

Everyone Brave Is Forgiven Study Guide

Everyone Brave Is Forgiven by Chris Cleave

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Plot Summary

NOTE: This study guide specifically refers to the May, 2016, Simon and Schuster first hardcover edition.

Everyone Brave is Forgiven is a historical novel by Chris Cleave. The book heavily fictionalizes the World War II experiences and the romance of his grandparents in London and Malta. When Germany begins tearing across Europe and England declares war on Germany, eighteen-year-old Mary North leaves finishing school to apply for work at the War Office. Initially, she is assigned to teach a class at Hawley Street School. Since London is expected to be bombed, Mary must prepare the class for evacuation into the countryside where the city children will be quartered with rural families.

Meanwhile, twenty-three year-old Tom Shaw, a kind and shy young man, works at the Education Authority. He does not believe that the war will occur. His roommate and best friend is twenty-four year-old Alistair Heath, an art conservator. Alistair has already enlisted and is prepared to fight for his country. After Mary is fired from her teaching job because she has been getting too friendly with students –including Zachary Lee, a black kid –she appeals to Tom for a new assignment. In a short time, the two are dating. Tom secures a new class for Mary, which consists of kids unable to be placed in the country, such as Zachary. Alistair deploys to France, where he battles the Germans until the Allied forces must be evacuated by ship from Dunkirk.

Back in London, Alistair is promoted to captain and reassigned to a Royal Artillery regiment. Tom and Mary entice Alistair to come out for a double date along with Mary's friend, Hilda. It is the first time Alistair meets Mary, and he is floored by her. London then comes under repeated bombing by the Germans. Alistair is recalled and sent to garrison the Mediterranean island of Malta against the combined forces of Germany and Italy. Tom, who is enraged by the bombing of London, tries to join. However, he is denied enlistment by the Royal Air Force due to the importance of the position he already occupies. During Christmas, Mary's school is bombed. The blast kills students, parents, and Tom. Only Mary and Zachary survive.

Mary goes on to work with Hilda in the ambulance corps, bringing the wounded and dead back to hospital. During one such outing, Mary is severely injured and becomes addicted to morphine. At the same time, Malta comes under repeated bombardment and blockade by the Germans, who hope to starve out Alistair and the British forces. However, letters between Mary and Alistair help them to keep going, and their flirting with one another through words gives them both hope for love.

On Malta, Alistair befriends a fellow captain named Simonson, and the two men watch out for one another. When Alistair is bitten by a downed German pilot while trying to prevent a mob of locals from tearing him apart, Alistair's hand becomes infected. Ultimately, the infection costs him his entire arm which has to be removed. Simonson helps evacuate Alistair from the island ahead of schedule. This lands both Simonson and Alistair in trouble.



At home in London, with Zachary's help, Mary is able to fight off her morphine addiction. Hilda, who has distanced herself from Mary because of the addiction, now reconnects with Mary. Released from prison for his being absent without leave from Malta, Alistair returns to London. He and Mary arrange for Hilda to begin corresponding with Simonson, and the two quickly become friends. Mary is thrilled to see the arrival of American troops in London, knowing they will turn the tide of the war and save the world as they always do. She and Alistair walk the ruins of London and look forward to a future of love and hope.



Pages 1 – 84

Summary

Part One: Preservation

Untitled Prologue – Forty-five minutes after Great Britain declares war on Nazi Germany, eighteen year-old Mary North quits finishing school and joins the military. She is sent to the War Office in London, where the city is alive with talk of war. Ten thousand women are enlisting, and Mary is determined to do her part. She is assigned to teach children at Hawley Street School. She does so without complaint, but she wonders if there has been a mistake. The War Office assures her there has not been a mistake.

September, 1939 – Mary is ordered to evacuate and take her class to the country by Headmistress Vine, for London will certainly become a bombing target for the enemy. Mary is stunned, however, when she learns that zoo animals will be evacuated from the city first. A young black boy, Zachary Lee, is upset by the animals being taken away, and he does not want to go into the countryside. Mary reassures Zachary that everything will be alright, then brings him back to where the school's children have assembled. Miss Vine cautions Mary against befriending the children as it is not considered professional or proper. Because of this, Mary will not be coming to the countryside. Mary is stunned. That night, Mary goes home for dinner with Moher mother and Mary's own good friend, Hilda. She cannot bring herself to tell her mother why she has not gone to the country. Hilda reveals that she envies Mary doing something for the country. She wants to do something patriotic as well. After dinner, Mary reveals she has been fired and that she has kissed Geoffrey St. John. However, she did not like the kiss.

October, 1939 – Twenty-three year-old Tom Shaw does not expect the war to happen at all, believing both sides will come to the brink and then back down. Tom is among the few young men at the Education Authority who have not gone off to enlist. Tom oversees Kentish Town and Chalk Farm for the Authority, a difficult assignment. After a morning walk, Tom heads home to learn that his flatmate, twenty-four year-old Alistair Heath, will be in the country overnight with Lizzie Siddal. Alistair works at an art museum, and reveals that the most valuable art is being tucked away below ground for safekeeping from bombing. While Alistair works on stuffing a preserved cat, Tom explains he has a date with Mary North, whom he first met when she came to ask him for a new class to teach. Alistair reveals that he has finally signed up to go fight. He explains it is the right thing to do. Tom is stunned. He gifts a jar of homemade jam he has made to Alistair, who says that they will open it and enjoy it together at the war's end.

October, 1939 – London feels empty to Mary without all the local children out and about. Posters have been put up across the city, urging parents to keep their children evacuated, and to evacuate their children if they have not yet done so. Mary writes a letter to Zachary, to see how he is doing. At home, Hilda tells Mary she should break up



with Tom, for they have been dating for a while now but Tom has yet to make a move on Mary. Mary disagrees, saying Tom is handsome and a good man, and that she still needs a job.

November, 1939 – Alistair is at Salisbury Plain, training to fight. He is not thrilled with the training, and even less thrilled with the drill sergeant's constant shouting. Alistair befriends another man named Duggan, who has a slight stutter but says the stutter disappears when he acts on the stage. Duggan reveals he is from Peckham, while Alistair explains he is from Cambridge. He then shares the jar of blackberry jam with Duggan, explaining he was originally saving it for war's end, but that it is no use if one dies of misery before then. Duggan pulls out biscuits to eat with the jam, but the sergeant strides up and smashes the biscuits into the ground. Duggan tells the sergeant that he'll get more biscuits from the sergeant's wife when next he sees her. The sergeant congratulates Duggan on the comeback, then later orders Duggan to head back to barracks in the night rain on his own, even though Duggan has no idea where they are. Alistair gets out to help Duggan. Unfortunately, Duggan steps on a live artillery shell from a test firing, which rips him apart and nearly deafens Alistair.

November, 1939 – Alistair's ear bleeds on and off from the sound of the blast. Still haunted by Duggan's death, Alistair tries to take comfort in a letter from Tom, in which he describes his continuing relationship with Mary. Tom worries about the relationship because Mary is from a higher class of people. The rest of the men in Alistair's unit help make him comfortable. They take care of his things –such as polishing his boots –so Alistair can get some sleep.

March, 1940 – Mary continues to correspond with Zachary, and is shocked to learn he is being bullied by the other children, and that Zachary is very, very cold. Mary decides to visit Zachary's parents to tell them to send for their son. Mary believes she is in love with Tom. At last, a job opens up for Mary, and Tom writes her an official letter to let her know she is to be allowed to return to Hawley Street School. Mary is thrilled because she will be allowed to select whatever classroom she wishes to use, since the building is not currently in use at all. Mary knows that not only will she need a classroom to teach the students, but that she will need to ensure the classroom will be capable of withstanding a bombing raid as much as possible. She chooses the Sparrows' classroom, since it is closest to the cellar. Tom arrives moments later to congratulate her.

April, 1940 – Mary and Hilda attempt to style Mary's hair in the American fashion seen in Vogue Magazine. Mary explains to Hilda her parents know little about her new job, as her father, a Member of Parliament, is set on becoming a cabinet minister while her mother is helping her father to lay the foundations for such a thing in the social circles of the political world. Mary reveals she has been to see Zachary's father. She has urged him to bring Zachary home, saying that Zachary will have a safe classroom to attend.



Analysis

World War II provides not only the backdrop for Chris Cleave's novel *Everyone Brave is Forgiven*, but an active influence on the course and events of the plot itself. With the Germans rampaging across Europe, Great Britain declares war on Germany. In the opening lines of the novel, Mary commits to serving her country in whatever way she can by way of the War Office. Through her, the theme that many people will do whatever they can to help Britain's war effort is made plain. Mary is assigned the important role not only of teaching, but protecting children –the future leaders of Great Britain. Alistair, an art conservator from a wealthy family, joins the British military, proper, and deploys to France to fight the Germans. Tom's decision not to join up comes not through cowardice but through the belief that the war will not last long, if it comes at all.

