

WILLOW ROSE

Welcome to the Reading Group guide for *Willow Rose* by M. Kevin Hayden.
This was created to help facilitate discussion for and support book clubs.

1. In the playlist referenced in the beginning of the novel, did any lyrics, titles, or moods resonate with you? Were there any “breadcrumbs” between the songs and the novel that you caught in hindsight or going back to listen to the songs?
2. Let’s talk about horror and heart. How do these themes intertwine in literature? Do you find yourself drawn to them? Why or why not? Do you feel emotional depth amplifies the horror, or vice versa? Why or why not? Was there a scene that hit you hardest—either with fear, grief, or beauty?
3. Cosmic horror usually evokes dread. Do you think the “horror” in *Willow Rose* is truly about monsters? What larger fears or truths did the story reveal for you?
4. “What’s in a name...?” This quote opens *Willow Rose*, pulled from *Romeo and Juliet*. What do you think was suggested by placing this quote first? Did you find yourself thinking about the names of the characters as the story unfolded? Were there any moments where a name felt symbolic, ironic, or even prophetic?
5. Bart Ellis is a late-night radio host whose gravel-toned ramblings echo through the book. What was your perception of his role in the story? Did you find him an important character? Why or why not?
6. What universal themes (metaphorical, emotional, etc.) does *Willow Rose*’s existence represent to you? Was there a moment where your understanding of her shifted?
7. How did your interpretation of Comet Goodwin evolve over the course of the story? Where do you believe it came from and what purpose did it serve in the narrative?
8. Let’s talk about Faith Linden. How did you interpret her role in the story, both emotionally and spiritually? How did your perception of Faith change throughout the book?
9. How did Alder’s childhood shape the man he became? What do you make of the early losses he endured? How do these experiences influence his view of love, responsibility, and connection to Willow? How do they contribute to his guilt?
10. Do you feel Alder needed redemption, and did he earn it by the end of the book? Why, or why not?
11. Imagine Alder revisiting his younger self under that group home quilt. What would he say?