

Between Shades of Gray Study Guide

Between Shades of Gray by Ruta Sepetys

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Between Shades of Gray Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1 through 11.....	4
Chapters 12 through 24.....	6
Chapters 25 through 35.....	9
Chapters 36 through 46.....	12
Chapters 47 through 62.....	15
Chapters 63 through Epilogue.....	18
Characters.....	21
Objects/Places.....	24
Themes.....	26
Style.....	28
Quotes.....	31
Topics for Discussion.....	32



Plot Summary

Lina Vilkas is fifteen years old in 1941 when a group of Russian officers beats on the door of the family home. Her mother answers and the officers rush in, placing the family under arrest but without any information why they are being targeted. Lina, her mother Elena, and her younger brother, Jonas, are taken to a railroad station with hundreds of others. There, they are loaded onto train cars and left. It's soon discovered that one of the ladies is sitting over a hole in the corner of the car in an effort to have some fresh air. She's forced to move and that hole becomes the bathroom for the coming days. One of those in the group is a young woman who was taken from the hospital moments after giving birth to a daughter. The child dies during the trip and the mother, sick and crazed with grief, is shot in front of the group. Before they leave the station, Lina slips away from the train car and finds her father. He believes they are going to Siberia. Lina never sees him again.

Lina and the others are soon in route to the prison camp that becomes their home for the next ten months, Turaciak. They are forced to share a tiny shack with an old woman who is rude and constantly angry. Lina is forced to reevaluate her opinion of Andrius, a boy who had come with them on the train. Andrius' mother becomes a prostitute for the Russians in order to keep Andrius alive. Lina and the others work brutal hours and are tormented when they refuse to sign papers admitting they are criminals and agreeing to serve twelve years hard labor.

After ten months, Andrius learns that a group of people is being sent to the Arctic Circle. Lina, Elena and Jonas are on the list but Andrius is not. They travel by train, truck, and barge to reach Trofimovsk. Lina and her family are assigned to group eleven. There are no buildings for the prisoners who are forced to build their own shelters. The daily rations include only a small piece of bread. Group eleven suffers several deaths. When Elena is told her husband has been executed, she seems to give up hope and soon dies as well. However, there are also triumphs. Lina and a little girl from the group find a dead owl. The members of their group have a feast that night.

Jonas grows ill with scurvy from malnutrition and Lina is desperate when they hear a knock on their shack door and find a doctor there. He'd been alerted to the conditions by a guard and stepped in, demanding care for the sick and food for all the prisoners. The story ends with Lina holding onto hope that she'll be reunited with Andrius. The epilogue is a letter buried by Lina in 1954 and found in 1995. In the letter, she says she's buried her writings and drawings with the hope that someone will find them so the world will know what happened to thousands of her fellow Lithuanians. She indicates that she and Andrius did marry and that she hopes that by sharing this knowledge, the events will never be repeated.



Chapters 1 through 11

Chapters 1 through 11 Summary

As the story opens, Lina is looking back on the time leading up to being taken prisoner. She says she had seen signs that something was happening. Her mother had sewn her best jewelry into the lining of her coat and burned family photos. Lina later realizes her parents had intended to escape the country, but they were arrested before it could be accomplished. On June 14, 1941, Lina was already in her nightgown when Russian soldiers beat on the door of her home. The officer says the family has twenty minutes to pack. In chapter two, Lina begins packing, obeying the direction of Elena, her mother. Elena sends Lina's little brother Jonas to pack also.

In chapter three, Lina's mother packs a large suitcase for Jonas and, though he has trouble carrying it, he does so without complaint. As Lina's mother is putting on her coat, Lina remembers seeing her mother sew her most valuable silver and jewelry into the lining of the coat. Lina loudly complains of needing to use the bathroom to distract the soldier watching her mother. In chapter four, Elena tells Lina to button her coat and she realizes she's in her nightgown. She recognizes a teacher named Miss Grybas and some others, including some her father knows. Lina knows they are all on "a list," but doesn't know what that list is or why they are on it. They all get into a truck. A man jumps out and breaks his leg, but is simply thrown back in by the soldiers. They go to a hospital where a woman on the list is giving birth to a baby.

In chapter five, they wait for hours while the woman is giving birth. The bald man with a broken leg asks Jonas to smother him but Elena refuses. Elena's cousin calls out to her but Elena ignores her. Lina recalls a conversation between her father and some of his friends. One had asked Lina for her opinion on Stalin and she'd replied that he should be run out of Lithuania. The soldiers unceremoniously load the young mother and infant child into the truck. In chapter six, they learn the young mother's name is Ona and her child is a girl. In chapter seven, they are taken from the trucks at a train station outside town. It's obvious that the bald man and Ona are in danger because they can't walk, so others from the truck carry them. Lina carries the baby. The guards try to take Jonas away but Elena bribes one of the guards with a pocket watch.

In chapter eight, Lina, Jonas, and Elena are put onto a train car with dozens of others. There's a librarian names Mrs. Rimas. Jonas was so afraid at one point that he had wet his pants. Elena holds a raincoat up to provide at least a little screen while Lina changes from her pajamas and they both shield Jonas while he changes into dry pants. In chapter ten, Lina counts forty-six people in their train car. A boy named Andrius Armydas introduces himself and says his father is away in the Lithuanian Army. It becomes evident that Ona's child is in trouble.

In chapter eleven, Andrius, who says he is seventeen, plans to leave the train car and look for his father among the men on another train. Lina and Jonas go along though



Andrius objects. As they slip away from the train car, careful not to alert the guards to their presence, Lina notices the words "thieves and prostitutes" on the back of the car. They find Lina's father, Kostas Vilkas, and talk to him through a hole in the train car. He gives them a bit of ham each and a piece for their mother as well as some warm clothes. He tells them they are going to Siberia. He instructs Lina to keep drawing. He then urges them to return to their own car and to be careful. Andrius refuses, going farther to look for his own father. In chapter twelve, Lina tells her mother about seeing her father and gives her the items that he'd sent. Elena gives her share of the ham to Mr. Stalas, the man with the broken leg.

Chapters 1 through 11 Analysis

Elena tells Lina and Jonas that they are to ignore any offers of help as they are being taken away. She says they don't want to get anyone in trouble. She doesn't elaborate but she knows anyone caught trying to help them in any form will also be punished.

Lina remembers going to the store for a loaf of bread. The woman had not accepted payment for the bread, whispering, "We could never repay you as it is." Lina doesn't know what the woman is talking about but when Lina is packing, a loaf of bread and some money appears on her window sill. She doesn't say how it appears there but it seems likely it's the woman from the bread store. Much later, Lina will realize she left it behind.

Lina looks at her most valuable possessions as she's packing, trying to decide what she needs to take with her. She picks up a photograph first and then searches desperately for her sketch pad.

