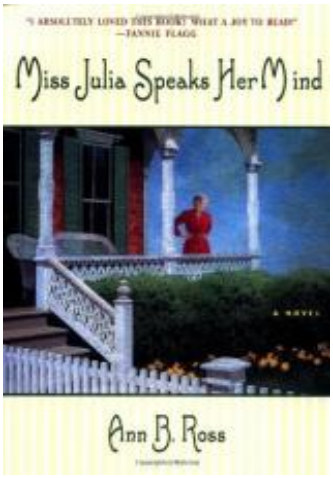
Miss Julia Speaks Her Mind

by Ann B. Ross



About the Book

After the unexpected death of her husband of 44 years, Julia Springer is more than just a grieving widow, she's a rich one. She's also a woman on the verge of finding herself. Freed at last from her husband's sheltering, often suffocating gaze, Miss Julia realizes that she must learn to manage her money, to run her own household, and to carry on the substantial reputation that her husband built in their small Southern town. It's a tall order, and one she's excited to take on. But just when she thinks she's got her new life under control, an unexpected visitor arrives with news that would send anyone, let alone a proper Southern lady, into a tailspin. How Julia copes with the news of her husband's secret life, and learns to rebuild her own, is the subject of this charming, often zany and always riveting novel.

In Julia Springer, Ann B. Ross has created a unique and utterly compelling character who forces us to rethink our concept of how a respectable, well-to-do woman should behave. On the outside, Julia is a formidable presence, proud of her position in the town, and unquestioning of the choices she has made. But news of her husband's infidelity shakes the very foundation on which she has built her life. Miss Julia is forced to reconsider not only the man her husband was, but what kind of marriage she had. And, as the people in the town learn of Julia's plight, their treatment of her becomes a lesson of a different kind-about the value of honesty over lies, and about the importance of being true to oneself, even in the face of judgmental neighbors.

Ann B. Ross overturns many prejudices in this wonderfully vivid portrait of Southern life, including those involving class, race, and religion. But her most important triumph lies in the surprising transformation of a sheltered white woman who learns to stand on her own two feet; to value money wisely spent and generously given; to make friends with all kinds of people; and ultimately to trust her own good instincts and speak her mind whenever she sees fit.

Discussion Guide

1. Miss Julia remarks to Deputy Bates, "Don't you know it's always the wife's fault if a man strays? . . . There's always

something the wife's doing, or not doing, that pushes a man over the brink. That's just the way it is." Do you think she believes this, or is she merely commenting on a societal prejudice? Either way, do you think Miss Julia is accurately predicting what the town will think of her husband's infidelity?

2. How well does Miss Julia know herself? Is she a reliable narrator? How does the author use point of view and tone to develop Julia's character?

3. What does Julia learn about her late husband as a result of his death? Why do you think her revelations about his personality have come so late in their relationship? What kind of person did Julia think she was married to? To what extent was Julia's ignorance about Lloyd's negative traits willful ignorance, and to what extent was she misled by him?

4. Ann B. Ross's portrait of Miss Julia's church and its leadership is far from flattering, yet religion plays a big part in Julia's life. Discuss Pastor Ledbetter's actions. Is there any difference between his deceptions and those of Brother Vern? What is Miss Julia looking for in religion that neither of these men can provide?

5. Why do you think Julia is so easily taken in by Dr. Fowler? Why is he so willing to believe that there is something psychologically depraved about her?

6. Julia goes from being terribly concerned about what the townspeople will think of her connection to Little Lloyd to taking a very defiant stance about the choices she has made. What is she risking by refusing to give in to the town's prejudice? What is she gaining?

7. How does Julia's relationship with Little Lloyd change over the course of the novel? What signs are we given of Julia's affection for the boy?

8. How do you think you would react in Miss Julia's situation? Would you take in Little Lloyd? Would you befriend Hazel Marie?

9. Why do you think Miss Julia develops such strong friendships with Lillian and Hazel Marie? What do these very different women have in common, and what does their affection for each other reveal about each of them?

10. What has Julia learned about life and love by the end of the novel? How have the obstacles she's overcome made her stronger and wiser?

11. Do you think Ross's portrait of a small Southern town is accurate? What aspects of Abbottsville and its denizens ring true to you? How does she use satire and slapstick to illustrate Abbottsville's more ridiculous qualities? How would Miss Julia's story have been different (if at all) had it taken place in your own community?

Author Bio

Ann B. Ross holds a doctorate in English from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and has taught literature at the University of North Carolina at Asheville. She is the author of fifteen previous novels featuring the popular

southern heroine Miss Julia, as well as ETTA MAE'S WORST BAD-LUCK DAY, a novel about one of Abbotsville's other most outspoken residents: Etta Mae Wiggins. Ann Ross lives in Hendersonville, North Carolina.

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