It is in tragedies such as World War II that people are brought closer together, despite the darkness, the horror, and the violence. Mary cares deeply for the children to which she is assigned, becoming more like a friend to them than a teacher –which in turn earns the ire of the older teaching establishment, leading to her being fired. Mary comes to date Tom when she goes to see him about a new assignment, a romance that would never have been possible without the war. The reader will note that, throughout the course of the novel, the characters look for the silver lining in the darkness around them. Mary and Tom seem to have found each other because of the war. They consider their relationship to be a silver lining in the midst of war. Even in Alistair's regiment, men from all walks of life become common friends and brothers-in-arms, made equal in the defense of their country against the Germans.

These personal connections –some impossible, others possible but unlikely without World War II –prove the thematic argument that Cleave makes in which new beginnings are possible even in wartime. The idea that new beginnings are possible in wartime will remain consistently found throughout the course of the novel. As the narrator even notes in the Prologue, London is a city meant for beginnings. In the present, a new beginning is found by Mary who goes from finishing school to teaching a class full of children. It is not a direction she was expecting in life prior to the war but is a new beginning she has now. Her romance with Tom is also a new beginning she was not expecting previously. Alistair's decision to join up is a new beginning to his own life he was not expecting prior to the war.

The war itself is not a glamorous thing. Although people try to make do with it – especially because it was not a war of their own choosing –there are still countless tragedies, large and small, that make the war up. Even with all the prejudice and racism of Nazi Germany, and with Nazi Germany being the enemy, many of the British retain their own prejudices, such as those who dislike Mary being so friendly with black children. It is a tragedy of hypocrisy. As Alistair trains to go to war, a friend he makes – Duggan –is killed accidentally by an unexploded artillery shell fired during an artillery exercise. That Duggan should be killed in such a freak accident rather than against the enemy is a tragedy.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Mary volunteer at the War Office when Great Britain declares war on Nazi Germany? What is she assigned to do? How does she feel about this? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Although countless others are rushing off to volunteer for the war effort in whatever way they can, Tom does not. Why is this so? How does Tom feel about his decision? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Although Tom join, Alistair quickly enlists to fight the Germans. What prompts him to do this when Tom will not? Why does it matter to Alistair so much that he joins the military?

Vocabulary

unaccustomed, extravagance, indignation, injunction, daresay, companionably, ponderous, reversion, ostentatiously, mundane, incorrigible, aggrieved, exuberantly, bereft, torpid, absentia, indefatigable, indeterminate, restitution, superannuated, indolent, asinine



Pages 85– 174

Summary

Part One: Preservation, continued

May, 1940 – Tom and Mary have sex for the first time. They confess their love to one another. Tom finds himself thinking about Alistair's letters, wherein Alistair speaks about his military service. Mary reveals she believes the war is amazing because it has given her the freedom, at nineteen, to have her own school. Tom walks her to the Tube to catch the train back home. When Mary turns back to talk to Tom, she has lost him in the crowds. She feels a dread now about love.

June, 1940 – Alistair's regiment is given leave after fighting in France and evacuating at Dunkirk, so Tom takes the opportunity to travel to London by train. He is still recovering from a slight injury in his arm, where glass, shattered in the fighting, has lodged. Alistair tries to suppress memories of the awful scenes at Dunkirk, and tries to focus on the beauty of the English landscape. At last, he comes to London's Charing Cross Station, where he leaves the train. He drops a note for Tom. His mind wanders back to France, where a large number of the regiment's officers and sergeants were killed, and during which time Alistair became a hero among the men, helping to organize their retreat and saving many lives. Tom wanders around London until night, then heads out to the country to his parents' place, hoping her will feel more at ease in the countryside.

June, 1940 – Zachary is still having a difficult time with the countryside, but a girl named Simone Block helps him to adjust. She is interested to learn that Zachary and his family originally come from America, and that his blackness is actually his skin color rather than bad sunburn. Meeting at eight in the evening, Zachary and Simone share a kiss. They are then pelted with stones, after which Zachary's father is instructed to come and bring Zachary home. Back outside of London, Zachary is amazed to see that London has not yet been bombed. Zachary's father is worried about sending Zachary to school with Mary after what happened in the countryside, but Zachary insists. Mary welcomes Zachary with a hug, and tells him he is late as usual.

July, 1940 – Paris falls to the Nazis. At school, Mary teaches her class about France. Mary's class consists of kids of all ages and abilities, from handsome but slow fifteen year-old George Hampton, to pretty and intelligent Betty, to troublemaking Poppy, to proper Kenneth Cox, to polio-stricken, wheelchair-bound Thomas Essom, to beautiful but quiet Beryl Waldorf. All have been sent back to, or brought back from the countryside for one reason or another. For example, no family wanted to take in Thomas because of his condition. In addition to teaching her eight students their usual lessons, Mary also takes care to keep them informed about the war as it is unfolding. The children worry the Germans will invade. Mary reassures the children that their country is well-prepared to defend itself against the enemy. It causes Mary to reflect, however, on a conversation she and Hilda recently had about what they might do if the



Germans came. Mary reflects on how both of them would choose to die rather than submit to the Germans.

August, 1940 – Tom reveals to Mary that Alistair’s unit is set to leave again. Mary urges Tom to get Alistair to come to the city for a visit, but Tom explains Alistair will not come. Instead, he suggests going out to the country to see Alistair. Mary agrees. Upon learning that Alistair is handsome, now a captain, and kind, Mary proposes setting him up with Hilda. Tom comes to caution Mary about her informal teaching style, and for getting too close to Zachary because Zachary is black. He explains he is in a difficult position, doing his best to keep the school open despite prevailing policy about child evacuations. Mary is angry with Tom, saying she is not just teaching, but helping the kids handle life as it is. Tom argues it is not their job to change how things are, but just to teach. Mary cannot understand what good it does to teach a child to count, if the child does not know he counts for something. Tom tells Mary she is losing him, to which Mary responds she possibly is.

September, 1940 – Alistair, now a captain in the Royal Artillery, and having seen combat, does his best to keep as much distance from his men as possible though still maintaining friendly enough relations with them. Alistair goes in for a physical check up with the doctor, during which time he explains to the doctor he now keeps himself mostly to himself. The doctor explains war does these things, but that Alistair must fight to keep brightness in his life, such as finding a girl. Alistair thanks the doctor, then heads out to meet Tom, Mary, and Hilda for lunch at Lancaster Gate. Alistair has never met Mary or Hilda before, and he is floored by Mary’s beauty. In a quiet moment, Alistair encourages Tom to marry Mary, for a girl so beautiful and kind will surely be snatched up by someone else. Mary asks Alistair about the war. Alistair explains the Germans were well-organized, but that they will be ready to hit the Germans back when next they meet. Mary reveals her father is MP for Wensum Valley.

After lunch, the four go to get ice cream. Alistair enjoys Hilda’s company, but he is jealous of Mary and Tom. They then go see a comedic stage production at the Lyceum Theater in which Zachary’s father is acting. The show exploits racial stereotypes, but also savages Nazi Germany which the audience enjoys. The show is suddenly interrupted, and all those assembled are asked to head into the basement. Among those in the basement is Zachary, who is happy to see Mary. What everyone thinks is a routine air raid drill turns out to be the real thing. Bombs begin falling on London. People look to Alistair, in uniform, for reassurance. He does his best to tell everyone to remain calm, that British anti-aircraft batteries are shooting back at the German bombers. The performers begin to sing to try to calm everyone as well. Zachary’s father comes over to thank Mary for seeing the show. Alistair and Mary get to talking on their own, during which time Alistair explains he is not interested in Hilda, but that it is not Hilda’s fault.

Alistair and Mary head outside to see what is going on. Alistair worries about Mary’s safety, but Mary urges him to come with her to the river. There, they see the docks being bombed and the surrounding buildings blazing. Mary is stunned. Alistair brings her back to the theater, then heads off to find his men. He reunites with them and organizes them in Waterloo, from where they respond to the docks, helping local



authorities and volunteers dig through the rubble and pull out trapped, wounded, and dead civilians. It enrages Alistair's unit, and they are determined now more than ever to smash apart the Germans. As the regiment prepares to depart, Mary arrives at the station, carrying Alistair's duffel bag, for he had forgotten it at the theater. She explains she also wanted to make sure Alistair was okay, as well as conveying word that Hilda is furious that Alistair left without saying goodbye. Alistair congratulates Mary on having Tom, and says he is hopeful about the future for everyone.

Analysis

As the novel unfolds in earnest, the reader is captivated by the sights and sounds of an entire country of people doing whatever they can to support the war effort. Mary, through Tom, regains a classroom, and ensures that those local children left behind in the city, or refused to be evacuated from the city, will receive a proper education. Although it might not be a role on a battlefield, or directly in support of the war effort, Mary is content in the knowledge that the work she is doing does matter, and is very important. Alistair, meanwhile, deploys to France where the combined Allied forces are smashed apart by the German advance. Alistair is among those evacuated at Dunkirk, where he distinguishes himself by organizing the men of his unit and ensuring that their lives will be saved through an orderly retreat.