Elena's nature becomes apparent in the stressful hours the family begins their journey. She calls the children, "my darlings," and is repeatedly calm. When it's obvious they are going to be loaded onto a train car with many others, Lina is upset. She pleads with her mother to avoid the situation though she must have realized her mother couldn't do anything about it. Elena says they are going on "an adventure." She then urges Lina to be calm and not upset Jonas. This calming, loving attitude is evident throughout the book.

Many of the people are not what they seem. Mr. Stalas, the man with the broken leg, is rude and pushy. He continually predicts doom and death, saying they'll all eventually be killed. He seems to fully expect to die. He survives the first two years and surprises Lina on several occasions.



Chapters 12 through 24

Chapters 12 through 24 Summary

In chapter thirteen, the train car becomes unbearably hot the following day. When Elena asks about Kostas, Lina doesn't tell her that Kostas had been beaten. Lina thinks about her meeting with her father. He'd told her to keep drawing and she hadn't really known what he meant. Looking back at the conversation the following day, she understands that he will recognize her art and that she can send messages to him through her drawings. In chapter fourteen, Andrius returns to the car and has obviously been brutally beaten. Lina helps him make it the rest of the way to the car and the others help pull him in. In chapter fifteen, their rail car pulls away from the station. Lina sees a priest who "flung oil and made the sign of the cross." She realizes he's issuing last rites on the entire train.

In chapter sixteen, the train arrives in Vilnius. The train stops and the cars carrying the men are split off. Lina hears the voices of the man in another car, singing the Lithuanian national anthem. Andrius, Jonas and the gray-haired man in Lina's car join in. Lina remembers being singled out by a teacher who noticed her artistic ability. Lina believed she was in trouble for drawing in class but the teacher helped her apply to a summer art program in Vilnius.

In chapter seventeen, the trip continues for days. They stop for the soldiers to give them food and water each day, but the stops are only made in remote rural areas so the prisoners will have no chance to attract attention or to escape. When it rains, everyone holds containers outside through a slot in the car, catching the fresh rainwater. They are given one bucket of food and one bucket of water each day. The water is dirty and the food is a gray gruel, but they eat and drink it all. One day it's Lina's turn to get out and get the bucket of food and water. She hesitates just outside of the train and watches as soldiers throw the bodies of two dead children from one of the cars. The open fields seem to call to her and she considers running away. A Russian soldier yells for her to hurry but she simply stands there. Andrius takes the buckets from her and goes for their rations. Elena pleads with Lina to get back on the train and she does. She says people in the other cars look sick. Elena says once the rest of the world finds out what's happening, the Soviets will be stopped.

In chapter eighteen, the gray-haired man notices Lina drawing. He promises not to tell and she explains that it's going to be her way of getting word of their whereabouts to her father. One day Jonas sees soldiers through the little slot that serves as the only window in the car. Elena takes his place at the window and learns that Germany has invaded Lithuania. People cheer. Ona's baby dies.

In chapter nineteen, the train stops and they know they'll have to give Ona's dead baby to the soldiers. She pleads with them not to and they agree. Lina thinks about the words of the bald man who wasn't happy when the German soldiers were seen. The man says



Hitler is worse than Stalin. He says Hitler is killing thousands of Jews. Lina wonders if it's true. Lina recalls drawing her father. When she'd signed the portrait, her father asked about her signature. He said no one would recognize that to be Lina's name. She shrugs and says he will.

In chapter twenty, the train continues south and Miss Grybas explains about the Ural Mountains when they pass through them. The baby has begun to smell by the third day and Ona finally agrees to drop the body through the bathroom hole but can't bring herself to do it. Miss Grybas finally intervenes, grabbing the child and dropping it through. She says it's easier for someone who isn't attached to the situation to take action. In chapter twenty-one, weeks pass and the travel continues uninterrupted except for small breaks. One day Elena uses some of the silver and jewelry in her coat to bribe a guard. She slips away from the train and buys candy from a kiosk. She says she would have purchased substantial food but there wasn't any.

In chapter twenty-two, the train comes to a stop and Elena has Jonas and Lina straighten their clothes. She puts on some lipstick and they are trying to prepare for whatever is waiting for them. They expect a train station but find themselves in an open countryside. They are divided into groups and told to wait. Elena, as one of the few who can understand Russian, realizes the soldiers are "selling" the people. In chapter twenty-three, Jonas asks the question all have been considering - whether they "want" to be sold. Other groups are taken away, obviously being bought. Elena tries to ask a guard where the people are being taken but he ignores her. They briefly consider running away but hear gunshots and abandon the idea. The train is completely empty and pulls away. Andrius believes they are going for another load of prisoners.

In chapter twenty-four, a grouchy woman who is a member of the group complains, saying Elena and the others had made them seem weak. She believes the prisoners are wanted for manual labor and if they don't perform that, they'll be killed. Lina, Jonas and Andrius lay on their backs in the grass and the conversation turns to why they were arrested. Lina says her family was arrested because her father works at the university but Jonas points out a neighbor who wasn't arrested who also works at the university. Lina doesn't have an answer but her thoughts turn to an incident in which her father discovered a drawing Lina had done of Stalin in a clown suit. Her father was furious. Her mother said the drawing, in the wrong hands, could be enough for Lina's arrest.

Chapters 12 through 24 Analysis

When Andrius returns to the car that Lina questions the reason they are allowing themselves to be held prisoner. She says they aren't standing up for themselves and, because of that, can't expect anyone else to stand up for them. It's a common question and there have been many questioned about their compliance. There are only a few soldiers to the hundreds of people in the train cars but they don't revolt.

The fact that the priest is issuing last rites as the train pulls away from the station is a significant indication that others know what's happening to those on the train. This is



another question that's asked repeatedly about the atrocities performed by Stalin and Hitler. Why didn't people object? There isn't an easy answer and this question, like the question of why so many went quietly to their deaths, is left to the reader to decide.

The bald man is amazed when Elena returns to the train with a lot of candy. She shares it all around with everyone on the train. For the men, she has a few cigarettes. The bald man asks why she would do that and she says because she knows that he would do the same for her children. Much later in the book, he does put the children above himself.

Mrs. Arvydas asks Elena to tell the soldiers that Andrius is "a simpleton." She means for the soldiers to believe he is mentally retarded, believing they will let him stay with her if they believe that. She later goes to great lengths to keep Andrius with her.



