

Discussion Questions for *A Gentleman from Moscow*

untitled prologue (beginning with a poem): It is 1922, Lenin's totalitarian communist dictatorship is in full control of the country following the Civil War, and the trial of 30-year-old Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov is underway. What do we learn about the Count during the prosecutor's interrogation? How does the 1913 poem "attributed" to the Count affect his sentencing by the Emergency Committee of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs?

"Book One": What items does the Count select to bring with him to his new, smaller abode? What "secret room" does he discover? What is the Count's source of money? How does he pass the time away? What do we learn about the Count's relationships with friends—Andrey (the maître d' of the Boyarsky restaurant), Vasily (the concierge), Marina (the seamstress), Moscow friend & admirer Konstantine Konstantinovich the Greek, old friend from university days Mishka (Mikhail Fyodorovich Mindich), ex-Prince Nikolai Petrov? What displeases the Count about the "Bishop" (waiter at the lower-scale Piazza restaurant)? What does the Count notice hidden in hotel manager Mr. Halecki's office? Who is Nina, what impresses the Count about her, what adventures do they go on, and what is her gift to him?

"Book Two": It's now 1923. Who is Katerina, what effect is she having on Mishka, and how does Rostov feel about it? Who is Anna Urbanova, what impresses Rostov about her, and what kind of relationship do they have? A year later: Why is Rostov seeing less of Nina and Mishka, what is the reason for all the foreign guests, how does Rostov help Andrey, why is the Bishop promoted to the Boyarsky, and what decision does the Bishop make regarding wines? What tragic story about his sister Helena does Rostov relate to visiting British aristocrat Charles Abernathy at the Shalyapin Bar? It's now 1926, and Stalin is in full control of the country. Who is Abram, and how does he unwittingly (without knowing) save Rostov?

"Book Three": It is now 1930. How is Rostov rejuvenated in purpose and spirit as a result of his "Triumvirate" partnership with Emile (head Boyarsky chef) and Andrey (now head Boyarsky waiter)? What previous decision does the Bishop (now assistant manager to Mr. Halecki) reverse himself on? Where is Mishka living, and why is he broken-hearted? In a reunion with Rostov, what does Nina, now 17, relate about her future plans? What does the narrator tell us about Anna's past? Who is Osip Ivanovich Glebnikov, and what does Rostov, now a Boyarsky waiter, agree to do for him? What ominous news does Mishka relate in a letter (that Rostov misplaces)? Now 1938, how does Stalin attempt to distract attention from mass famine and deadly purges? How has Nina's life been impacted by Stalin's terror, what shocking request does she make of Rostov upon her return to Moscow, and why does he agree to do it? How does Anna indirectly save Sofia and Rostov from government interference? It's 8 years later and WWII is over. What prank is Sofia (now 17) accused of doing by the Bishop? What shocks Rostov about Mishka's condition, and what shocking news does Mishka relate to Rostov? What do Osip and Rostov discuss? Who is Richard, and what do they discuss? What does Richard gift to Rostov? What near tragedy befalls Sofia, and how do Osip & Marina help Rostov save her? What tragedies befall Andrey & family?

"Book Four": It is now 1950. What is Sofia like now at age 17? Who is Viktor Stepanovich, why does Rostov come to him in a rage, and what secret have Sofia and Viktor been keeping from Rostov? How does Viktor's employment situation, the architect's employment situation, and Rostov's overall situation tie in with "moths of Manchester" story related to Richard by Rostov? Now 1952, what profession has Anna shifted to and why? What practical joke do Anna and Sofia play on Rostov? Why does Rostov reject Richard's bold proposal? It's 1953, Stalin has passed away, and Malenkov and Khrushchev vie for control of the country. What are Sofia, Anna, and the Triumvirate celebrating when the Bishop enters the room with Frinovsky, and how does Anna save the day by deceiving the intruders with a lie about Nachevko? What bad news does Katerina bring to Rostov, and what secret does Rostov reveal to Katerina? How is "bread" in Mishka's final project (a compilation of quotes about bread from famous Russian authors) a metaphor for Stalin's cruel, disastrous reign?

“Book Five”: It’s 1954. Where is Sofia headed in six months and why? In reaction to the Bishop’s increasing interference, coupled with concern for Sofia’s future, what is Rostov planning to do and how? In accordance with the plan, how does Rostov end up serving dinner to Malenkov and Khrushchev, et al, despite the Bishop’s initial decision to remove Rostov from the position? What is the reason why Khrushchev cuts off Moscow’s electricity, then quickly turns it back on, and how does this fit into Rostov’s plan? What does Rostov give to Sophia just prior to her departure, and why does Sofia tease him about it? Why do Osip and Rostov end up watching “Casablanca” together? How does the Finnish couple fit into Rostov’s plan? What does the Bishop discover that threatens the plan, and what does Rostov do about it? For what purpose does Sofia use the stolen “Fountain of Youth”? What does Richard give to Sofia, and what does Sophia give to him? How else does Richard help Rostov?

“Afterward” + “And Anon”: How does Rostov thank Andrey and Emile for their friendship? How does Viktor Stepanovich figure into Rostov’s plan? What has happened to Rostov’s mansion in Nizhny Novgorod? Who is the “willowy woman” in the tavern? If Towles were to write a sequel to *A Gentleman in Moscow* (wish he would), what storyline might he choose?