Back in London, Alistair is promoted to captain and assigned to a Royal Artillery regiment for his distinguished leadership and heroism at Dunkirk. It is while he is in London that he not only meets Hilda for the first time, but Mary as well. The tragedy of war brings people together in ways unseen in peacetime, as under different circumstances, these four human beings would probably have never crossed paths. Alistair and Mary are immediately smitten with one another, but due to their strong morals and sense of honor, do not act on their feelings as they believe that perhaps their mutual initial attraction may only be temporary; and, after all, Mary is in love with Tom and is set to marry him whenever he should propose. Tragically, the double date is brought to a sudden end as the London Blitz –the brutal German bombing of London – begins the very same day.

Despite the onslaught of the Germans, Mary's love for Tom remains strong. The idea that love can be found in even the darkest times remains a clear and poignant theme. Love is one of the most important things which makes life worth living, and the fact that love can be found even in such situations demonstrates the resilience, courage, and eternal optimism of humankind. Despite the death all around them, Mary and Tom are determined to live as normally and as hopefully as they are able to under the circumstances. Mary and Tom are not the only ones. Hilda, though love is not possible with Alistair, is nevertheless still seeking a very human connection through love in spite of the war. It is a way of saying that she is going to keep on living no matter what Hitler might throw at them.

Hilda's hope for love and a better future provide further evidence to the idea that new beginnings are possible even in wartime. The idea that new beginnings are possible



even in wartime is lent further credence by the initial mutual attraction that materializes between Alistair and Mary. As noted previously, they do not act on their feelings because they think them only temporary, value morality and honor, and Mary is safely in Tom's corner. However, it is clear that a groundwork for something has been laid between the two by their meeting. How this will play out ultimately remains to be seen. The terror of the bombing of London, however, makes new beginnings seem impossible, as tragedy on a grand scale at large, and tragedy on countless, personal scales mars any hope for the future. Alistair gathers his unit not to hunker down, but to go out into the inferno to rescue trapped people.

Discussion Question 1

What are Alistair's wartime experiences like in France? How do these affect him upon his return to England? Why does he avoid going to London until just before he is to deploy?

Discussion Question 2

What is the first meeting between Mary and Alistair like? Despite their obvious mutual attraction, neither one acts on their feelings. Why?

Discussion Question 3

Hilda is anxious for love, but is unable to find any. Why? Why do things not work out with Alistair? What does Hilda's nevertheless-eternal hope for love have to say about the wartime situation at large? Why?

Vocabulary

arbitrarily, imponderables, simultaneously, protuberant, redaction, inscrutable, effervescence, besotted, sardonic, antiaircraft batteries, subterfuge, conflagration



Pages 175 – 254

Summary

Part Two: Attrition

September, 1940 – Mary and Hilda drive over to see the damage at the docks. The area is devastated. Hilda asks Mary if she and Alistair kissed because of the way Mary looked at Alistair. Mary says she did not kiss him. Mary tells Hilda she is impossibly spoiled, which horrifies Hilda. Mary immediately apologizes. She calls Mary selfish. Hilda says she knows they kissed. Then, she leaves to find her own way home.

December, 1940 – On the night of the first bombing, Tom volunteers for the Royal Air Force. Now a few months later, Tom learns by official mail that his testing has been satisfactory, but his acceptance has been rejected by the War Office since the War Office considers his current function vital to the war effort. Tom is heartbroken. He goes for a couple of drinks, then he heads to the school to watch Mary's class rehearse for their Nativity play. After rehearsal, Tom tells Mary she should leave him because of the War Office's rejection. Tom admits to being envious of Alistair, and admits to feeling worthless because he is not able to fight. Mary reassures him that she loves him, that he is not worthless, and that she will not leave him. She says that this is what they are meant for, to dig one another out when they get buried.

December, 1940 – Alistair's unit, 200 Battery, 10 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Royal Artillery, is stationed on the island of Malta in the Mediterranean. In a quiet moment, Alistair and his buddy, Captain Simonson, fish off the island. Simonson, unable to catch any fish, calls them Nazis. The two must be careful as they sail around to avoid mines. As they sail, an Italian fighter plane screeches in overhead, causing both captains to startle and overturn their dinghy. The fighter plane sweeps back and drops a note, apologizing for the disturbance. Alistair and Simonson right their boat, then head in as the sun sets. Alistair has received a letter from Hilda, even though he has realized he is in love with Mary.

December, 1940 – Mary's class officially premieres their Nativity play to parents and other locals. But as the performance gets underway, the air raid sirens go off. Tom and Mary usher everyone into the basement while the lights above are turned off. Mary directs the adults to one side so that a space can be cleared for the performance to continue. The bombs, however, get closer, startling everyone. Zachary, terrified, flees the basement. Tom rushes after Zachary, followed by Mary. Mary catches Zachary first, and must drag him back to the school. When they return, they discover the school has been bombed, and dead bodies are already being pulled from the rubble. Among them is Tom. Mary is stunned and devastated.

December, 1940 – The British situation on Malta is becoming desperate as the enemy blockades the island and stops supplies from getting in. On Christmas Day, Alistair



receives a letter from Tom's father, letting him know that Tom has been killed. Alistair is shocked. Alistair pulls out Tom's jar of blackberry jam, sets it on his windowsill, and stares at it well into the night.

January 1941 – Zachary is still heartbroken by the death of his father. Zachary takes on a job waiting tables at the theater where his father used to perform. He comes to live in the basement, sleeping in old drapes.

January, 1941 – Hilda attends Tom's funeral with Mary, which is difficult for Mary because it is the first time she ever meets Tom's parents. On the way home, Mary notes that she must see about Zachary's welfare. Mary also explains she is determined to teach again. Much of London is now in ruins. Mary heads to Tom's old office, now occupied by a slightly older man named Cooper, to see about new work. Cooper refuses to open up any schools, saying he does not want any repeats of what happened to Hawley Street School. Cooper tells Mary to take a break for a few weeks, and get out of town. Cooper then invites Mary out for lunch, but she turns him down.

January, 1941 – A new club in the basement of the theater is constructed called The Joint, which becomes operational any time there is an air raid. Theater patrons rush down not only for protection, but to keep on with their time out and about. Zachary works the tables and sleeps under the bar when the crowds leave.

January, 1941 – Mary writes to the Lyceum. She learns that Zachary is doing well. Mary's mother encourages her to get back out in the dating circuit, but Mary explains she was in love with Tom and cannot move on so quickly. Hilda, who has been volunteering for the ambulances, suggests it to Mary, who in turn suggests it to her mother.

January, 1941 – The island of Malta is in bad shape. Not only is it being starved out, but it has been ordered to hold to the last against the combined armies of Germany and Italy. Alistair's unit, 10 Regiment, is stationed at Fort Saint Elmo. The German Luftwaffe attacks by air for two days, while the Regiment does its best to fight back and survive. They manage to hold out. Alistair and Simonson direct recovery efforts, and the evacuation of the wounded. That night, Alistair reads a letter from Mary, who speaks gently about Tom and says she and Hilda have joined up with the ambulance corps. She says she will keep up with the rent for the flat that Alistair and Tom rented if he wishes, and notes that she has been caring for things in his absence. Alistair writes back that he worries for Mary's joining the ambulance corps, tells her it is up to her what she does with the flat, and encourages her to continue teaching. The plane that bears Alistair's letter home is tossed into the sea by a strong wind upon landing, causing all people and things on board to be lost in the water.

February, 1941 – A month goes by without a reply from Alistair, which worries Mary. Mary wonders why he has not responded, and wonders what step she should take next in her life. She and Hilda receive word that they have both been accepted into the ambulance corps.



Analysis

The idea that many people will do whatever they can in times of war to support the war effort is clearly apparent in this section of the novel. Having witnessed the horror and evil of bombing London, Tom is determined to enlist. He wishes to fly a fighter plane to shoot down German aircraft to prevent them from killing innocent people. Unfortunately, the War Office rejects him only on the grounds that he is considered essential in his current position in the Education Authority. This devastates Tom, because Tom wants to do something beyond merely administrating education. Tom is reminded, by both the War Office and Mary, that his work is indeed important, because the future adults of the country still need their education and support in troubled times.

Tragedy is not far behind Tom's rejection. Ironically, Tom is killed in the London bombings, the very thing which he wanted to enlist in order to prevent. Tom's death is a devastating tragedy to Mary, because she was determined to marry him. The same attack which kills Tom also kills Mary's entire class (except Zachary) and their families, including Zachary's father. The tragedy is too much for Mary to bear, so she doubles-down by seeking to keep busy. She applies for work in the ambulance service, realizing that she can do some good by pulling to safety, and trying to save, the wounded innocents of the city. Mary's decision to work in such a manner is a demonstration of the thematic idea that in wartime, people will do whatever they can to support the war effort.

