ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

The Queen of Roses

by Julia Kelly

About the Book

Spanning the ballrooms of Pasadena and the sunlit gardens of Altadena, a new novel of love and sacrifice from the international bestselling author of THE LIGHT OVER LONDON and THE LAST GARDEN IN ENGLAND.

1960: Frustrated reporter Theresa Johnson?s life changes when she receives a phone call from a Miss Pearce who claims her obituary about one of Pasadena?s last great hoteliers is wildly inaccurate. Seeking the truth, Theresa drives to the mysterious Rosewood House nestled high in the Altadena foothills. Even more intriguing than the house?s beautiful garden is Miss Pearce?s proposal that Theresa help her settle old scores by writing her biography.

1903: Beautiful but haughty, Adele Pearce is reluctant to leave the London Season and her last hope of a proposal. When she arrives in California, she discovers the startling truth of why her mother has called her there: her father has squandered his fortune, and Adele must marry a wealthy American to save the family.

Stifled by expectation as Pasadena?s newest doyenne, Adele?s only comfort is Rosewood House and the beautiful garden she creates with the help of taciturn gardener Alexander Macalister. However, as Adele?s feelings for Alex flourish, a fire ignites in the San Gabriel Mountains above Rosewood House, threatening everything Adele holds dear, while in 1960, Miss Pearce learns that history has a terrible habit of repeating itself.

Discussion Guide

1. When Theresa first visits Rosewood House, she expects to correct an obituary after being told there was an error. What makes her agree to write Adele?s life story instead? How does her understanding of Adele change as she listens?

2. Adele arrives in Pasadena believing that marriage is the clearest path to a secure future. What pressures shape that belief? At what points does she begin to imagine a different life for herself?

3. How does Pasadena look to Adele when she first arrives from London? How does her relationship with the city change after she leaves Guy and makes a life at Rosewood House?

4. Adele?s marriage to Guy offers comfort and status, but she worries about his business decisions. Which moments change how she sees him? Were there signs that she only understood in hindsight?

5. Mrs. Barnes becomes an important friend to Adele. How did you interpret her actions when she learned that Elizabeth is pregnant? What does their falling out reveal about friendship, loyalty and the pressure to protect a family?s reputation?

6. Rosewood House begins as a retreat for Adele and becomes the center of her work. What does the house, especially its garden, mean to her at different stages of her life?

7. Adele and Alex grow close while working in the garden, yet both have obligations beyond Rosewood House. How did you feel about the choice Alex makes after Annabel?s letter? What future, if any, could you imagine for him and Adele?

8. Adele helps Pamela and later gives Matt a place at the nursery without explaining her connection to his family. Do you understand why she keeps that history private? How might Matt?s life have been different if she had told him sooner?

9. Theresa wants to move beyond writing obituaries, but her colleagues do not always take her ambitions seriously. How does reporting on the 1960 fire change the way others see her? Does it change the way she sees herself?

10. Theresa faces a difficult choice at Rosewood House: help Adele and Matt protect it or remain an observer so she can report on the fire. What did you make of her decision? Where would you draw the line between personal loyalty and professional responsibility?

11. Adele tells much of her story to Theresa, but the novel also takes readers into Adele?s earlier life. What does each timeline allow you to understand that the other could not? Did knowing the older Adele change how you viewed her younger self?

12. Fire threatens Rosewood House in both timelines. How do those scenes connect Adele?s past with Theresa and Matt?s present? Besides the house, what else are the characters trying to preserve?

13. Guy?s obituary leaves Adele out of his life story, but the novel ends with an obituary that tells hers. How do the two obituaries frame the book? Who gets to decide which parts of a person?s life are remembered?

14. By the end of the novel, Adele has built a legacy that looks different from the future she once expected. What do you think matters most to her: the business, Rosewood House, her relationship with Matt, or having her story told? Did your answer change after reading the final obituary?

Author Bio

Julia Kelly is the internationally bestselling author of emotional historical fiction about extraordinary women and intriguing historical whodunnit mystery novels. Her books have been translated into 13 languages. In addition to writing, she?s been an Emmy-nominated producer, journalist, marketing professional and (for one summer) a tea waitress. Julia called Los Angeles, Iowa and New York City home before settling in London with her husband.

The Queen of Roses

by Julia Kelly

Publication Date: October 20, 2026
Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction, Women's Fiction
Paperback: 400 pages
Publisher: Gallery Books
ISBN-10: 1668032759
ISBN-13: 9781668032756