Chapters 25 through 35

Chapters 25 through 35 Summary

In chapter twenty-five, there are only a few prisoners left and even fewer guards. They sleep outside. The next morning, a truck picks up another group and another truck picks up Lina and her group. Lina realizes there wouldn't be any point in running because there's no place to go. When the truck comes to a stop, they get out and are told they can take a shower. In chapter twenty-six, they are forced to undress in front of the soldiers. Lina is upset but they are so happy at the prospect of being clean that they don't refuse. One of the guards touches Lina and Elena pulls her away. The woman who had a baby, Ona, undresses with the other women and her legs are caked with blood. In chapter twenty-seven, Elena rushes to get herself and Lina clean, knowing they soldiers will probably limit their time in the shower. They are loaded back on the trucks and almost everyone is in a better mood because they are clean. But Ona becomes upset and chants loudly, ignoring efforts to quiet her. One of the guards pulls Ona out of the truck and kills her. Andrius pulls Jonas away so that he can't see and then calls out to Lina, prompting her to turn her head away as well.

In chapter twenty-eight, the trucks arrive at a large farming area near Altai. Lina, Elena and Jonas are assigned to a hut that already has an occupant with an old woman who can only speak Russian. Elena learns there are beet and potato farms to work. The farm is a "collective farm" called a kolkhoz. Jonas is immediately interested, realizing there are potatoes to eat but Elena learns from the woman that food is strictly rationed. Lina recalls a conversation with her father about Stalin's policies toward the people who owned agricultural land. When Lina learned that Stalin was taking land and tools from people but forcing them to work and dictating how much they'd be paid for the crops they raised, Lina was angry. She said it was unfair but her father said it was Communism.

In chapter twenty-nine, Lina describes the shack which is a total of only about ten by twelve feet with a stove in one corner. A soldier arrives as they are wondering what they will eat. He argues with Elena in Russian then orders them out of the hut and to an office. Jonas and Lina are ordered to wait outside while Elena goes inside. While she's gone, Lina recalls a shopping trip with her mother. She'd tried on a dress and when she changed back into her own clothes, she discovered her mother was gone. Elena had reappeared with ice creams. Back in the present, Jonas worries that they should have gone with Elena. She emerges and demands the soldier take them back to the hut. Lina and Jonas want to know what happened but she won't talk about it until they're back in their little shack.

In chapter thirty, Elena tells Jonas and Lina that the soldiers want her to spy on the other prisoners because she knows Russian and can relate events to them. In chapter thirty-one, Elena says they promised special favors if she'd agree but she refused. Jonas is momentarily upset. He says they could have had a larger ration of food but



Elena says the soldiers would never have followed through on their promises. They pay the woman for a single potato then have to pay her again to use the stove to cook it. They sleep on the floor that night. Lina recalls the day she was informed she'd been accepted into the art program.

In chapter thirty-two, early the next morning Jonas is sent away to work with two elderly women while Elena and Lina are sent to the fields. They are given rusty shovels with no handles and told to dig. There is little else in the way of instruction and they are all unsure what to do until one woman steps forward and begins to dig at the ground with the shovel. While they work, Elena tells Mrs. Rimas she hopes to send a letter from a nearby post office. Mrs. Rimas warns that Elena be careful what she writes. Lina is immediately worried because she's written and drawn a great deal about their time. Elena says she'll be careful but adds that she has a "contact." Lina doesn't know what that means.

In chapter thirty-three, the pit the women are digging has gotten bigger and at one point Lina compares it to a grave. The stress is unbearable and they seek ways to relieve it. Once, Lina, Elena and Mrs. Rimas are in the woods using the bathroom. They are using leaves instead of toilet paper and Mrs. Rimas asks Elena to "pass the talcum." The three women break into laughter at the absurdity of the situation. Elena points out that the soldiers can't take their sense of humor. Lina recalls a vacation at the Baltic Sea. She and her cousin Joana had walked on the beach, seen some boys and going for a swim.

In chapter thirty-four, Elena says they need to figure out how to survive the winter. Lina says she doesn't plan to still be in prison by then and her mother says they must be prepared, just in case. Lina draws in the dirt with a stick and notes the blond guard who is often nearby is watching her. It rains and they continue working in the mud. That evening, Miss Grybas slips them a couple of beets she stole while working in the fields. Jonas has put the old woman's pots outside to catch water and they drink their fill before cleaning up as much as possible. Lina notes that she is anxious to get to eat the beets, even though she hates beets and they'd been carried in "someone's sweaty underwear."

Chapters 25 through 35 Analysis

Everyone knows the situation is dire long before they reach the farming community of Altai but it's near there that Ona is shot and killed. It's serious when people are dying of starvation, dehydration, and lack of medical care, but Lina and the others realize they are completely expendable when Ona is shot because she's become a problem for the guards.

Elena's attitudes about life come through as she's faced with the dire situation. When they arrive at Altai and it's obvious they are going to have to live in the cramped little hut, Elena assures the children it will be alright. She continually does this, striving to make them feel as safe as possible by assuring them she has the situation under



control. Elena is also above reproach when she's offered special favors in return for informing on the other prisoners. She says her clear conscience is worth more than any tiny gift the soldiers might give her.

Lina talks a great deal about a cousin named Joana who wants to be a doctor and who, as far as Lina knows, is currently studying toward that goal. Actually, Joana's family has escaped the country and Lina's parents helped them make their escape. The plan was for Joana's family to return the favor as soon as they were safely away but Lina's family was arrested before they could make good on their promise.

Lina talks about a young blond soldier. He has not yet been named but she will eventually come to know him because her mother sees something decent in the young man despite his uniform. Lina and Jonas will eventually become suspicious that there's something between this soldier and their mother. There isn't but the soldier will later play a role in Lina's survival.



Chapters 36 through 46

Chapters 36 through 46 Summary

In chapter thirty-five, Elena makes Lina take a beet to Mr. Stalas who has a broken leg and is unable to work. Lina is angry at the task and Mr. Stalas is rude, asking what took her so long. Outside his hut, she encounters Andrius. Andrius tells Lina the blond soldier's name is Kretsky. That night they learn the Altai woman's name is Ulyushka. In chapter thirty-six, Lina and the others are wakened in the middle of the night and taken to the military office. They are told they have to sign a document agreeing to work on the farm, to pay a war tax, and admitting they are war criminals. One of the men who constantly winds his watch introduces himself as Alexandras Lukas from Kaunas, a lawyer. He suggests they simply sit quietly but refuse to sign. The commander spends hours slapping and kicking people but no one signs.

In chapter thirty-seven, Lina sees the body of a man and learns he'd been killed because he wrote a letter. That day, they are interrupted during their digging. The soldiers tell Elena the women are to get into the hole. They obey and lie down as instructed. The soldiers kick dirt on them, fire guns and frighten the women badly, but don't physically hurt any of them. After it's over, they're told to get out. Lina sits up and Kretsky reaches out his hand to help her out of the hole. She hesitates and he reaches in further, helping her climb out. Lina says none of the women speak for the rest of the day and they are ordered to resume digging.

