

# READING GROUP GUIDE

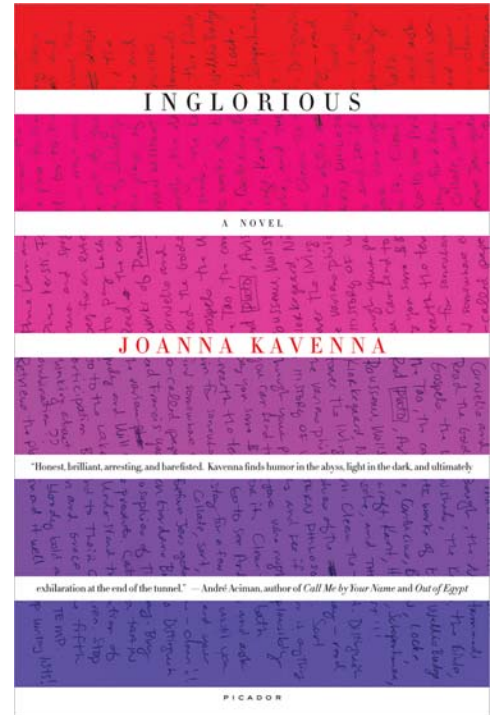
## *Inglorious*

A Novel

by Joanna Kavenna

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### About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Inglorious* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Inglorious*.

### About the Book

One day successful young journalist and dedicated urbanite Rosa Lane sends her boss an e-mail that says “I quit” and then walks out of her job. She can’t explain why—not to Liam, who’s lived with her for years; not to her friends; not to her anxious, recently widowed father. All Rosa knows is that she needs to find enlightenment, to somehow understand her mother’s death and do more than just earn her living.

Thus begins the piercingly wise and bitingly funny odyssey of Rosa Lane. Along the way, she is deceived by her lover, evicted by her roommate, threatened by her bank manager, picked over by prospective employers, befuddled by philosophy, and tormented by omnivorous London. Brought very low indeed, Rosa in her desperation makes a final assault on those who have done her wrong, leading to the beginning of her return to normality—whatever that is.

In a remarkable fiction debut, Joanna Kavenna displays lacerating wit, a perfect eye for social hypocrisies, and great depths of compassion to create a triumphant modern heroine.

## Praise for *Inglorious*

“Kavenna writes with elegance and flair, endowing Rosa with a graceful articulacy... she also has a mordant way with social satire.”—*The New York Times Book Review*

“[Kavenna’s] understanding of the complexity of depression and her evocation of her heroine’s bewilderment are precise, and Rosa, for all her misery, has an appealing and often funny voice.”—*The New Yorker*

## About the Author

**Joanna Kavenna** was born and raised in the United Kingdom, and has spent some years living in the United States and various parts of Europe. Her first book, *The Ice Museum*, was short-listed for the Ondaatje Prize. Her writing has appeared in the *London Review of Books*, the *Times Literary Supplement*, and the *International Herald Tribune*, among other publications.

## Discussion Questions

1. Why does Rosa leave her job? Is it an unconscious act to force a confrontation with Liam? Is this the beginning of her downward spiral? Did it cause her decline, or vice versa?
2. Did Rosa stop loving Liam, or were her feelings for him the result of her mother’s death? Did Rosa cause Liam’s disaffection by never praising him?
3. Was Rosa willfully blind to Liam and Grace’s affair? Did she deserve their treatment? Grace insisted Rosa and Liam’s relationship was over before she began her relationship with him. Was she justified in having the affair or was it a betrayal of her friendship with Rosa?
4. Rosa stays with several “friends” who she doesn’t know very well. Why not go to her father’s? Why can’t she ask him for help? Describe the ways in which Rosa and her father are alike and how they are different. She says her father never had any authority. What can you glean from the novel about her parents’ marriage?
5. Why does Rosa take up with Andreas? She says he lacks a sense of foreboding. Discuss her attraction to him.
6. Rosa often invokes philosophy and the works of Socrates, the Upanishads, Bacon, *The Golden Bough*, Proust, Vedas, and others. She calls herself “Jamesian,” saying she only trusts experience. Does her preoccupation with philosophers feed her paralysis and inability to act? Is Rosa too cerebral?

7. Discuss the three parts of the novel: Retreat (from what), Quest (for what), Return (to what). Are they stages of grief?
8. Why does Rosa make endless lists? Why can't she accomplish anything on them?
9. What causes Rosa's apathy? Why is she so willing to humiliate herself?
10. The author chooses to omit information about Rosa's mother, who remains a shadow character. Is this meant as part of Rosa's inability to accept her mother's death? Finally, as she rides the train to visit Judy and Will, Rosa is flooded with memories about her mother. Why does this come so late in novel?
11. Rosa eventually reveals how her mother died and realizes that her parents were actually happy. For the first time she admits how abandoned she feels. Speculate on the nature of the dynamic between Rosa and her parents.
12. On the train back from her visit to Will and Judy, Rosa contemplates her options: escape or retreat. Which will she choose? Rosa writes a letter to her mother apologizing for getting so distraught over her death. Will she be able to move on? What will happen to Rosa after the novel ends?

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