

*Book Club Guide*



# FROM THE AUTHOR

*Dear Book Club Coordinator,*

I can't thank you enough for taking the time to consider *The Burning of Rosemont Abbey* for your book club. Set in a seemingly quiet English village in the 1950s, the story follows Louisa Everly, a young woman who is determined to prove that her twin brother was murdered when everyone else in the village believes that he set fire to their beloved abbey and disappeared. I've always had a special fondness for mysteries that balance weighty themes with wit and humor, so this book humbly tips its hat to many of the prolific mystery authors I've come to admire: Dorothy Sayers, Agatha Christie, and G. K. Chesterton.

The research process for this novel was incredibly fun, and I tried to make it as immersive an experience as possible. I made a playlist of popular songs from the 1940s and '50s and bopped along while I was doing the dishes and folding laundry. I pored over the pages of *The Constance Spry Cookery Book*, which was published the same year that my story is set. During the last year, my husband and I have watched dozens of '50s films, and my mother-in-law lent her particular expertise as a hairstylist by putting my hair up into pin curls and showing me how best to style them for capturing the characteristic chicness of the decade.

If your group chooses to read this book, I encourage you and your fellow readers to immerse yourselves in much the same way when you gather to discuss. You might play some Andrews Sisters in the



background as you arrive or try your hand at baking Mrs. Kittle's award-winning sponge cake. You might drink tea or don your fedoras or your pearls or your favorite shade of red lipstick. (I personally recommend "Fire and Ice" by Revlon, which has been in circulation since 1952!) Then fall in step with Louisa, Malcolm, and the hilarious Mrs. Watson as they seek to prove what really happened on that most dreadful night when Rosemont Abbey went up in flames.

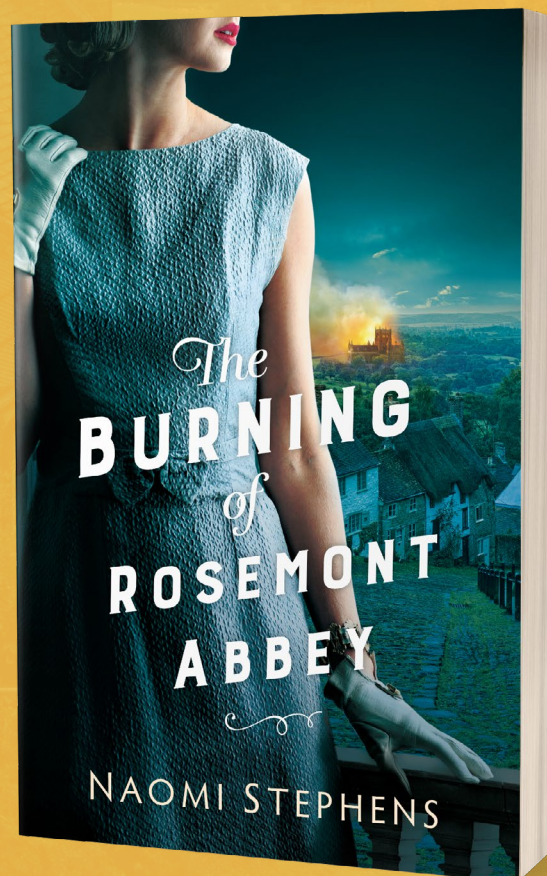
I'm always thrilled when I get to speak with book groups, either in person if travel is possible or via Zoom. If you're interested in coordinating a chat with your group, please fill out the [Request an Author Call form](#) on the Open Book website.

Blessings to you in Christ!

*Naomi Stephens*

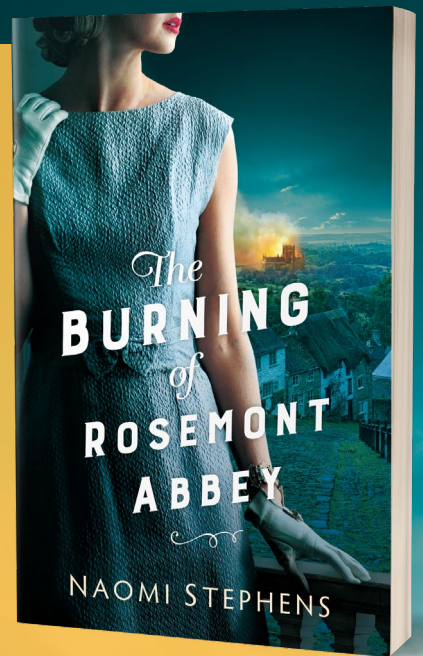
Naomi Stephens

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# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the epigraph and how its imagery plays out both literally and metaphorically in the novel.



2. In *The Moonstone*, Wilkie Collins coined the term “detective-fever” to describe the obsession one feels when desperately trying to untangle a mystery. On this note, discuss your experience with detective-fever while reading *The Burning of Rosemont Abbey*. Who did you think the culprit might be? Were there any red herrings that led you astray and/or any clues you picked up on before Louisa and Malcolm had fully realized their meaning? Were there any moments or revelations that were especially shocking?

3. In what ways is Louisa a successful sleuth? In what ways do she and Malcolm complement each other, both in terms of the investigation and regarding their relationship?