In chapter thirty-eight, Jonas realizes that evening that something has happened but they don't tell him about it. Jonas has three potatoes and they are careful to be quiet so the Altai woman won't demand a share or even all of them. Lina has time to think about Mr. Stalas and to wonder what he had to eat that day. She slips away to figure it out and sees Andrius and Mrs. Arvydas in one of the huts. Mrs. Arvydas's clothes are pressed and her hair is fixed. She is laughing with some of the soldiers. In chapter thirty-nine, Elena and Jonas say Andrius has gotten food for them on several occasions and that he's courageous for doing so. Lina is stinging from the idea that he betrayed them to live a comfortable life with the soldiers. The next day, Lina works in the beet field and learns that stealing even a single beet is a tremendous task, and makes her more appreciative of the risk others have taken. When Lina next encounters Andrius, her anger boils over. She says he doesn't look dirty or hungry as the rest of them do. He says his mother is prostituting herself as a way to bribe the guards to allow Andrius to remain with her. He says he's considered killing himself to free her of this debt. He says instead, they've decided to use their position to help get food to others.

In chapter forty, Elena recognizes a budding relationship between Andrius and Lina. She tells Lina to be careful not to "block" Andrius' advances "at every turn." She says men who are trying to talk to young ladies are not often "graceful." Lina recalls the vacation with Joana. There'd been a boy she liked but she'd seen him with another girl.



In chapter forty-one, winter is quickly approaching. One day an old man is caught eating a beet and the guards pull out his front teeth with pliers. The lifestyle is increasingly difficult and everyone begins to distrust everyone else. They write letters that Elena plans to mail. They use code to say they are having a "lovely time" and "learning good trade skills."

In chapter forty-two, the grouchy woman has given in and signed the document. She's allowed to go to the village and Elena bribes her with a piece of silver as a wedding present. Lina recalls a conversation between her father and some other men with her father comparing Stalin and Hitler to "two devils" who "both want to rule hell." In chapter forty-three, Kretsky tells Elena the officers are looking for someone who can draw well enough to reproduce a map. Elena initially refuses to let Lina go but gives in when Lina says it might give them news of the events outside the farm. Kretsky takes her to the office. When two guards are looking at Lina, Kretsky slaps her violently and calls her a fascist pig. The guards laugh, one makes an obscene gesture, and they walk away.

In chapter forty-four, Lina draws the map and the commander is pleased. Lina steals a pen. In chapter forty-five, Lina is returning to her own shack when she sees Andrius and his mother. She's obviously been beaten brutally. Lina stops and offers to help but Andrius tells her to leave. In chapter forty-six, Elena reveals that the nearby village, Turaciak, has a post office and a school. Soon after, they learn that Hitler has "pushed" Stalin out of Lithuania. The bald man says both Hitler and Stalin were performing genocide and it doesn't matter who is the one to do the killing. The prisoners plant potatoes meant to grow as the spring crop. Elena teaches school to children of the adults who signed the documents. Still, most refuse to sign. Jonas spends his days in the freezing weather, chopping logs. Lina spends her days carrying sixty-pound bags of grain and, with Mrs. Rimas' help, learns to "pilfer" a bit from the bags without being detected.

Chapters 36 through 46 Analysis

The fact that the soldiers are so insistent on the prisoners signing the document admitting guilt seems to be a tactical move rather than one of legality or practicality. The people are already prisoners. They can't escape and are forced by fear and hunger to work at whatever jobs the soldiers put to them. They are going to be held for as long as the soldiers can get away with it. But some of the Lithuanians who are being held see signing the document as the final move toward giving their captors complete control.

Lina recalls a time when Jonas had told of a classmate who got in trouble at school. Jonas believed the boy was in trouble because he was talking about hell. Jonas says the boy said there was no place worse than hell and that's where they were all going to be if Stalin took over the country. In truth, the boy was probably in trouble because he'd talked in a derogatory manner about Stalin.

The scene in which Kretsky slaps Lina is interesting. Lina says the slap came out of nowhere and she wasn't at all expecting it. Looking back on the fact that Kretsky had



helped her out of the hole when Lina believed she was about to be killed and looking forward to Kretsky's later actions, it seems more likely that Kretsky realized Lina was in danger from the other two soldiers. Lina is fifteen and is probably an attractive young woman, despite the hardships she's faced. Rape is likely very common and it seems that Kretsky was probably anxious to take the soldier's minds off Lina as an attractive young woman. Though she doesn't see it, Kretsky hates his role in the situation.

Lina says she and the other prisoners, by the time winter is approaching, have "become bottom feeders, living off filth and rot." She also notes they are all becoming proficient at scavenging.



Chapters 47 through 62

Chapters 47 through 62 Summary

In chapter forty-seven, Mrs. Rimas receives a letter and learns through a coded message that her husband is alive. There's a reference to Psalms 102 and Jonas reads the passage from the Bible that ends with the words, "I am withered like the grass." The old bald man says he is starving and is also "withered," and Andrius adds that the man is at least alive. Lina realizes Andrius wishes the same could be said of his own father.

In chapter forty-eight, Lina learns that Jonas is very ill but Kretsky and the other soldiers won't let her leave her work to go to him. Lina arrives home to find Elena already there and Jonas so ill he is barely conscious. Mr. Lukas says Jonas is suffering the effects of scurvy from malnutrition. Andrius arrives soon with a can of tomatoes and feeds the entire can to Jonas. Lina asks where he got them and he says he stole them. A Siberian woman offers the makings for tea she believes will also help him. In chapter forty-nine, Lina and Andrius are left alone with Jonas while Elena goes with the Siberian woman for the ingredients for the tea. Lina is very uncomfortable and finally says she's "sorry about your mother." Lina remembers receiving a letter from Joana who described a hectic household though she doesn't know why her father would be doing things such as packing up her medical books. In the letter, Joana asks Lina to draw the cottage they'd stayed at in Nida.

In chapter fifty, two weeks pass as Jonas slowly improves. Elena and Lina ask the others to help provide extra food for Jonas. One day Lina watches while Mrs. Rimas crams the entire ration of bread into her mouth the moment it's in her hand. Lina notes that she can't blame the woman and that she feels like doing that sometimes as well, but after that, Lina and Elena don't ask for help. Lina steals logs to help warm the tiny shack. Christmas is quickly approaching and the one respite is that the guards don't want to venture out into the bitter cold to check on the prisoners. One day when Lina is stealing a log, she encounters Andrius. He asks why she isn't scared and she says she's simply cold. She invites him to join the Christmas celebration they have planned but he says he isn't sure he and his mother would be welcome.

