



# READING GUIDE

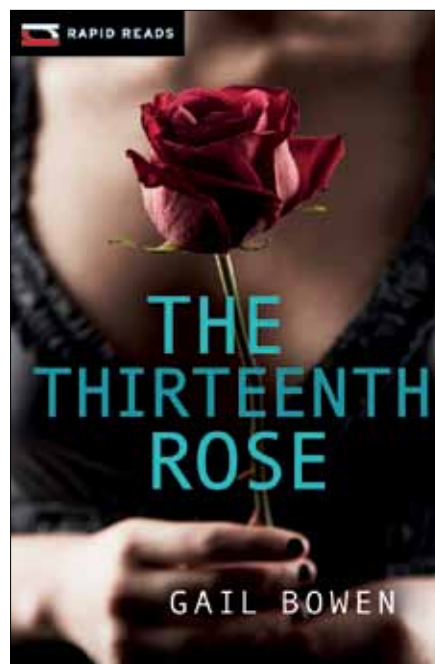
## THE THIRTEENTH ROSE GAIL BOWEN

Reading level: 5.6

Interest level: Adult

Themes: mystery, murder, crime, talk-radio

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### Summary

It's Valentine's Day, and Charlie D is on his way to work at CVOX radio, where he hosts *The World According to Charlie D*. He's got an armload of roses—twelve for his producer, Nova Langenegger, and one for Dolores O'Reilly, a neighborhood street worker he's known for years. As he exchanges words with the aging beauty on her familiar corner, Dolores informs him of a new campaign to “clean up the red light district,” headed by none other than Kevin O'Hanlon, an opinionated, right-wing CVOX host with a dangerously loyal following. Calling themselves O'Hanlon's Warriors, the men are harassing sex workers to the point of terror and physical assault—and they're promising worse.

Dolores hops into a shiny SUV to begin her night's work and Charlie turns his attention to the arrival of his guest for the evening show: Misty de Vol Burgh, an ex-escort who has agreed to help Charlie host a program about “satisfaction”—romantic, sexual and otherwise. Twenty-five and nine months pregnant with the child of her 83-year-old billionaire husband Henry Burgh, Misty also happens to be the owner of CVOX.

When Misty is met with a slanderous cartoon stating: *Kill a whore before she kills you*, she acknowledges her dislike of Kevin O'Hanlon despite his excellent ratings at CVOX. What follows is a night of intense conversation as listeners call in to shoot the breeze with Misty about how to please their partners. But things take a turn for the terrible when Nova receives a phone call from someone—O'Hanlon's Warriors in all likelihood—warning them that hookers are going to die tonight. With over 900,000 fans of O'Hanlon's show, it would be difficult indeed to figure out who was planning to do the killing.

Misty informs Charlie that, as a retired sex worker, she knows of O'Hanlon's Warriors—and that factions have sprung up in major cities all across the country. They're not just targeting prostitutes, either: Aboriginals, gays, lesbians and immigrants are also on the chopping block—anyone who doesn't fit the image of what O'Hanlon and his henchmen consider the “ideal.”

When the show's producer receives video footage of a captive woman being slaughtered, the police descend on the station to piece together the rapidly intensifying puzzle. Another woman is scheduled to die within the hour. Nova and Charlie involve Misty in a plan to get O'Hanlon down



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to the station, pronto. The only way they can stop the murders is if they can somehow get O’Hanlon to call off his goons.

The second woman is killed as threatened. O’Hanlon arrives at CVOX and is met by his boss, who hands him a resignation letter to be read on air. When O’Hanlon becomes belligerent, calling Misty a slut, he is laid flat by Misty’s husband Henry who, although aging, still packs an impressive left hook.

When Charlie learns that Dolores O’Reilly has also met her fate at the hands of a Warrior, he gives his old friend a moving eulogy on air. Kevin O’Hanlon is taken to the ER and Charlie takes Nova to pay their respects at the streetlight where Dolores used to work. Though it takes them months, the police monitor several of O’Hanlon’s Warriors until enough information mounts to lead them to the men who were responsible for killing Dolores O’Reilly and the other two women.

### Questions for Discussion

1. In chapter 1, when Charlie suggests Dolores report to the police any violent acts against prostitutes, the prostitute says, “Jeez, Charlie, were you born yesterday?” What do her words mean? Look for other figures of speech as you read *The Thirteenth Rose*.
2. What is the significance of the number thirteen?
3. As Misty de Vol Burgh gets out of the Rolls Royce at the CVOX station, the driver “holds her arm as if she were spun glass” (ch. 1). This is called a *simile*: a comparison using the words “like” or “as.” Authors often use this literary device to enhance description. How does the simile here fulfill this function?
4. As he thinks about Misty’s life compared to Dolores’s in chapter 1, Charlie reflects that luck is a funny thing. Some people have it; some people don’t. Do you agree? Is luck a constant? Explain.
5. Misty is a beautiful young woman married to a much older wealthy man. Explain this phenomenon. Is it culturally bound, or do we see this form of partnering in different cultures around the world?
6. As you see it, is there something wrong with a woman (or a man) selling sex to make a living? Can it be reasonably explained in the same context as someone who uses their body and talents to sing, act, massage tired muscles or mend clothing? Or is sex sacred? What is it that makes this territory so fraught with judgment and disapproval by many in society?
7. O’Hanlon’s Warriors are waging a campaign of hatred against not only sex workers but also against gays, lesbians, Aboriginals, immigrants and others who don’t fit their view of what the country should look like. Throughout both modern and historical times, where else has this kind of mass social discrimination been evident?
8. In chapter 3, the woman representing Families First tells Charlie on air that women should honor their husbands as the head of the household. What is your opinion of this belief?
9. The Internet is a useful tool and offers many benefits to our modern way of living—but it can be used in very dark ways too. Nova and Charlie are forced to watch a brutal murder on video. The image of a woman being killed will never leave their minds for as long as





they live. With a small group, discuss the risks and drawbacks of living in the Internet age. Do you suppose a video of a horrific stabbing would go viral in the real world?

10. At several points throughout *The Thirteenth Rose*, Charlie D mentions how difficult it is to be alone on Valentine's Day. Do you agree? What is it that makes Valentine's—and other significant occasions—this way for some people? And how is it that others are unaffected by a random day that's designated for being all about love? What's your position?
11. In chapter 5, as Britney and Misty talk on air, Charlie reflects that in all likelihood, Misty's childhood wasn't as rich in love as Britney's has been. What do you know about the connection between a woman who enters into pornography or prostitution and her upbringing?
12. In chapter 6, as the show winds to a close, Charlie D reminds listeners that "it's always darkest before the dawn." Explain the significance of these words.
13. In chapter 8, the author explains how the police managed to trace Kevin O'Hanlon's involvement in the murders through a series of people who had been recruited by his "henchmen." *In return for certain considerations*, Bowen writes, *the recruit was all too willing to blow the whistle on Kevin*. What does the term "blow the whistle" mean? How do you think it came about? As you see it, is whistle-blowing more or less common in our society than it used to be? Does it depend on the situation?
14. Through all the Charlie D books, the relationship between Charlie and his producer, Nova Langenegger, has been described in a way that leaves the reader with questions as to their real connection. Think about the author's purpose for creating their relationship to be the way it is. What conclusions can you draw from the ending of *The Thirteenth Rose*? Can you tell definitively what the relationship is between Charlie and Nova?
15. Discuss: What makes a good title for a book? How are book titles different from newspaper headlines? Develop another title for this book.