The tragedy of the war and the routine bombings of London bring people together in ways unseen in peacetime. Mary and Hilda are both educated and wealthy. Through the ambulance service, they have applied for some of the grittiest, bloodiest, and most heartbreaking work imaginable. It is the kind of work that they never would have otherwise done. It brings them into contact with people they probably never would have met under ordinary circumstances. Likewise, Mary's continued involvement with ensuring Zachary's safety would probably never have been possible given calmer, more stable times. However, with attention diverted largely elsewhere, old expectations about human interaction and associations are not always applied or upheld.

Meanwhile, Alistair's posting on Malta allows him to befriend Simonson, with the tragedy of the war once again bringing together friends who might not have been friends under other circumstances. Alistair and Simonson get along well, and they value their friendship against the greater drama of the war around them. The island of Malta is not immune from the war. The island has been blockaded, making food, supplies, and accoutrements of war in short supply. Soldiers and civilians on Malta are suffering as well from constant bombings. There is a looming threat of invasion from Italian and German forces. In war, people do whatever they can to help the war effort, and in Malta, the British military attempts to stave off yet another German onslaught to deny Germany the power it craves through world conquest.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Tom apply for service in the Royal Air Force? Why is he ultimately denied? How does this affect him? How does he cope with the rejection?

Discussion Question 2

When Tom and the schoolchildren are killed, how does Mary respond? Why? What does she seek to do next with her life? Why?

Discussion Question 3

What is Alistair's situation? What is the purpose of defending a place like Malta against the Axis powers? Why are Alistair, Simonson, and the British forces so determined to defend the place?

Vocabulary

incalculable, famished, iconoclastic, oblivion, dominion, exasperated, extrovert, soliloquy, philippic, burnished, plaintive



Pages 255 – 340

Summary

March, 1941 – Mary reports to the Air Raid Precautions Station at Saint Helen's Church in Bishopgate where she is to be the new driver for the Join War Organization stretcher party. There, she meets a man named Huw, who along with Clive, handle a stretcher. Hilda, who will be working in the same crew as a nurse, has already arrived. Mary says hello to Hilda, then begins to familiarize herself with the van she will be driving. That evening, the Germans begin their bombing raids once more, and the crew sets out to recover the wounded to bring them back to the hospital set up at the church. The foreheads of the injured are marked according to their injury classifications and any treatments administered before arrival, such as with an X for internal injuries, a T for trauma, and an M for morphine already having been administered. Most heartbreaking to Mary and Hilda is when they are called to the scene of a bombed building where a boy of about eight or nine has been mortally injured. After their shift, Mary sits down to write to Alistair once more.

March, 1941 – Mary writes that she has mended one of Alistair's shirts, and that she is prepared to proceed with the rest of his wardrobe at the flat. Alistair is amazed that her letter makes it through the blockade, since so much else is not. He writes back at once, to which she responds. The two begin flirting through their letters, and Mary's letters begin to make the war disappear for Alistair whenever he reads them. Alistair and Simonson wonder what England will be like after the war. Simonson wonders who would miss him if he was dead. Alistair reminds him he has three girls writing to him romantically at once. Simonson explains he is looking for a unique girl. While in a village near the fort, Alistair and Simonson discover a downed, dying German airman being beaten by a group of locals. Alistair orders them away at gunpoint, then turns to the wounded German. In desperation, the German attacks Alistair and bites his hand, so Simonson must shoot the German. The German is still barely alive. Simonson shoots the German again to put him out of his misery. The German continues to breathe, speaking about his son. Simonson fires the rest of his handgun into the German, who manages to remain alive. Alistair then suffocates him.

March, 1941 – Mary and Hilda continue their work. When Hilda laments that Alistair hasn't written her, Mary reveals she has been writing to Alistair. Hilda is deeply upset, while Mary apologizes. She assures Hilda that Hilda will soon find someone. The crew responds to a call in Farringdon, where a flooded tunnel must be entered. There, a steel beam collapses on Mary's legs, Hilda struggles to help Mary free, but the water level keeps rising. Hilda breathes into Mary's lips underwater to keep her alive until rescuers can force the water out. Because of this, Hilda saves Mary's life.

April, 1941 – Malta has been under siege for a year. Alistair's hand, bitten by the German, is infected, forcing the surgeon to cut away more and more of it as time passes. Simonson is promoted to major and takes command of the entire battery unit.



Alistair reveals he has been restoring a painting for a local church as penance for having killed the German airman. Food is growing more scarce, and the men are growing thinner. Much of their time is spent digging graves for the dead, but they often come across the graves of the dead from previous wars.

April, 1941 – Mary continues to recover from her injuries. Mary's mother is glad she is alright, but she is enraged that Mary has nearly died. She forbids Mary from going back into the ambulance service. Mary talks about doing important things, but Mary's mother reminds her that while Mary may find her mother's life small, it is not small to her mother, because she loves it, her husband, and Mary.

April, 1941 – Mary is able to walk once more, so she goes to the Lyceum to see about Zachary. He is still living under the bar, now with a young black girl named Molly. Mary can see both children are malnourished, and suffering from scurvy. Mary brings both children out at once for a decent meal at the Ritz that includes meat, eggs, and fruit. The waiter protests, but Mary ignores his dislike of black children eating at such a place. He consents to their eating, though Mary knows some of the other diners are shooting discourteous looks at her.

May, 1941 – Some Sicilian fisherman are blown toward Malta by a strong wind. Their food and supplies are requisitioned by the British, and shared with the Sicilians after they agree to spit on a photograph of Mussolini. The British put on a show of marching bands and dress uniforms to make it appear to the Sicilians that they are doing well and strong despite the blockade, news which the Sicilians will undoubtedly send along to the enemy. Alistair is, meanwhile, worried that he has not heard from Mary in a while. The Germans continue to bomb the island by the air, but the British and their local enlistees are barely able to return fire for lack of ammunition and lack of strength to fight. It is only a matter of time before the German paratroopers come and actually invade the island, everyone believes. Simonson, meanwhile, urges Alistair to allow the surgeons to remove his infected arm.

May, 1941 – Mary moves into Alistair and Tom's flat when her mother refuses to allow Mary any more morphine, knowing Mary has become addicted. Mary, meanwhile, continues to care for Zachary and Molly, and discovers another black boy named Charles now staying with them. While out walking with Zachary, a woman slaps Mary across the face with a glove because Mary is clearly high and running around with a black kid. It stuns Mary, and causes her to fall. She begs Zachary to drop morphine into her mouth, which he does. He then urges her to give up the morphine, and throws the rest of the bottle in the Thames. Mary realizes she must quit using morphine.

May, 1941 – Mary takes to teaching the children who are gathering at the Lyceum, even though the bombing raids. She begins trying to force herself off morphine. Hilda reminds her this is important since there are injured people who actually need it. When Hilda is injured at work, suffering three massive gashes along her face, she has no choice but to allow Mary to administer morphine so that her face can be bandaged up.



Analysis

As the novel continues, the thematic truth that, in wartime, people do whatever they can to help the war effort, is readily apparent in the way in which Mary and Hilda commit to their work as ambulance drivers. They repeatedly risk their lives in order to save the lives of other innocents caught up in the bombing. Mary and Hilda have their hearts broken nightly by the terrors and horrors that they witness, but they do their best to remain brave and focused on the task at hand in which they try to save as many lives as possible. Meanwhile, Alistair, Simonson, and the rest of the British forces garrisoned on Malta continue to be a thorn in the side of the advancing Germans, for still, despite being outnumbered, outgunned, and in various stages of starvation, the British heroically will not yield to the Germans.

War has a very tragic side to it, as the reader continues to discover. The tragedies of war are large and small. One particular ambulance call leaves Mary and Hilda especially shaken, and it is yet another site of a German-bombed home. There, they discover a child of about eight or nine mortally wounded, with his insides torn out. The child is unable to be saved. At the same time, Alistair and Simonson demonstrate their valor when they intervene on behalf of a downed German pilot, preventing him from being torn apart by a rightfully angry group of local citizens. The German, however, lashes out at and bites Alistair in a frenzied spate of desperation, a tragedy which leads to Alistair having to kill the German, and leads Alistair to have to have his arm amputated.

During an emergency response, Mary also faces a life-threatening situation when she is nearly killed by a fallen beam. Only Hilda's quick work and the efforts of volunteers to drain water from the tunnel in which they are trapped save their lives. Mary's recovery, painful and slow and made worse by the recent loss of Tom and the children, leads Mary into the throes of morphine addiction. Morphine becomes the central focus of Mary's life, overtaking even her writing of letters to Alistair. The letters, which have meant the world to Alistair and are symbolic of new beginnings and the potential for love between the two, stop coming. This deeply concerns Alistair, while Mary does not think twice about it because she is too busy trying to find more morphine.

Tragedies continue to abound. Mary's sudden addiction to morphine is an especially heartrending tragedy. As Hilda explains, Mary's addiction is not only hurtful, but damaging to the war effort because the morphine is not going to people who actually need it. Hilda herself, even despite her injuries, has prevented taking morphine to deal with the pain until it can no longer be avoided, and ensures she herself does not become addicted. Another tragedy the reader is once again reminded of is how, despite England battling not only Nazi Germany, but the prejudicial hatreds Nazi Germany represents and practices, some of the English retain their prejudices toward blacks. Although their prejudices pale in comparison to the Nazis, they are still prejudices. This can be seen in Mary being slapped by a passing white woman who is angry at her for being high and for consorting with black children.