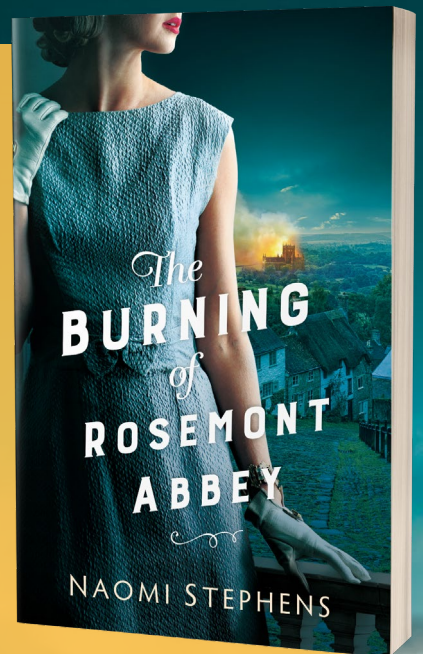


# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

4. In the beginning of the novel, Louisa thinks she and her brother are opposites in nearly every way, “growing apart like a tree split at the root.” How does her investigation dismantle this opinion? What clues does she find that prove Paul was not at all the man he seemed to be?

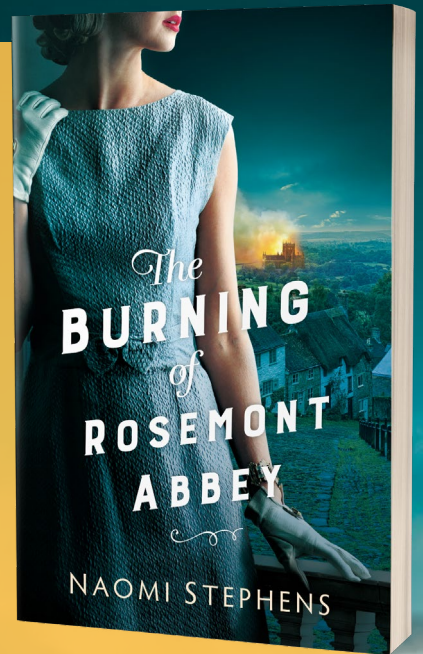
5. There are several specific Scripture passages referenced in the novel, such as the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, Christ praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, Joseph and his brothers, and Jesus raising the widow’s son. Which of these stood out to you, and how did they help Louisa at that specific moment in her journey?

6. Struggles with shame and promises of salvation—where do you see examples of these?



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

7. The novel is set more than a decade after WWII, but for many in Wilbeth Green, the aftereffects of the war still linger. Where do we see examples of that?



8. Who is your favorite secondary character, and why?

9. After years of food rationing, the people in Wilbeth Green enjoy an assortment of delectable foods; for example, the dinner party at Everly Hall and the church fete. Were there any dishes or recipes in the novel that sounded intriguing or that you might like to try making yourself?

10. Bonus question: If Mrs. Kittle and Mrs. Watson both entered cakes in the Best Victoria Sponge category, who do you think would win?



# 1950'S MOVIE WATCHLIST

One of the most enjoyable parts of my research process for *The Burning of Rosemont Abbey* was in watching a healthy regimen of 1950s movies. Putting together and working through this list helped establish the style and aesthetic for the period and kept me in tune with what would have been popular and *en vogue* for my characters, especially for my heroine, Louisa.

I haven't watched all of these movies (yet!), but a few of my special favorites thus far are shown in boldface:

**Harvey (1950)**

**In a Lonely Place (1950)**

**A Streetcar Named Desire (1951)**

*Singing in the Rain (1952)*

**The Quiet Man (1952)**

*My Cousin Rachel (1952)*

*The Wild One (1953)*

**Roman Holiday (1953)**

*Sabrina (1954)*

*Dial M for Murder (1954)*

**Rear Window (1954)**

*The Country Girl (1954)*

**The Ladykillers (1955)**

*Guys and Dolls (1955)*

*To Catch a Thief (1955)*

*Rebel Without a Cause (1955)*

*East of Eden (1955)*

*Picnic (1955)*

*The Swan (1956)*

*Somebody Up There Likes Me (1956)*

*The Man Who Knew Too Much (1956)*

*Anastasia (1956)*

*High Society (1956)*

*Giant (1956)*

**12 Angry Men (1957)**

**Witness for the Prosecution (1957)**

**The Bridge on the River Kwai (1957)**

**3:10 to Yuma (1957)**

*The Big Country (1958)*

**The Long, Hot Summer (1958)**

*Vertigo (1958)*

*North by Northwest (1959)*



# MRS. KITTLE'S VICTORIA SPONGE CAKE

*“The glory of the Victoria sponge had been somewhat dampened by the discovery of the body, but Mrs. Kittle still made sure she had her first-place ribbon in her possession before everyone went rushing off.”*

- 3 eggs, their weight in butter, castor sugar, and self-raising flour (or 1 ½ teaspoons baking powder and plain flour)
- Good-quality jam
- Icing or castor sugar

Cream the butter until it looks like whipped cream. Add the sugar and beat until white. Add the eggs one at a time with a good spoonful of sifted flour. Beat thoroughly. Sift the baking powder with the remaining flour, stir quickly into the mixture. Turn into two sandwich tins 17cm/7 inches across, well buttered and floured; bake in a moderate oven 20–30 minutes. Turn out when cool, sandwich well with jam. Powder with icing or castor sugar.

(Recipe found in *The Constance Spry Cookery Book*, 1956)





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