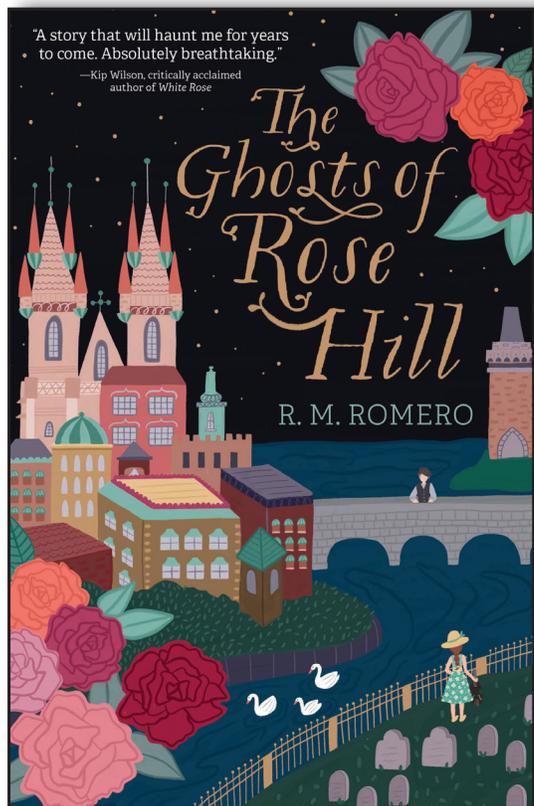


READING GROUP
GUIDE



The Ghosts of Rose Hill

by R. M. Romero

ABOUT THE BOOK

A modern folktale for fans of *The Bear and the Nightingale* and *The Hazel Wood* about embracing your power, facing your monsters, and loving deeply enough to transcend a century.

Sent to stay with her aunt in Prague and witness the humble life of an artist, Ilana Lopez—a biracial Jewish girl—finds herself torn between her dream of becoming a violinist and her immigrant parents’ desire for her to pursue a more stable career. When she discovers a forgotten Jewish cemetery behind her aunt’s cottage, she meets the ghost of a kindhearted boy named Benjamin, who died over a century ago. As Ilana restores Benjamin’s grave, he introduces her to the enchanted side of Prague, where ghosts walk the streets and their kisses have warmth. With spellbinding verse, R. M. Romero channels the spirit of myth into a brilliantly original tale, inspired by her experiences restoring Jewish cemeteries in Eastern Europe.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Describe Ilana’s family. What are their dreams for her? How are their dreams for their daughter shaped by the hardships of their lives when they were young? Debate whether sending her away and forbidding her to play and compose music is the right approach. Explain how they have made Ilana afraid of the future.
- Ilana is sent to spend the summer in Prague with her father’s sister, Zofie. How does Aunt Zofie show that she is satisfied with living the modest life of an artist? Explain why Zofie thinks that she and Ilana are alike.
- Discuss what Ilana means when she says, “Aunt Zofie is a storm who only pretends to be a woman” (p. 17). Ilana is definitely not a “storm” at the beginning of the novel. Has she become a “storm” by the end of the summer?
- Why is Ilana interested in cleaning up the Rose Hill Cemetery?
- Describe Benjamin, the ghost boy Ilana sees at Rose Hill. Is Ilana surprised when she learns that her aunt had seen the boy on several occasions? Aunt Zofie tells her not to talk to the boy again. Explain her comment, “You don’t belong in his world, and he has stopped belonging in ours” (pp. 30-31). How does Aunt Zofie’s statement sound like a warning?
- Describe Ilana’s view of Prague when she first arrives. Discuss what she means, “Prague believes in magic. Prague believes in *itself*” (p. 34). Why does she say that myths are locked behind the walls of the synagogue? How does Ilana’s view of Prague change after she becomes involved with Benjamin and Wassermann?

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- What is the conflict of the book? Explain the symbol of the black violin. Wassermann asks, “What do you hope to be when you grow up, Ilana?” (p. 79). Draw a connection between his question and the conflict of the book. Why does Aunt Zofie take the black violin from Ilana? How does Wassermann help Ilana reclaim the gift of music?
- At what point in the novel does Ilana start to fall in love with Benjamin? Ilana tells Benjamin everything about her family, her music, and her friends. Ilana is confused when he doesn’t reveal anything about his family and his earthly life. Discuss what she means when she says, “Maybe I am looking for darkness where there is none” (p. 127).
- Why does Benjamin call Ilana a “miracle”?
- At what point is Wassermann’s sinister side revealed? What does Ilana see when she follows Benjamin and Pearl into Old Town? Who are the children that live with Wassermann?
- Wassermann asks Ilana to live with them—to be a part of his family. Explain Benjamin’s reaction. Why does Benjamin call Wassermann a monster? Explain what Benjamin means in the quote, “the world can be cruel, I know. Don’t be cruel alongside it” (p. 226).
- What is the significance of the teapot? Why is Ilana determined to find it? What does she intend to do with it?
- Explain the following metaphor: “If Wassermann is a river, I’m a stone; I won’t be moved by his power” (p. 301). Discuss what Ilana means, “the most impressive monsters are always the least impressive men” (p. 329).
- At the end of the novel, Ilana refers to a curse. What is her curse? How does she break it? How does she counter it with a spell of her own? Discuss how the spell Ilana references relates to the resolution of the conflict.

ABOUT THE CREATOR

Photo Credit: R. M. Romero



R. M. Romero is a Jewish Latina and author of fairy tales for children and adults. She lives in Miami Beach with her cat, Henry VIII, and spends her summers helping to maintain Jewish cemeteries in Poland. *The Ghosts of Rose Hill* was inspired by these experiences. Find R. M. on Instagram @rmromeroauthor.