Discussion Question 1

What tragedies do Mary and Hilda face during their service in the ambulance corps? How do they cope with these tragedies?

Discussion Question 2

How does Mary become addicted to morphine? Why is this a tragedy in its own right, especially given there is a war on?

Discussion Question 3

Why do Mary's letters come to mean so much to Alistair? In particular, how do they help him to cope with the war? How does he respond when the letters stop coming? Why?

Vocabulary

annihilating, calumny, condescension, jollity, fulsome, libelous, prudent, hospitable, methodical, omnipresent, sirocco, humane, obtuse, scurvy, subordinate, ludicrous, preposterous



Pages 341 – 418

Summary

Part Three: Restoration – Alistair finds it hard to balance at first with only his left arm. Without the arm, he is due to be shipped out of Malta since he is considered combat ineffective. Before he is to leave, Alistair wants to have the fully-restored painting returned to the church in the village. His subaltern, Briggs, arranges a truck under false pretenses and drives Alistair to the church. As they drive, an enemy plane zooms in, injuring Briggs and causing the truck to catch on fire, killing Briggs. Back at the fort, Alistair takes blame for what has happened. Simonson will not court-martial Alistair under the circumstances, for Alistair has just lost an arm, is not himself, and has demonstrated nothing more than poor judgement. Meanwhile, a letter arrives from Hilda, speaking about Mary's refusal to stop using morphine and her consorting with blacks. Simonson says this is a lot to consider when Alistair shares it with him, while Alistair says he should like to know Mary's side of the story, and that he will not give up Mary for anything. When Alistair is set to be evacuated from the island, Simonson sees him to the airfield. Fifty miles from Gibraltar, the plane must ditch into the sea. Alistair and four others survive the crash. Exposure begins to take a toll on Alistair, but fortunately, he and the others are rescued.

September, 1941 – Mary learns from Simonson by mail that Alistair's plane has gone down over the sea. Alistair is presumed dead. Mary turns heavily toward morphine once more. When she runs out of morphine, Mary wonders what she will do now. She wanders around until she comes to the Lyceum, where she asks Zachary to find her some morphine. Zachary is horrified at the request. He proposes a cigarette instead, which angers Mary who calls him ungrateful. Zachary tells her no more morphine as Mary is wracked by withdrawal and falls asleep. When she awakens, she apologizes to Zachary. Zachary reveals he has spoken with the manager, who has in turn procured some morphine for Mary. Zachary tells Mary she can have it, but if she takes it, to never come back. Mary refuses to take it. Zachary watches over Mary as she struggles through withdrawal. She hallucinates, sleeps, cries, and cramps up. Zachary and the other children she has cared for now watch over her through the night. Zachary, out of curiosity, injects himself with the morphine, and is delighted.

December, 1941 – Mary is now clean and sober. Mary receives an aerogramme from Simonson, saying that Alistair is alive and safe. Mary is thrilled. However, Alistair is serving a twelve-month prison sentence for being AWOL, having left Malta before he was officially allowed to leave. Mary visits with her mother. Her mother is thrilled to see her well and clean. Mary confesses her love for Alistair, that he is a war hero, a good man, is from a good family, and before the war worked as an art conservator at the Tate Museum. This thrills Mary's mother. Mary then explains Alistair's situation. She asks for her mother's help, and agrees to do so on the conditions that she will happily do whatever the War Office assigns her to do, that she will move back home until the wedding to Alistair, and that she will stop carrying on with blacks. Mary argues that she



at least be allowed to keep teaching the black kids. Mary's mother will not hear of this due to social pressures. When her mother leaves, Mary asks the butler, Palmer, to call for a cab and to let her mother know she won't be home for dinner that night, meaning she does not accept her mother's conditions. Palmer calls Hilda, saying Mary urgently needs her. Mary is surprised when Hilda shows up in a cab, while Hilda explains she has come at Palmer's request. Hilda is glad to learn Mary is now clean, and the two quickly reconnect.

December, 1941 – Mary heads to teach class at the Lyceum. There are now nine black children that she teaches. The blacks who act in the show, including a man named Bones, worry about Mary teaching the class because they don't believe blacks and white should be mixing because they believe it would mean fewer whites would pay to attend their shows. Mary has no choice but to leave.

January, 1942 – Simonson remains in command of his artillery unit at Malta, and does his best to keep his men strong and together. Simonson is put under investigation for helping Alistair to leave early. Simonson's commander explains that without bread, only fairness and law will keep the men in order. Simonson will have until the morning to confess. In his room, Simonson discovers that Alistair has left behind the blackberry jam jar. Simonson tastes a small amount. In the morning, Simonson goes to Hamilton and confesses in order to cover for Alistair, saying Alistair knew absolutely nothing about the corners that had been cut to get him home early. Hamilton then asks Simonson what they should do about Malta. Simonson says allow the men who wish to fight to fight, and to allow the men who wish to surrender, to surrender when the time comes.

March, 1942 – American troops begin to arrive in London. Mary and Zachary watch them arrive, grateful that the Americans have come to save the day. She and Zachary then officially say their goodbyes.

April, 1942 – Zachary tracks down his father's burial location, in East London Cemetery. He then visits his father's grave, and apologizes for taking so long to visit. Zachary realizes that London is not a dying city, but a city dying to begin.

May, 1942 – Hilda has been corresponding with Simonson, and she is falling in love with him. She cannot wait to see him in person.

January, 1942 – Mary and Hilda meet Alistair at the Ritz upon his return to London. He meets them directly from the train he comes in on. Mary is thrilled to see Alistair, and the two later have dinner. But during dinner, Mary suddenly leaves, apologizing as she goes. She comes back in and tells Alistair that the place isn't her, and that they should go elsewhere. Alistair immediately agrees. Alistair asks to go by the Tate, and is chilled by its ruins. As they continue walking through the museum ruins, they discuss the things they have suffered, and how they want to try to make a go of things. Alistair is lost and in personal distress, but Mary hopes he will find his way back to life through love with her. They kiss and fall asleep until dawn breaks over them through the museum.



Analysis

Simonson's friendship with Alistair becomes central to the lives of both men when Simonson helps Alistair to leave Malta before Alistair's number comes up for evacuation. Simonson then covers up for Alistair, meaning Alistair's time in prison will not be as bad as it previously could have been. Simonson's friendship with Alistair necessitates a new beginning for Simonson as well, for it is through Alistair and Mary that Simonson begins to write to, and fall in love with Hilda. Even in wartime, love and new beginnings can still be found. These themes, taken together, help to reinforce the thematic idea that tragedy brings human beings together in ways unseen in peacetime. Had it not been for the war, the British garrison on Malta, and the bombing of London, Simonson and Hilda might never have even known the other existed. Now, they are poised for romance.

Alistair, meanwhile, counts down the days until he is able to see Mary, but the reader should note his departure from Malta is bittersweet. On the one hand, he is glad he will be heading home, but on the other, he will be forced to leave his men –and his friends – behind to face the German juggernaut without him. Alistair has befriended and gotten to know countless people he never would have otherwise known without the war, once again demonstrating that war brings people together in ways unseen during peacetime. Alistair knows that the war is over for him, however. While he may be able to do something to help back home, he will never be able to return to the battlefield as a one-armed soldier, for the British government would not allow it.

Mary, meanwhile, finally cleans herself up and reconnects both with Hilda and her mother. However, as tragedies of war continue to abound, so does the prejudice of Mary's mother. While Mary's mother does not hate blacks, she does not believe Mary should be associating with them at all. She agrees to help Mary find a way to secure Alistair's release from jail on the condition that Mary stop associating with them. Mary refuses. Ironically, and tragically, it is the black workers at the theater themselves who request Mary stop coming to see them. They value their lives as they are, and value the strange non-relationship relationship they have with whites, and do not want things to be upset by Mary. Mary must say goodbye to Zachary as a result, but the reader should note that their goodbye scene is made more hopeful by the arrival of the Americans, who Mary and Zachary realize have come to save their day as they always do. The arrival of the Americans marks a new beginning and a new phase in the war which will ultimately lead to the defeat of Hitler's Nazi Germany.

Finally, that love can be found in even the darkest times is made apparent when Alistair and Mary finally meet again in London. They are thrilled to see one another, but their reuniting is cautious because both have been so scarred by the war, because both have lost so much in the war, and because their coming together has only been made possible by the death of Tom in the war itself. Nevertheless, Tom is especially haunted by his wartime experiences, and Mary knows he will need extra care and patience, even as both hold out for the hope and promise of love. It is proof that new beginnings are always possible, and that love is possible even in wartime.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Simonson cover for Alistair when Alistair is declared AWOL from Malta? What happens to both Simonson and Alistair as a result?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Mary refuse to accept her mother's offer of help regarding Alistair's imprisonment? Why must Mary say goodbye to Zachary? What do both instances have to say about some members of British society?

