

# HER NAME IS ROSE

Christine Breen

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## READING GROUP GUIDE

### ABOUT THE BOOK

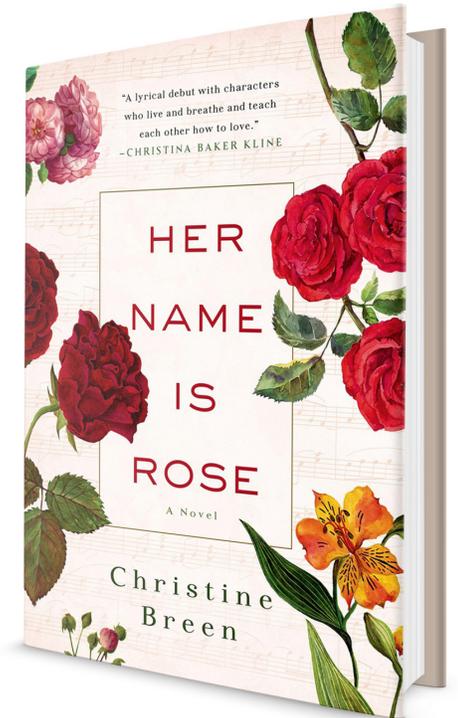
*People used to say Iris Bowen was beautiful, what with the wild weave of her red hair, the high cheekbones, and the way she carried herself like a barefoot dancer through the streets of Ranelagh on the outskirts of Dublin city. But that was a lifetime ago.*

In a cottage in the west of Ireland, Iris--gardener and mother to an adopted daughter, Rose--is doing her best to carry on after the death of her husband two years before. At the back of her mind is a promise she never intended to keep, until the day she gets a phone call from her doctor.

Meanwhile, nineteen-year-old Rose is a brilliant violinist at the Royal Academy in London, still grieving for her father but relishing her music and life in the city. Excited but nervous, she hums on the way to an important master class, and then suddenly finds herself missing both of her parents when the class ends in disaster.

After the doctor's call, Iris is haunted by the promise she made to her husband—to find Rose's birth mother, so that their daughter might still have family if anything happened to Iris. Armed only with a twenty-year-old envelope, Iris impulsively begins a journey into the past that takes her to Boston and back, with unexpected results for herself and for Rose and for both friends and strangers.

Intimate, moving, and witty, Christine Breen's *Her Name is Rose* is a gorgeous novel about what can happen when life does not play out the way you expect.



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The book opens with a line from Deborah Levy's *Swimming Home*: "Plants are always from some sort of family." How are plants (including gardens and flowers and flower names) and family important throughout the story?
2. Rose thinks of Iris as "her mad, loveable mother" and Iris of Rose as "too young, too vulnerable, too talented to be parentless." How do YOU view them and their relationship as mother and daughter? In what ways does that relationship change in the course of the novel?

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3. How do the various characters cope with loss or the fear of loss? What do you see as significant turning points in their lives? Do any of the characters or incidents remind you of situations you have faced in your own life?
  4. What are some of the secrets characters keep in this novel, and what impact do they have? Do you feel there are times when not telling the whole truth is wise and/or justified?
  5. How might the story be different if Iris had stayed in a conventional hotel in Boston? What do you think might have happened if she had found Hilary alive?
  6. There are many kinds of music throughout the novel. What does music mean to the various characters and to the novel as a whole?
  7. How do you feel about Rowan's decision not to reveal himself to Rose and Iris at the end? How do you think this experience will change his life going forward? What clues has the author given us?
  8. On the day Iris first meets Luke, they share a quote from *The Waste Land* about "memory and desire...stirring dull roots with spring rain." In what ways does that theme play out in the novel?
  9. In Chapter Eleven, when Hector is talking about the Real Book and the fake books, what significance do they have for him? And for Iris?
  10. When Rose was younger and failed her French exam, "her mother's cups of tea and homemade scones were like some magic recipe." What does she mean? Do you feel there is similar magic in any of the novel's other encounters?

WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT CHRISTINE BREEN?

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