In chapter fifty-one, they work on Christmas Eve but meet that evening for a make-shift celebration. Everyone brings their family photos. The grouchy woman provides biscuits she picked up in the village and Andrius and his mother send chocolate. The bald man reveals that he's Jewish. The celebration is interrupted by the arrival of the guards. In chapter fifty-two, Lina gives Andrius a drawing for Christmas. Jonas gives him a stone. Andrius found it when they were first aboard the train and he gave it to Lina. Lina had given it to Jonas when he was sick. Jonas says the stone is bound to have some luck attached. In chapter fifty-three, Andrius tells Lina that he's learned she is going to be called on to draw a portrait of the commander. He warns her to make it flattering. In chapter fifty-four, Lina can't envision anything but snakes where the commander's head should be and she worries that she'll somehow convey that in the drawing. They're



promised potatoes for her work but realizes she's been lied to and wishes she'd drawn the snakes. While Lina is in the office, she sees her name on a file. She manages to slip it into her clothing and actually gets out of the office with it. In chapter fifty-five, they go to the kitchen where Kretsky throws a loaf of bread into the dirt. As Lina is picking it up, soldiers throw potatoes, tinned sardines and garbage out the door. Lina and Jonas scramble to pick up everything they can carry.

In chapter fifty-six, Lina shows Andrius the file and asks him to tell her what it says. He says she's stupid for having taken it because she's put her entire family in danger. Lina argues that it might be the key to finding her father and he agrees to read it. He tells her the file indicates her father is in Krasnoyarsk Prison. Andrius plans to return the file. In chapter fifty-seven, they eat most of the food immediately, fearing the soldiers will take it back. Lina is furious when Elena shares with Ulyushka. Lina puts together a drawing for her father and offers her slip - the only thing she has left worth trading - to the grouchy woman if she'll pass it along to any Lithuanian in the hope it reaches her father in prison. The grouchy woman agrees to pass it on but refuses payment.

In chapter fifty-eight, Lina turns sixteen on March 22. Lina is surprised that evening to find a surprise party in her honor. She is presented some paper and a pencil and no one says where it came from. Andrius gives her a book. She's excited though it's written in Russian. He says she'll have to learn Russian in order to read it. In chapter fifty-nine, they receive a letter letting them know through code that Lina's father is alive. Andrius tells her a new Russian word - *krasivaya* - but won't tell her what it means. He says she'll have to learn it for herself.

In chapter sixty, Andrius learns that Lina and her family will be leaving the camp but doesn't know where they're going. Some are frantic, some believe they might be going home and others fear a worse fate. In chapter sixty-one, Andrius spends a little time with Lina one evening. They hold hands and Andrius agrees to hide Lina's drawings and writings. In chapter sixty-two, the soldiers arrive and it's clear Lina and her family are leaving. Ulyushka gives them food, a heavy animal skin and even gives Lina a pencil. Lina doesn't understand why she's being kind now. Andrius is there to see them off. He says, "I'll see you," to Lina, indicating he will find her. He also slips the stone into Lina's pocket and she shows him she has it as the truck leaves.

Chapters 47 through 62 Analysis

When the Christmas Eve celebration is interrupted, Lina rushes to retrieve the photo of her father from among the family photos displayed. She expects to be hit or somehow stopped but isn't. She notes that Kretsky is staring at the photos as they are rushed out of the hut. This is another clue that Kretsky isn't pleased with the situation. He is obviously afraid of what will happen to him if he doesn't obey orders, and that's a natural human reaction, but he's also not comfortable with what's happening to the prisoners.

When Lina and Jonas are picking up the food thrown at them from the camp kitchen, Andrius appears. Lina is scrambling to gather up everything. There's even a sack of



flour and she's trying to put it all in her skirt. She's hurt from having been hit in the head by a can. Andrius could easily have laughed at the sight but he realizes her desperation. He tells her to calm down and promises they'll get "everything" carried back to her shack. Lina is even picking up empty cans, knowing there might be scraps of food in them that would benefit her family.

Andrius finds a word associated with Lina's father and says he does not know what the word is. The file is naturally in Russian and Lina can't read the file at all. It seems more likely that Andrius knows the word but doesn't want to tell Lina what it is. Though he's argued earlier in the conversation that Lina has put her family in jeopardy by taking the file, he becomes really angry after reading that part of the file. He tells her that he is also in danger because he is going to have to return the file but he also seems to understand Lina's motivation.



Chapters 63 through Epilogue

Chapters 63 through Epilogue Summary

In chapter sixty-three, they travel first by truck and then are put on a train. They crowd toward the doors in order to make the car look full and succeed in keeping the car much less crowded with only thirty-three people in the car. A little girl who had traveled with them on the first train tells Lina her name is Janina. They learn that the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and consider what that might mean for the war effort. In chapter sixty-four, a girl dies and her mother jumps off the train when her body is removed. The soldiers shoot her. Janina tells the bald man that Hitler might be killing Jews. The bald man, who is a Jew, says Hitler is killing Jews.

In chapter sixty-five, the train stops and Lina sees Kretsky waiting outside. She realizes that Elena knows Kretsky by his first name - Nikolai. They discover they're going to be allowed to bathe. Lina is embarrassed to be undressing in front of the soldiers but they pay no attention. She realizes it's because they are so skinny as to be androgynous. In chapter sixty-six, they begin the trip up the Angara River. They are given more food than usual but know it's so they'll be able to work harder when they arrive at their destination. In chapter sixty-seven, one of the men continues to insist they're being taken to America but few really believe it. In chapter sixty-eight, they arrive at a port and some of the soldiers disembark. Kretsky is one of them but he is ordered back to the boat. Lina realizes they still don't know where they're going but that Kretsky is going with them.

In chapter sixty-eight, the people are excited, believing they are headed to America but Kretsky tells them they aren't. Instead, they learn they've already crossed into the Arctic Circle. They arrive at a camp called Trofimovsk. It's already cold and they are told they'll have to build their own shelters. In chapter sixty-nine, Janina's mother goes crazy, almost kills Janina and cries a lot. In chapter seventy, the prisoners have to work and they gather wood and other materials for their camp in their spare time. In chapter seventy-one, an American ship arrives and the prisoners are forced to hide while the Americans are there. After the ship leaves, Lina wonders if the Americans know what the Russians are doing and are simply ignoring it, or if the treatment of the prisoners is still a secret.

In chapter seventy-two, Jonas finds a barrel that can be used as a stove. They use cans shoved together for the stovepipe. Lina and Jonas realize Elena is giving them most of her daily food ration. They encounter Kresky while gathering wood and he gives them a piece of his. There's a great deal of snow and they have to shovel a path in order to go for their rations. In chapter seventy-three, Lina and the bald man are walking in the woods, looking for wood. The man asks to borrow Lina's mittens and says he'll tell her a secret if she'll let him wear them for a few minutes. She agrees and he says her parents helped Joana's family escape the country. He says that's why they were deported. Lina realizes it's a plausible explanation. She recalls when Joana had written about the chaos of her house and an overheard conversation between her parents.