Discussion Question 3

What is the reunion like between Alistair and Mary like? Why is this the case? Nevertheless, why do they both hold out hope for the promise of love?

Vocabulary

equilibrium, expeditious, subaltern, extravagant, distraught, euphoric, invariant, centrifugal, nonchalance



Characters

Mary

Mary North is an eighteen-year-old woman living in England during World War II. The daughter of wealthy parents, with her father being a Member of Parliament, Mary drops out of finishing school to volunteer at the War Office to do her part against Nazi Germany. She is initially assigned to teach school at Hawley, but fired for being too friendly and casual with the students. When seeking rehiring, she meets and falls in love with Tom, who arranges a new class for her. However, Mary's willingness to teach black students like Zachary rubs some people the wrong way. Mary ignores them and continues to teach the students, knowing she is doing what is right.

When Mary meets Alistair for the first time on a double-date, she is floored but she does not act on her attraction to him. She believes that the attraction is temporary because she wants to marry Tom. When most of the class and Tom are killed in a bombing raid, Mary is devastated. She turns to working the ambulance crews with her best friend, Hilda, where they save countless lives as Germany bombs London. Mary begins writing to Alistair. Injured on the job, and seeking to cope with her loss, Mary becomes addicted to morphine, a habit which Zachary only later helps her to break. Mary later eagerly awaits, and is thrilled when Alistair returns from the front. Romance between them truly begins as the novel ends.

Alistair

Alistair Heath is a twenty-four year-old man living in London during World War II. From a wealthy background, he is an art conservator by trade, Alistair is best friends with Tom. When war is declared against Germany, Alistair enlists in order to protect his country. He serves with distinction in France and the evacuation at Dunkirk, and he is promoted to captain and reassigned to the Royal Artillery.

At home on leave, Alistair meets Mary and is floored by her, but he does not act on his feelings because he believes that his feelings are temporary. He would never do anything to hurt Tom. Alistair is then deployed to Malta, where he befriends Simonson and endures a German blockade and constant bombardments. Alistair is saddened by news of Tom's death, but he becomes romantically interested in Mary through the letters they write to one another. Wounded by a German pilot, Alistair must have his arm removed. When Alistair leaves the island ahead of his evacuation orders, he is arrested for going absent without leave and imprisoned for a year. When he is released, he travels to London and reunites with Mary.



Tom

Tom Shaw is a twenty-three year-old man living in London during World War II. He is an official at the Education Authority and the best friend of Alistair. Tom does not believe the war will last long. When he meets Mary who asks him for more work in the school system, Tom and Mary quickly fall for one another and begin a slow but loving relationship which is headed toward marriage. Tom is killed during a German bombing run.

Hilda

Hilda is Mary's best friend. From a wealthy background, Hilda is bright and optimistic, and always tries to look on the brighter side of things. She is a loyal and courageous person who saves Mary's life when the two are trapped in a flooding tunnel while both serving in the ambulance corps. Hilda, however, is lonely, and longs for love. She hopes she will find love with Alistair, but she is hurt when Alistair does not return her feelings.

She later confronts Mary over Mary's morphine addiction and distances herself from Mary when Mary chooses the drug. Hilda later reconnects with Mary after Mary cleans up her act.

Hilda is introduced through letters to Simonson. The two fall in love through writing to each other.

Zachary

Zachary Lee is a young black boy originally from America who has moved to London with his father so that his father may act in a local show. Zachary is dyslexic and prone to fright, but he is kind and thoughtful. He is devastated by the death of his father, but he takes comfort in his friendship with Mary, who also serves as his teacher.

When Zachary learns that Mary is addicted to morphine, he fights to help break her of the habit. Given prevailing social norms of the time, Mary and Zachary must say good bye and part ways as friends. Zachary goes to visit his father's grave and looks forward to a more hopeful future as the novel ends.

Simonson

Douglas Simonson is a British captain in the Royal Artillery who befriends Alistair while the two are stationed on Malta. Simonson is friendly, outgoing, and patriotic. He is a loyal friend, but he longs to have a solid romance with a solid girl. Simonson takes the blame for helping Alistair leave Malta before Alistair is cleared to go.



Simonson is later introduced to Hilda through letters, and the two strike up a romance through their letters to one another, with Simonson looking forward to meeting Hilda in person.

Hamilton

Hamilton is the commanding officer of both Simonson and Alistair. Hamilton is a friendly but duty-driven man who realizes Malta is in a dangerous situation. Under normal circumstances he would not care about the injured Alistair leaving early. However, in the current situation, he must take action. With food in short supply, fairness has to be exacting.

Mary's mother

Mary's mother, never named, is a kind but strict woman who loves her family deeply. She is devoted to seeing the lives of her loved ones be as full and productive as possible. To this end, she supports her husband's politics, works political circles, and does her best to keep Mary in line. To support Mary, she is willing to go so far as to leverage influence to help get Alistair out of jail, but refuses to do so when Mary refuses to stop teaching black children. Although Mary's mother does not hate blacks, she does not praise them, either. She adheres to social norms of the time, instead.

Mary's father

Mary's father is often mentioned but never seen. He is a Member of Parliament for Wensum Valley. Much beloved, Mary's father is poised to be named to the cabinet of Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and end to which his wife works emphatically. Mary's father, though often absent, deeply loves his family and his country. His efforts in supporting the country's war aims keep him away from home much of the time, though he does his best to get home as often as possible.

Palmer

Palmer is the long-time butler of the North household. Kind, supportive, and supremely loyal to the family, Palmer does his best to help intervene against Mary's addiction without stepping beyond his place. It is Palmer who calls Hilda to come over when Mary rejects her mother's deal, and it is Palmer who ensures that the friendship between Hilda and Mary will be reinaugurated.



Symbols and Symbolism

Blackberry jam

Blackberry jam is produced by Tom by hand at home, a jar of which is carried by Alistair through the war as a reminder of better times and a physical reminder of the time that will come after the war. The jar of jam is given to Alistair as a gift, with Alistair promising only to open it at war's end. Alistair zealously guards and carries the jar with him every step of the way, almost deciding to eat it at one point. He accidentally leaves it behind on Malta, where it is then cared for by Simonson, who intends to return it to Alistair when Simonson returns to London.

Duffel bag

Alistair accidentally leaves his duffel bag at the Lyceum Theater the night he meets Mary when London first comes under attack by the Germans. Alistair rushes off to organize his men to help pull wounded people from the rubble. Mary brings the duffel bag to him at the station, using it as an excuse to see how he is doing. This is the last time they will see each other until Alistair is discharged from the military after prison.

RAF rejection letter

A Royal Air Force rejection letter arrives for Tom, and symbolizes Tom's feeling of helplessness and worthlessness against the wider backdrop of the war. When London is bombed for the first time, Tom decides to enlist in the Royal Air Force. However, his position is considered vital, and so he is rejected from service.

Nativity play

A Nativity play is rehearsed and prepared by Mary's Hawley Street School class, and is being performed when another night of bombing occurs. Mary leads students and audience members into the cellar to continue the play, but must chase after Zachary when Zachary runs into the night. When Mary and Zachary return to the school, they find it destroyed and all inside, dead.

Letter from Tom's father

A letter from Tom's father to Alistair arrives when Alistair is stationed in Malta. The letter announces that Tom has died in one of the London air raids, and that Alistair has always been, and always will be considered family to Tom's parents. The letter from Tom's father deeply affects Alistair, who feels he has lost his closest friend.



Mary's letters to Alistair

Mary's letters to Alistair symbolize new beginnings and the possibility of love. Following Tom's death, Mary begins regular correspondence with Alistair, at first as a matter of friendship and concern, and later as a matter of romance. The letters help Tom to cope with the war, and each time he reads one of Mary's letters, he forgets the tragedies taking place around him for a brief time.

Alistair's letters to Mary

Alistair's letters to Mary symbolize new beginnings and the possibility of love for Mary. The letters begin as a matter of friendship, concern, and coping after Tom's death, and later lead to romance. Mary treasures each of Alistair's letters, and always looks forward to the next one.

Painting of Mother Mary

A painting of Mother Mary from a local Maltese church is restored by Alistair as a matter of penance for the killing of the German pilot. The painting becomes Alistair's best work of restoration ever, being undertaken during his own convalescence. The painting is destroyed in a German air raid when Alistair and Briggs are bringing it back to the church.

Morphine

Morphine is a highly addictive but highly effective painkiller administered in liquid form. Mary becomes addicted to morphine following an injury, and spends seven months living her life dependent upon, and revolving around how to get more. Zachary finally helps Mary to break her addiction to morphine by leveraging his friendship with her as an ultimatum.

Letters from Simonson to Hilda

Letters from Simonson to Hilda are written after Alistair leaves Malta, and after which Simonson and Hilda are introduced by mail. Both Simonson and Hilda are thrilled with their correspondence, with each finding the other big-hearted, attractive, and kind. The letters lay the foundation for a wonderful romance that will come to blossom between them.



