



FLATIRON
BOOKS
NEW YORK

Roses, in the Mouth of a Lion

Reading Group Guide

Welcome to the Reading Group Guide for *Roses, in the Mouth of a Lion*. Please note: In order to provide reading groups with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is necessary to reveal important aspects of the plot of this novel—as well as the ending. If you have not finished reading *Roses, in the Mouth of a Lion*, we respectfully suggest that you may want to wait before reviewing this guide.

1. Discuss the title, *Roses, in the Mouth of a Lion*. What does it mean to you? Are there images of roses and lions from the novel that particularly stood out to you?
2. Compare and contrast Razia's friendships with Saima and Taslima. How is she shaped by each of them? What about Shahnaaz? How did your understanding of her character evolve?
3. Razia has a personal, intimate relationship with Allah, telling Allah things she doesn't tell anyone else. What is the importance of Islam in her life? How do her own religious views diverge from those of her family and community?
4. How is Razia's neighborhood of Corona, Queens, portrayed in the novel? How does it change as she grows up? Contrast it with lower Manhattan, where she goes to high school. In what ways is Razia shaped by place?
5. After Ziyad and his friends kill Miss Kitten, the old Italian looks at Razia with "a look of hate, saying: We were bad. We were dirty. We didn't know how to take care of life. We didn't know how to grow anything, and when we touched the world, it died" (p. 19). What sorts of racism and prejudice does Razia experience growing up, and how do they affect her?
6. What is Razia's relationship to Julio? How does it similar to and different from her relationship with Angela? How does she understand her feelings in both instances?
7. Razia tells us that, for Pakistani men, "us first-gen Pakistani girls were a forest of green cards. We were groomed like Christmas trees, thinking we were in the beautiful woods, thinking we were growing, but we were just being readied to be cut down. They were coming for us" (p. 137). How does the threat of marriage hang over Razia and the other girls? What does Pakistan mean to them?
8. Why is Razia so unsettled by the Aunty? What kind of future does she represent?
9. In "Strays," Razia describes her mother: "Her eyes were red and beneath them was a cold, hot fierceness that would always protect me, a fear from which I would never be able to

hide” (p. 95). What does she mean? How does her relationship with her mother change over the course of the novel? Do you find her mother to be a sympathetic character?

10. After the Goodwill incident, Razia’s father tells her, “No matter what you do, if you try to be American, they will never accept you. They’ll turn against you in the end” (p. 166). In response, Razia reflects, “How could I explain that I wasn’t trying to be American, I already was?” Discuss their different viewpoints. How is the idea of assimilation depicted and interrogated throughout the novel?
11. Razia describes most of her first-generation classmates at Stuyvesant as “the dreams, the ones expected to take our paper airplanes and turn them into rocket ships rising into higher orbits. . . . I was a rocket ship, but for me things were slightly different. My parents cared about school but at the end of the day they didn’t believe in the importance of this world other than as a spiritual test. The ultimate test whose grades mattered more than anything else” (p. 178). What is Razia’s experience like at Stuyvesant? How does her story compare to what you might think of as the stereotypical immigrant narrative?
12. The first time Razia visits Angela’s apartment, she stands at the window and feels “a quivering sense come over me. . . . It all began to disappear, what my parents wanted from me, who they wanted me to be, the future they had so carefully planned” (p. 188). How does Razia’s own sense of herself differ from what her parents and community expect?
13. Razia begins to understand her sexual identity later in the book, but even before she meets Angela, she feels different from those in her family and community. How does she experience her queer identity before she has words to describe it?
14. Why do you think Shahnaaz and Saima decide to reveal Razia’s relationship with Angela to the community, leading to her huge fight with her parents? Do you sympathize with their decision?
15. Why does Razia feel she has no choice but to leave New York? Do you agree? Discuss the last line: “I lifted my arm to say goodbye, then walked straight into the mouth of a lion” (p. 273). Do you consider this to be a hopeful ending? Why or why not? What do you think the future holds for Razia?