In chapter seventy-four, Lina can't get past the idea that her family was starving and in horrible danger while Joana's family was "comfortable in Germany." In chapter seventy-five, Lina is stealing wood from near the soldiers' barracks when she sees Elena, Kretsky and a commanding officer from the camp. The commander makes a motion like a gun at his head and Elena collapses. Kretsky catches her before she hits the ground. Elena tells Lina what she's learned - that Lina's father has been killed in prison. In chapter seventy-six, Lina considers the information could be wrong.

In chapter seventy-seven, the weak begin dying, especially the young children. There is no medical attention available. One day Lina and Janina are walking in the woods looking for wood when Janina finds a dead owl. They decide to take it back to their hut to eat but know the guards will stop them. Lina tries to hide it under her coat but can't conceal such a large animal. Other prisoners from other huts join to help create a wall concealing Lina from the eyes of the guards on her way home. In chapter seventy-eight, a man in the hut contracts typhus and leaves to live with another group where there are several cases of typhus. He says he wants to keep from infecting Lina and the others living in their hut. One day Elena reveals how she came to know Kretsky. She says he'd saved her from being raped by some soldiers and gave her a ride. She says she believes the commander found out what Kretsky had done and that's why he's been sent with them. In chapter seventy-nine, Elena is very ill and Lina begs Kretsky for medical attention but he refuses.

In chapter eighty, Elena dies and Lina insists they bury her to keep the foxes that range through the camp from eating her corpse. In chapter eighty-one, Lina deals with the guilt of wanting so desperately to survive when her parents are both dead. She finds a fresh, clean dress, shoes and the accessories in her mother's suitcase as well as a complete change of clothes for her father. They make a coffin and bury Elena.

In chapter eighty-two, Lina encounters Kretsky. He says Elena was "a good woman." Lina's anger and hatred shows through and Kretsky says he also hates himself. He tells Lina to take whatever wood she wants and she begins to gather an armload. She then realizes Kretsky has turned his back and that he's crying. She hesitates but then tells him she's sorry. In chapter eighty-three, Kretsky is gone from the camp the following day. Several of the children are becoming increasingly ill. Jonas is showing the signs of a relapse. In chapter eighty-four, there's a storm as Jonas's condition worsens. Then a man arrives in the doorway. He checks on Jonas and Janina who are both ill and screams out to a soldier. He orders the two children be fed raw fish immediately. The man, who is a doctor, asks the bald man to help cut fish and make soup for the children. Lina expects the man to refuse but he agrees, insisting only that Jonas and Janina be the first to be cared for. The doctor asks about Lina's parents and says the information about her father might be wrong though he doesn't know for sure. Lina holds to the hope. Lina asks how the doctor found them and he says Kretsky summoned him. In chapter eighty-five, Lina often dreams of her father returning as Jonas and Janina begin to heal.

The epilogue takes place in Kaunas, Lithuania, on April 25, 1996. A man finds a wooden box containing Lina's writing, drawings and a letter that indicates she and her husband,



Andrius, spent twelve years in prison and that she'd left these documents in an effort to ensure that what happened to her and others would never be forgotten.

Chapters 63 through Epilogue Analysis

At one point, Lina expresses her hatred for Kretsky and her mother's reaction is immediate and painful. She grabs Lina by the arm and tells her to stop judging him. Elena says that Kretsky is "just a boy," and that no one knows what he's going through.

Lina is looking at the horrible conditions at their new camp. They've built a crude hut but have no way to heat it initially. At one point she looks critically at the hut and says she can't imagine how they'll survive the winter. She then realizes that's what the guards are hoping that they won't survive at all.

Lina is very angry when she learns Joana's freedom came at such a high cost. At least part of Lina's anger is because her parents didn't trust her with the knowledge. She doesn't understand the depth of the danger involved. Elena points out that Joana has given up her studies and won't become a doctor because of the situation. While the sacrifice isn't at all comparable, Lina understands she isn't the only one who has lost something important.

The doctor who insists the soldiers take care of Lina and the others is able to make the demands because the soldiers are dependent on him to give the camp his approval. He makes it clear he won't do that unless they abide by his demands. Kretsky was likely punished or even killed for having alerted the doctor to the situation. His fate is not revealed.



Characters

Lina Vilkas

Lina is fifteen when the Russian soldiers arrest her. Lina lives in Lithuania. She is an average girl and a gifted artist. She is the oldest child of the family. She and her younger brother, Jonas, are the children of a college professor. It is likely that her father's profession is at least part of the reason for their arrest. Lina is an outspoken youngster and headstrong. When one of her father's friends asks what she thinks of Stalin, she tells him. Her father says Lina is too headstrong and outspoken. This is seen when everyone is afraid of being killed by the soldiers but Lina says they can't expect anyone else to speak up for them if they aren't willing to speak up for themselves. Lina's will to live is strong though she comes to question whether she has the right to survive after the deaths of her parents. Lina learns a great deal from her mother but has to sometimes be prodded into doing the right thing. For example, her mother insists that Lina take food to a man with a broken leg. Lina doesn't like the man and doesn't want to, but obeys her mother. Lina believes her art is the key to reaching her father and she draws constantly, though her drawings could result in serious punishment by the soldiers. Lina eventually marries Andrius though the details of how they reconnect is not revealed in the book.

Elena Vilkas

Elena is Lina's mother. She speaks Russian which puts her in the position to be an interpreter between the guards and the prisoners. She's a determined woman who believes her bearing and manners are very important. She is called to an office soon after their arrival at their final destination. There, she's offered the job of a spy for the Russians, reporting on the other captives. She's told she'll be given extra rations if she does but she realizes those are empty promises. She says that a clear conscience is worth more than the promise of food, even if the promises were fulfilled. When others are panicking over new situations or hardships, she insists they remain calm. When the train comes to a stop after days of traveling, she puts on lipstick and has the children straighten their clothing, preparing to meet whatever lies ahead. When she has some food, she shares with all the other prisoners though some hoard what they have. When one of the prisoners has a broken leg and is unable to work, she makes sure he is given food daily. Her determination and attitudes are important to Lina and Jonas who hold her up as a model for their own behavior, even when they don't realize it.

Jonas Vilkas

Jonas is Lina's younger brother. Jonas is well liked and works hard but is among the first to fall seriously ill. He suffers from scurvy and malnutrition but recovers when



Andrius provides additional food for him, including a can of tomatoes. He is very ill as the book comes to a close but is promised medical attention.

Andrius Arvydas

Andrius is a boy a little older than Lina whose mother claims that he is simpleminded in an effort to keep him with her when the men are being taken away. His mother later becomes a prostitute for the Russians in order to keep Andrius safe and near. Andrius feels guilty over this but uses his situation as a way to provide for others. He often manages to steal a little food and gives it to those who are hungry. He provides chocolate for the families celebrating together on their first Christmas in the prison camp. He eventually marries Lina.

