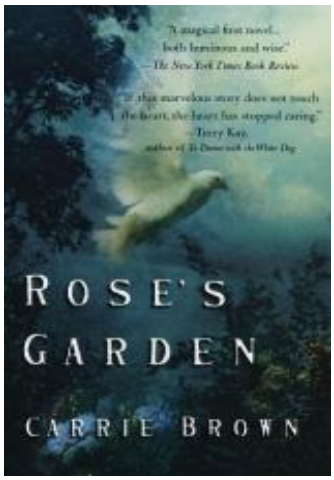
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Rose's Garden

by Carrie Brown



About the Book

It has been four months since Conrad Morrisey's wife, Rose, has died, and the grief-stricken man has fallen into despair, forgetting even to dress or eat. Distracted by his loss, Conrad has allowed his wife's cherished garden to slip into dilapidated neglect. Yet the garden has never appeared as vibrant and overflowing as it does this season. It is in this wild, exuberantly abundant garden, that Conrad receives an unearthly visitor: an angel who appears to be his deceased father-in-law, Lemuel. Lemuel-the-angel brings Conrad an extraordinary message.

As the reticent Conrad struggles to tell his magical story to the townspeople of Laurel, he finds himself drawn out of his enclosed life of pigeon tending, and thrust directly into the hub of Rose's life in a way he'd never experienced. As the many people who've been touched by Rose make pilgrimages to the garden, he learns of his wife's incredible generosity and compassion. Conrad had thought his life was over, but buoyed by Rose's message of love, he is about to embark on vital journey of the heart.

Discussion Guide

1.How would you describe Rose and Conrad's marriage? How does it change over the years?

2. How would you characterize what happened at Rose's funeral? Was it supernatural, or the result of inclement weather, or an hallucination on Conrad's part? How does Brown effectively blur the distinctions between these three states throughout her novel? Why might she do so? What is she saying about faith and the miraculous in its relation to everyday life?

3. Why is it that Conrad knew so little of Rose's charitable deeds while she lived? How does his understanding of his wife change after she dies?

4. How does Brown weave pigeon and flight imagery throughout her novel? What is the effect of using such an evocative leitmotif?

5. Brown writes of the pigeons, "they would, Conrad knew, no matter how far they went, find their way back by memory, remembrance itself distilled into a hundred different essences--sight, sound, smell--a penumbra of the familiar, all the resonances of the heart." What does she mean by that? Do you agree that memory is linked to the "resonances of the heart"? How so?

6. Why do you think Conrad was attracted to a career in gilding? What does it say about his character? How might his career choice be contrasted with Rose's occupation of gardening? What do their different choices say about how they each face life's challenges?

7. Speaking of the first flood that ran through Laurel, Eddie says, "It was hard to believe a few days of rain could change everything so much, so that you looked down at your life and it seemed like something that had happened a long time ago, to someone else." How is that sentiment echoed in other parts of the novel? In what other ways are lives quickly and irrevocably altered in the novel? What is Carrie Brown saying about life and love as she elaborates this theme?

8. Conrad thinks, "What is heroism...if not a moment of faith at exactly the right time?" Do you agree? Who would you characterize as heroic in the novel? What are their moments of faith? What enables them to act heroically?

9. "Acts of imagination...are man's answer to his own limitations, his yearning. Be limitless," Lemuel tells Conrad. What does he mean by this? Does Conrad take Lemuel's advice? In what way? How does his imagination save Conrad?

10. Why do you think the novel is entitled Rose's Garden? What role does the garden play in Conrad's life, both before and after Rose's death?

Author Bio

Carrie Brown is the author of five novels and a collection of short stories. Awards she has received include a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, the Barnes & Noble Discover Award, the Janet Heidinger Kafka Prize, and, twice, the Library of Virginia Literary Award. Her short fiction has appeared in *One Story*, *Glimmer Train*, *The Georgia Review*, and *The Oxford American*. She lives with her husband, the writer John Gregory Brown, in Virginia, where she is distinguished visiting professor of creative writing at Hollins University.

Critical Praise

"A magical first novel...both luminous and wise. "

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