Settings

London

London is the capital city of England, and the capital city of Great Britain at large. Considered a city of new beginnings by both narrators and characters like Zachary alike, the city lives up to its name as all those who enter London are transformed or changed in some way. For example, Tom and Mary find romance in London while Mary begins a new phase of her life in London as a teacher. London also becomes the predominant wartime target of Nazi Germany after German troops have driven the Allies from Western Europe. German bombers repeatedly pummel the city, killing tens of thousands of innocent civilians. Among them is Tom. It is in London that Mary and Alistair reunite after Alistair is released from prison.

Salisbury Plain

Salisbury Plain is an area of rural England set aside for a military base and training exercises by the British Armed Forces. It is where Alistair and his infantry unit begin training, and where Alistair befriends Duggan. It is at Salisbury Plain that Duggan is accidentally killed by an unexploded artillery shell that he steps on, and it is at Salisbury Plain that Alistair completes his training and deploys to France to fight the Germans.

Dunkirk

Dunkirk is a coastal town in northern France that becomes the epicenter of the Allied evacuation from Western Europe when German forces sweep toward the English Channel. Alistair is among the British infantry troops who fights at Dunkirk, and must evacuate by boat. With all of the unit's officers dead, Alistair takes command, organizing the retreat and keeping his troops in good order. Because of this, many lives are saved, and Dunkirk proves to be the reason Alistair is promoted to captain and transferred to the Royal Artillery.

Hawley Street

Hawley Street School is the school to which the War Office assigns Mary to teach. There, she is assigned to teach a collection of students in the Sparrow classroom as they await evacuation to the countryside. After the children are sent to the country, Mary receives the okay from Tom to begin teaching a second class of rejected and remaining children at the school. She befriends and cares for these children, and is heartbroken when almost all of them are killed, along with their parents, in a German bombing raid.

Malta

Malta is a major island in the Mediterranean Sea, and is targeted by the German and Italian militaries in World War II. Alistair is stationed on Malta along with his unit and thousands of other British troops. They endure starvation and constant bombing raids in order to defend the island, and protect its citizens while denying Nazi Germany a chance to expand its power by conquering the island. Malta is an island rich in history, in which graves being dug for recently-killed men reveal graves of men killed centuries before who warred over the island. While on Malta, Alistair befriends Simonson, begins a romantic correspondence with Mary, and comes to lose his arm after being infected by a German pilot who bites his arm.



Themes and Motifs

In wartime, many people do whatever they can to help the war effort.

Everyone Brave is Forgotten explores the theme that people do whatever they can to help during times of war. This is especially true in World War II and of the people whose lives revolve around London at that time. In the novel, Mary, Alistair, Tom, Hilda, Simonson, and others do what they can to support Great Britain's crusade against the horrors of Nazi Germany.

Forty-five minutes after war is declared, Mary quits finishing school and offers her services to the War Office. Mary is assigned to teach a class and to help prepare the kids as they are evacuated to the countryside. Mary's role is considered vital to the war effort. Children are key to the future. They need to be educated and protected. More importantly, they deserve to be spared from the ravages of war. Through Tom, Mary is assigned a second class that consists of holdouts, rejects, and returned kids. Mary cares for them until they are killed in the London bombings. Mary next goes to work with Hilda in the ambulance corps, saving the lives of countless people injured in the bombings.

Alistair is among the initial rush of men who volunteer to fight to defend England against Nazi Germany. Alistair is first assigned to the infantry, where he trains at Salisbury Plain and then deploys to France. Alistair battles the German army across France, until his unit reaches the coast and the city of Dunkirk. There, Alistair takes command of his unit when all the other commanders are killed. He is promoted to captain for organizing his unit's evacuation. Following a leave, Alistair is transferred to the Royal Artillery and stationed with the British garrison on Malta. There, Alistair befriends Simonson, who has also been assigned to Malta. The two withstand a prolonged and bloody German blockade and air campaign.

Tom does not believe the war will last long, so he does not bother to volunteer. However, when London is first bombed, Tom is enraged and vows revenge. He enlists in the Royal Air Force and passes the admissions testing. However, he is rejected by the War Office due to his current role in administration of education. The War Office considers his role vital to war efforts. Tom is heartbroken, but he doubles down in his job to make it even more worthwhile. At the same time, Mary's father—who is spoken of but never seen—spends most of his time supporting Prime Minister Winston Churchill's handling of the country and of the war effort. Meanwhile, Mary's mother moves in political social circles to support her husband's pursuit of a cabinet post to further the war effort in Parliament.



Tragedy brings human beings together in ways unseen in peacetime.

Chris Cleaves argues in his novel *Everyone Brave is Forgotten* that tragedy brings human beings together in ways unseen in peace time. The tragedy noted in the novel is the change brought by the war to the British social landscape.. The tragedy of the war also ensures that the best of humanity is to be seen as well, leading to the promise of hope and love in some cases.

When Great Britain is forced to declare war on Nazi Germany, hundreds of thousands of men rush to enlist. Hundreds of thousands of men and women rush to assist the war effort in other ways as well. Alistair, from a wealthy family, finds himself an equal among men from all walks of life, brought together in common brotherhood in the defense of their homeland. Alistair meets and befriends countless people, ranging from Duggan to Simonson, men whom Alistair never would have known otherwise, let alone considered as friends.

At the same time, the war makes romance between people who might not have met possible. Under different circumstances, Mary would never have been assigned to teach. So, she never would have met Tom who worked in education administration. Without Tom, Mary would never have met and later fallen in love with (and married) Alistair. Without Alistair and Mary, Hilda and Simonson would likewise never have begun writing to one another. Their letters led to falling in love.

When London comes under aerial bombardment by the Germans, the citizens of London –and across Britain –rally to the defense and assistance of Londoners. For example, Mary and Hilda –two young civilians –become ambulance drivers who voluntarily respond to calls of those wounded in the city during and after the bombardments. They and countless others pull people from the rubble, saving innumerable lives and demonstrating a kind of courage and selfless heroism that can be found only in wartime. This represents the very best of human nature as those who respond do not care about who they are saving, where they are from, what they do for a living, what their income is, what their skin color is, what religion they follow, and so on. Those who respond only care about saving those people.

War is full of very personal tragedies.

Everyone Brave is Forgotten models the theme that war is full of very personal tragedies. Whether on the battlefield or the home front, the numerous small and large tragedies that occur in the lives of the characters are common and heartbreaking.

The greatest overall tragedy faced by the characters is the onslaught of war. Nazi Germany's decision to invade much of Europe leaves Great Britain with no choice but to declare war to defend itself and its friends. Thousands of men join the British Expeditionary Forces that first meet German troops on the battlefield, including Alistair's



unit. Prior to shipping out, Alistair's friend, Duggan, is tragically killed by a live artillery shell when he steps on it during a training exercise. The horrors that Alistair witnesses while fighting in France plague his mind throughout his leave after evacuating Dunkirk.

On the home front, Tom is set back by a small personal tragedy when he is denied entry in the Royal Air Force. Mary faces a series of tragedies, beginning with being fired from teaching her first class, to the deaths of her second class students, to the death of Tom. Mary, who struggles to continue to teach a class of black children, is lectured by her mother about such associations. The lecture is ironic and hypocritical given that Great Britain is fighting the racism and bigotry of Nazi Germany. Mary and Hilda go to work for the ambulance corps, where they experience tragedies on a constant basis as they are responsible for the dead, the dying, and the wounded. One such particular tragedy brings Mary and Hilda face-to-face with a dying eight or nine year-old boy.

Tragically, Mary becomes addicted to morphine after her own injury. She uses the drug to escape the horrors around her until Zachary threatens to end his friendship with her over its use. Meanwhile, in Malta, Alistair loses his arm after being bitten by a German pilot he was trying to help, whom he then had to suffocate to put out of his misery. Alistair's first letter back to Mary is lost in transit when the plane carrying it tragically sinks into the sea.

New beginnings are possible even in wartime.

In Chris Cleave's novel *Everyone Brave is Forgotten*, the author explores how new beginnings are possible even in wartime. Though countless people are dying across the world thanks to the evil of places like Nazi Germany, new beginnings are still possible. In the novel, countless new beginnings are to be had, especially as far as London is concerned.

The narrator describes London as a city of new beginnings. While it is never explicitly revealed why, the evidence demonstrates that London is indeed a city of new beginnings. When World War II breaks out, Mary travels to London for a new beginning in her life by becoming a teacher. She soon after begins a new romance with Tom, which in turn leads to a new romantic era in her life. The same is true for Tom, who was not seeing anyone until Mary. The outbreak of war also changes Alistair's life, as Alistair enlists to go and fight the Germans.

The death of Tom brings about new beginnings as well. Tom's death means that Mary and Alistair are able to pursue their relationship after enough time has passed. This begins a new phase of both their lives. When Tom returns to London, he and Mary are happy to see one another. Both are optimistic about their future together. Romance is also underway for Hilda and Simonson, with Hilda writing to Simonson from London.