Kostas Vilkas

Kostas is Lina's father. He is a university professor and is targeted for arrest, probably because of his profession. He is separated from the family. Lina sees him only briefly when they are stopped in a train yard and they never see him again.

Alexandras Lukas

Alexandras is a man who is constantly winding his watch. He is a Jewish lawyer from Kaunas and he is the first to step in, encouraging calm resistance when the Russians insist the prisoners sign papers accepting twenty-five years imprisonment and admitting they are criminals.

Miss Grybas

Miss Grybas is a former teacher who is immediately put to work in the beet fields. She provides some beets for Lina and her family though she is in tremendous danger for taking them from the fields.

Ulyushka

Ulyushka is an Altaian woman who lives in the shack where Lina and her family are assigned to live. Ulyushka is angry at the intrusion and demands rent on several occasions. When Lina and her family first arrive, the woman refuses to share anything with them and often yells at them. However, when Lina, Elena and Jonas wind up on a list of prisoners to be deported, Ulyushka gives them food she'd been saving. That food saves their lives during the trip to their next destination.



Nickolai Kretsky

Nickolai is a young Russian soldier who torments Lina and her family. Lina sees only this side of him though her mother obviously sees something more in him. He is sent to Siberia with the group of prisoners because he has shown leniency toward them. It's Nickolai who tells Elena that her husband has been killed. It's also Nickolai who reveals the horrible conditions of the prison camp which results in health care and food provided to Lina, Jonas and the others.

Ona

Ona is a young woman who gives birth just as Lina and her family are arrested. They wait in the truck until Ona's baby is born, then take her and the child on the lengthy journey. The baby dies and Ona is crazy with grief. When she rants and raves at the soldiers, they kill her.



Objects/Places

Kaunas

This is where Lina's family is from.

The Lithuanian Army

This is where Andrius' father is serving when Andrius and his mother are arrested.

Vilnius

This is where the train cars carrying the men are split off from the main train and where Lina applies to a summer art program.

Thieves and Prostitutes

These are the words written on the train car in which Lina, Elena and Jonas travel to Altai.

The stone

This is the rock found by Andrius that comes to be viewed by Andrius, Jonas, and Lina as lucky.

Turaciak

This is the village near the beet farm in Altai where Lina and her family spend about ten months early in their captivity.

The Baltic Sea

This is where Lina's family and Joana's family join for a vacation.

Nida

This is the location of the cottage on the Baltic Sea where Lina and Joana vacation with their families.



Krasnoyarsk Prison

This is where Lina's father is being held.

Trofimovsk

This is where Lina and others are moved to a prison camp where conditions are horrible. This is also where Elena dies.



Themes

The Will to Survive

The will to survive is strong in all the characters though there are some who seem to expect they will die at any time. The bald man is an example of this. He is constantly saying that death awaits at the next turn or that he would be better off dead, but he continues to survive. Lina is furious with herself when she stoops to grabbing up food thrown at her by the guards but she does it anyway. Even the youngest children realize the need to survive. Jonas finds a barrel and realizes it can be made into a stove. Janina finds a dead owl and realizes it could be eaten. This will to survive sometimes results in anger and selfishness, as seen in the case of the Altaian woman who is forced to share her hut with Lina and her family. She demands food as "rent." But there are other instances in which everyone pitches in to help others survive. It should be noted that survival is more than the effort to stay alive. One day, Lina, Elena and Mrs. Rimas are squatting in the woods, using the bathroom. Mrs. Rimas laughs as she asks for the "talcum," as if they were in a nice bathroom. Their ability to connect at that moment was important. The need to keep family connections in the form of letters is another example of the need to survive as is the tendency to keep photos of absent family members. At one point Lina feels guilty for this will. When her mother dies, she wonders if it is wrong for her to continue to strive so hard to live. The will to live overcomes her guilt.

Doing What's Right

Elena is a prime example of doing what is right as is the soldier named Kretsky. Kretsky is angry over the treatment of prisoners but is often powerless to do anything about it. He does take action whenever he can as in the case of saving Elena from her attackers. When that happens, Kretsky is punished. Later, Lina finds him outside the barracks despite the cold. He is crying and is obviously upset over the situation. He doesn't seem to know what to do but is crying. Lina realizes then the depth of his pain and impotence though she hates herself for recognizing it. Kretsky does take action, alerting a doctor to the horrible conditions in the camp. That action results in the arrival of help just as Jonas and Janina are probably approaching death. There are others who exhibit this trait as well. When one of the men jumps from a truck and breaks his leg, Elena and the others share food with him. Elena leads the way on this topic. She has a little money and some jewelry and silver. When the train stops near a vendor, she uses some of this to bribe a guard so she can leave the train. She then spends some of these precious assets to buy what the vendor has to offer, but not just enough for her family. When she returns with a great many sweets, she shares with everyone in the train car. One of the women is able to smuggle beets out of the fields and shares them with others.



The Importance of Family

Those who are arrested go to great lengths to find news of their families' whereabouts and conditions. This is seen early on when Lina leaves the train with Andrius in search of her father. She is in danger but goes anyway. The desire to stay in contact is seen later when the people put themselves in danger in order to send letters that may not ever reach their destinations. Some of them do and they are each excited when there's news of anyone who is alive. This theme is also seen when the group plans to celebrate their first Christmas together. Lina pulls out her family photo. She's picked this up as one of her treasured possessions and carries it with her through a horrific train ride. When they arrive at the little shack where they're going to celebrate Christmas, they discover there are many other family photos as well. Another example of this theme is seen when Lina steals a file in an effort to find out where her father is being held. She is in serious danger for doing this but sees it as the key to what she considers vital information. Andrius is initially angry over the risk she's taken but understands when she explains the reason. When Elena learns her husband has been killed, she's devastated and basically gives up hope. However, Lina comes to hope the information is wrong and holds to that hope.



Style

Point of View

The story is written in first person from the limited perspective of Lina. She is smart and observant, noting details about her surrounding that add to the story. The limitations of the perspective are acceptable because the story is written in first person. The reader learns about things as Lina learns about them. A prime example is the destination of the Prisoners. The reader doesn't learn where the prisoners are going until Lina learns it upon their arrival. It should be noted, however, that the perspective is completely limited and that leaves the reader with some questions. For example, Lina's father is reportedly dead. Her mother believes it but Lina holds to the hope that it's either a cruel joke or a mistake. Elena's acceptance of it may make the reader inclined to believe it as well but Lina's refusal to believe it may make the reader question. The status of Lina's father is never answered. The story ends in an open-ended way that leaves a great many questions. The story's epilogue presents even more questions. Lina apparently marries Andrius but the reader doesn't know they were reunited or anything about their lives together. The limited perspective also doesn't reveal what others are thinking. For example, Elena somehow becomes friendly with one of the guards and defends him to Lina and Jonas. Since Lina doesn't know how that situation came about, neither does the reader. The limited perspective in first person is appropriate to the story.

