

## Reader's Guide for Rebecca Dean's PALACE CIRCLE

1. When Ivor meets Delia in Virginia, he has been encouraged by Sylvia to find and marry a New York heiress. Why do you think he chooses Delia instead?
2. As soon as her first conversation with Jerome, Delia is reminded of her beloved cousin Beau and “instantly liked” the man she took to be a close friend of her husband. What do you imagine is his initial attitude toward her? Do you think he expects a friendship to grow between them?
3. Discuss the character of Sylvia. Upon their first meeting, she regards Delia with a patronizing smile, obviously confident in her power over Ivor and the supposed inconsequence of his new wife. But after Delia saves her from drowning, Sylvia admits to an intense hatred for and jealousy of Delia. What has caused such a dramatic change? In your opinion, is it really Delia that Sylvia hates, or does her resentment belong more truly to Ivor, Jerome, herself, or her circumstances in general? How would you describe the balance of power in Sylvia and Ivor's relationship, and in Delia and Ivor's relationship, at this pivotal point?
4. What do you think of the division of the novel into character-focused sections? Does the order make sense to you? Does the choice of featured characters? Is there anyone else whose point of view you would have liked to see included?
5. When the Conisborough family arrives at their new home in Cairo, Delia reflects that she's happy with her choice of the young, pretty Kate Gunn as a nanny. Why do you think Delia likes Kate? Do you think she chooses her as much for Ivor as for the children, or is their affair an unintended consequence for Delia?
6. What role does Ivor play in his romantic relationships? How do his wants and needs change throughout the book? Discuss his progression from the commanding Sylvia, to beautiful and haughty Olivia, to the magnetic and headstrong Delia, to the relatively unassuming Kate Gunn. What does each woman mean to him, and what role does he play in their lives?
7. Delia is often described as “unconventional.” What exactly does this label mean to her? To what extent does she appreciate the power it holds, and how does this change throughout the novel? Does she become more unconventional as she gets older? Do you think she would have been seen this way if she had stayed in America?
8. Why doesn't Delia talk to Jerome directly about the possibility that Petra may be his child? Is there anything in Petra's character that leads you to believe that she could be? How did you interpret Delia's comment that Jerome was “most definitely not [Petra's] uncle”? Are there any other questions of paternity that occurred to you while reading *Palace Circle*?
10. As Jerome warns Delia soon after her arrival in London, infidelity among their social class is not only tolerated, but to some degree, expected. Do you think the same acceptance of adultery carries on to the next generation? Why or why not? How aware are the children of their parents' affairs?
11. Though Delia has other reasons for gladly accepting a divorce from Ivor, she cites one main justification for the timing: Ivor and Kate are eager to have a child together—for Ivor, hopefully a son and heir. Do you think it's strange that Delia should support this, considering her own

daughters' inheritance is at stake? Is this decision in keeping with her personality? Is it in the best interest of her family?

12. What do you think of Ivor's character? Are his transgressions against his wife forgivable? How does his treatment of Delia change over the course of the novel? In your estimation, is he a good man?

13. Where does Davina get her seemingly boundless energy for community service and involvement with lower classes, as opposed to Petra, who remains happily focused on the activities of her own class? Is Davina's hands-on civic mindedness what Delia has in mind when she tells Petra that it is she, not Petra, who will 'turn her father's hair white'? How do you think Ivor feels about his daughters' choices in activities?

14. Consider the importance of setting in *Palace Circle*. From Virginia to London to family homes in the British countryside to Cairo, places hold a great deal of meaning to the characters in this book. Who is linked to which places, and how does this inform the characters' interactions with each other as well as your reading of the novel?

15. In the final scene, were you surprised to find Darius (relatively) innocent of the charges Jack feared? Throughout the book, did you trust Darius? Did you like him? Why or why not?

16. Were you satisfied with the conclusion of *Palace Circle*? Why or why not?

17. Prior to reading this book, how much did you know about English and Egyptian history during this period of time? In what ways did the life stories of these characters illuminate aspects of the events and politics of World Wars I and II and English Colonialism in Egypt? Were you surprised by anything you learned?

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