Setting

The story opens in Lithuania, crosses Russia and ends in the Arctic Circle. These places are real. The historical setting is also real. Thousands of Lithuanians were targeted for their "anti-Soviet" policies and actions, and were summarily imprisoned or sent from their homes because of these "crimes." The author notes that there were many, like Lina, who were caught up in Stalin's idea of justice during this time. There are several distinct physical settings. The first is the home of Lina's family. Her father isn't there when the officials arrive. They aren't prepared to leave and have to hurriedly throw some possessions into suitcases. Elena breaks many of their beautiful dishes, knowing they'll be used by the Russians. The next important setting is the train car. Lina, Elena and Jonas spend days on the cramped car and it's there they meet some of the people who will share their lives and heartaches for years to come. This scene is repeated in a different car later in the story. There are two prison work camps. The first is Turaciak. There is a detailed description of the shack Lina and her family share with an old woman during their stay there. The shack is crude. Lina notes there are two pieces of glass "puttied together" to create the building's only window. There is a stove but nothing else. The old woman who lives there sleeps on a pile of straw. The second camp, Trofimovusk, is in the Arctic Circle. Lina and the others have to build a cabin in that camp. The conditions there are even more primitive. Jonas finds a barrel that becomes the stove for the building and the men make a stovepipe from tin cans. The settings are all crude, unsanitary and horrible. The overall settings are real and set in a



historic time that really happened. The individual settings - the specific shacks and railroad cars - are fictional but are based on the author's research of the people and events of the time period.

Language and Meaning

The story is written in a straightforward manner from the perspective of a fifteen-year-old girl, Lina Vilkas. The writing is clear and easy to follow. There are some words in Russian but these are typically explained so the reader can understand what's being said. An often-repeated Russian word is "davai." The Russians use this word repeatedly. It means "hurry." The names and settings may be difficult for some readers to pronounce and to remember. For example, the first prison labor camp that becomes "home" to Lina's family for the first ten months of their incarceration is Turaciak. One of the officers is named "Kretsky." Some of these names are repeated often so the reader will become familiar with them. There is a map at the opening of the book which will allow readers a reference point for the places mentioned. The story is mainly narrative though there is some dialogue. The dialogue is not really believable because the people of the time and place would have been speaking a different language. The author seems to have intentionally created dialogue that would be understood by modern day readers. The meanings behind the dialogue, however, do seem real and reasonable. There are some scenes that readers may find offensive or disturbing. For example, Lina describes the scene in which there are dozens of bodies piled outside the frozen labor camp. Among the corpses is a man without a hand and with his stomach opened, the result of foxes eating at the dead people.

Structure

The book is divided into eighty-five chapters. The chapters are titled by number only. The majority of the chapters are three to five pages in length. The book is also divided into three sections. The first is titled "Thieves and Prostitutes." Those are the words written on the train car in which Lina and her family first travel. The second part is titled, "Maps and Snakes." Lina is called on to make a copy of a map which she does because she believes she'll be given food for the service. There is little food and much of it is rotten. The word snakes refers to a vision Lina has of the commanding officer. She is called on to draw a portrait of the man. She's warned to make it realistic but is warned by the other captives that she must make it flattering or risk the man's anger. Lina is angry that she's told how she should see the man and so battles what she really sees, which is a uniform with snakes where the head should be. The final part is titled "Ice and Ashes." The word ice refers to the destination of Lina and her group when they are sent from the prison labor camp near Turaciak. They arrive in Siberia in the fall but it's already cold. The winter is brutally cold and they fight the ravages of ice and snow. The word ashes refers to the ashes from the stove. Lina discovers that she can mix the ashes with water and use that as a gray watercolor paint. The fact that the paint is gray refers back to the title of the book. The book includes an epilogue, which is a letter Lina buries in 1954, along with all her drawings and writings, discovered in 1995. The book



also includes several maps of the regional setting of the story. The story as a whole is written in chronological order but Lina experiences flashbacks of her life in the months leading up to her arrest. These are presented in italics and include events that contribute to her arrest.



Quotes

"Have you ever wondered what a human life is worth? That morning, my brother's was worth a pocket watch." (Chapter 7, p. 27).

"I planted a seed of hatred in my heart. I swore it would grow to be a massive tree whose roots would strangle them all." (Chapter 14, p. 55).

"We'll soon be back in our homes. When the rest of the world finds out what the Soviets are doing, they will put an end to all of this." (Chapter 17, p. 66).

"The commander pulled out a pistol and shot Ona in the head." (Chapter 27, p. 101).

"How could Stalin simply take something that didn't belong to him, something that a farmer and his family had worked their whole lives for? 'That's communism, Lina,' Papa had said." (Chapter 28, p. 105).

"My point is that we're dealing with two devils who both want to rule hell." (Chapter 42, p. 168).

"Sometimes, Jonas would return with care packages that Andrius and Mrs. Arvydas would hide in the trash. But aside from the occasional bounty from Andrius, we had become bottom-feeders, living off filth and rot." (Chapter 46, p. 185).

"I ignored him and quickly began snatching the potatoes with my free hand. I stuffed them into my pockets and skirt, desperate to get each one." (Chapter 55, p. 221).

"He tried to draw maps of the United States, discussing details he had heard from friends or relatives. He needed to believe it was possible." (Chapter 67, p. 266).

"We'd been trying to touch the sky from the bottom of the ocean. I realized that if we boosted one another, maybe we'd get a little closer." (Chapter 77, p. 307).

"She could have worn these clothes. She kept them to return to Lithuania in a clean set of clothes." (Chapter 81, p. 320).

"My husband, Andrius, says that evil will rule until good men or women choose to act. I believe him." (Epilogue, p. 338).



Topics for Discussion

Describe Lina. What is it about her that makes her determined to survive? What is her life like prior to her capture. What is it like after?

Describe Lina's family members. Describe her relationship with the various family members. Who is she close to? Why?

Who is Andrius? How does Lina meet him? What is her initial reaction to him? Why do they eventually become close? How might they have reunited?

Who is Kretzsky? What is his role in Lina's life? What do Lina and Jonas come to believe about him? What does she eventually learn about him?

Describe the two prison camps in which Lina and her family live during this story. What are the similarities? What are the differences?

Who is Ulyushka? What is her initial reaction to Lina and her family? How does that change over time? What does she do when Lina and her family are being sent away? What is the result of that action? Why do you believe she took that action?

Describe at least three people Lina and her family meet during their trip. How are these characters similar? How are they different? Are they likable? What does Lina learn about each? How does each impact Lina and her family?