After Tom is killed, Mary and Hilda both undertake a new beginning by committing to the ambulance service. After Mary becomes addicted to morphine, she goes over the edge and is pulled back by Zachary, who leverages his friendship against her addiction to get



her clean. Now free from morphine, Mary has a new beginning in life. Zachary himself, when visiting his father's grave, realizes that London will be rebuilt and that changes will come. Everyone will experience hope for the future. Likewise, when Zachary and Mary watch the arrival of American troops in London, they realize a new beginning is at hand in the war because Americans have arrived to save the day.

Love can be found in even the darkest times.

According to Chris Cleave in his novel *Everyone Brave is Forgotten*, love can be found in the darkest times. Love is one of the most important things that makes a life worth living, and the idea that love can be found even in such situations as wartime demonstrates the resilience, courage, and eternal optimism of humankind. It also demonstrate that that which is good, like love, will win over that which is evil, like hatred.

Had it not been for the war, Mary would never have quit finishing school and volunteered at the War Office. From there, she would never have been assigned to teach, would have never become too causal with her students, and never would have been fired. From there, she never would have gone to Tom's office to request a new job, during which time she and Tom met and hit things off. Because of this, she and Tom came to have a powerful and loyal romance that was severed only by his death.

After a respectful amount of time has passed following Tom's death, the initial attraction between Mary and Alistair blossoms into romance. This romance is exemplified by the flirtatious aspect of the letters written between them. Both Alistair and Mary come to consider that they might be in love with each other. When Alistair returns to London, he and Mary reunite and begin their romance in person.

Meanwhile, Hilda is let down that her own attempt at romance with Alistair did not go according to plan. At the same time, Simonson longs for a serious romance like Alistair has with Mary. It is through Alistair and Mary that Hilda and Simonson are introduced. Their letters to each other lead to romance and love.



Styles

Point of View

Chris Cleave tells his novel *Everyone Brave is Forgiven* in the third-person, omniscient, narrative mode. The third-person narrator allows Cleave to tell his novel in chapters that primarily focus around one or two individuals, who are often thousands of miles apart, one at a time. This allows the reader to follow parallel lives of major and minor characters, as well as how the lives intersect or join with others. The third-person narrator acts as a common unifying voice, tying together various interconnected but diverse stories into a single tapestry. For example, in the chapter dated December, 1940, events of Alistair's posting on Malta are shared. In the next chapter dated January, 1941, Mary and Hilda are back home trying to figure out what their next step in life will be following Tom's death.

The third-person narrator also allows the reader a God's eye view of all of the events of the novel, knowing everything going on at every moment even when the characters themselves do not know it. For example, Mary does not know what becomes of Alistair's first letter back to her, while Alistair does not know it never arrives. However, the reader knows the letter never arrives because the plane carrying it sinks into the sea.

Language and Meaning

Chris Cleave tells his novel *Everyone Brave is Forgiven* in language that is straightforward. The vocabulary is extensive in terms of the difficulty and number of words. This is done for several reasons.

First, the British education system at the time of the novel was one of the foremost in the world. A large vocabulary of large words among the characters of the novel therefore reflects the rigorous education British citizens undergo. The reverence for education is further demonstrated by Mary's assignment to teach and Tom's denied request for entry into the Royal Air Force. Those who made the decision for Tom's request viewed his current position as a school administrator as more important. That is just how seriously the British took education, even in a time of war.

Second, the four primary characters of the novel –Mary, Alistair, Tom, and Hilda –are all well-educated. In particular, Mary, Alistair, and Hilda have the benefit of an upper-class education that is without peer. This can be reflected in their use of large words and the rarity of cursing. Words like famished, rather than hungry, ostentatiously rather than showy, and asinine rather than stupid, are used.

Structure

Chris Cleave divides his novel *Everyone Brave is Forgiven* into unnumbered, titled chapters that span a period of time from September, 1939 to May, 1942. Each chapter bears a title reflective of the month and year in which the events of that chapter take place. As a result, certain months –like December, 1940 –become the title of several chapters in a row. This allows the reader to follow the events of the novel chronologically across almost three years of World War II, beginning and ending in London, but expanding to places as far-reaching as France and Malta. The chronologically-conscious construction of the chapters of the novel also allows the reader to progress rapidly through time as needed, or to dwell in particular moments of time as required by the unfolding plot.



Quotes

London, then. It was a city in love with beginnings.

-- Narrator (untitled prologue)

Importance: When Mary learns that England is at war with Nazi Germany, she immediately joins the military. To do so, she travels to the War Office in London. The city is alive with talk of war. It is noted as being a city of beginnings. Not only is this a new phase in Mary's life in terms of the war and her work, but it will be a new career in her life in terms of love that is to come.

Meeting Mary is the first thing to make me feel that this war might not be completely awful.

-- Tom (October, 1939)

Importance: Tom reveals he has been dating Mary and that she is the first thing that has happened to him because of the war that makes him feel as if not everything will be bad. He explains to Alistair that he and Mary first met in the Education Authority offices, when she came to see him for a new class to teach after being fired from the last class she taught. Tom believes he has a future with Mary, and he hopes the war itself will not last long.

He leaned his forehead against the train window, breathing hard. He watched the green fields rush by. Only this was real, he told himself...

-- Narrator (June, 1940)

Importance: After the Allied forces are driven back by German forces, compelling an evacuation at Dunkirk, Alistair's regiment is put on leave. Alistair travels to London to visit with Tom. He struggles to force the horrors of war from his mind, and does his best to focus on the English countryside at present. It is a struggle to forget the terror of the beach at Dunkirk, but Alistair knows he must keep focused on the present.

But what good is it to teach a child to count, if you don't show him that he counts for something?

-- Mary North (August, 1940)

Importance: As Mary's work as a newly-rehired teacher gets underway, her closeness to her students concerns Tom. Tom believes Mary is too friendly and informal and that she cannot afford complaints. Mary argues that the children she has –many of whom are different or rejects –must understand they matter in the grand scheme of things. This underscores Mary's goodness and her kindness.

In the final paragraph the recruiting officer regretted to inform him that his application had been vetoed by the War Office, who considered his current role essential.

-- Narrator (December, 1940)



Importance: On the night of the first London bombing, Tom signs up for the Royal Air Force. He is marked satisfactory in his testing, but he is rejected from service with the explanation that his current job is vital to the war effort as it is. Tom is heartbroken by this, but he demonstrates his determination to do his part for his country.

We must take turns, don't you think? Every time one of us is buried like this, we shall dig the other out.

-- Mary (December, 1940)

Importance: When Tom is rejected from service, he is depressed and urges Mary to leave him. Mary comforts him and reassures him, saying she will do no such thing. She explains she loves him, and that this is what matters –that they are there for one another in their weakest moments. This demonstrates just how kind and gentle Mary is –and how much Tom means to her.

The worst that could happen is that we might help someone.

-- Hilda (February, 1941)

Importance: Mary and Hilda decide to join the ambulance corps. Following Tom's death, Mary is looking for her next step in life, and believes she has found it. Hilda lightheartedly convinces Mary to take the job in the ambulance corps, saying the worst that could happen is that they will end up helping someone.

When Alistair looked up, he was surprised to find the war. She had done it again, her trick of making it all disappear.

-- Narrator (March, 1941)

Importance: Alistair and Mary begin corresponding with one another. Their letters are friendly and flirtatious, and each time Alistair reads his letters from Mary, he feels as if nothing else in the world exists –not even the war. Mary's letters actually make him forget the war, feel optimistic, and look forward to each day, as well as the future.

He understood that he was finished with the war.

-- Narrator (July, 1941)

Importance: After Tom is injured during the siege of Malta by a downed German pilot, he loses his arm. Because of this, he is to be evacuated from Malta because he is injured and considered combat ineffective. He realizes the war is over for him and that he will be returning home just as all men under arms will be doing when the war is over. It is a bittersweet moment, for Tom is happy to be going home. However, he is sad to be leaving his men behind.

They are blind to what's wrong.

-- Mary (December, 1941)

Importance: When Alistair is jailed for leaving Malta before his time is set, Mary appeals to her mother and father on Alistair's behalf. Mary's mother agrees to do what



she can. However, there are conditions. First, Mary must return home until she marries Alistair. Next, she will happily do whatever the War Office assigns her to do. Finally, she will stop carrying on with blacks. Mary says she will continue teaching them, saying that most people are blind to what is wrong –the way blacks are treated as second-class citizens in England.

London was a lightening of the sky... It was a city dying to begin.

-- Narrator (April, 1942)

Importance: Zachary looks up his father's burial site, and visits his father's grave. He apologizes to his father for taking so long to visit. Around him, Zachary can sense that London is not actually a city that is dying, but dying to begin again. Out of the rubble of the war will come a new start, and a new foundation for an even better order and society than has already existed. And Zachary will be a part of it all.

Even to hope for love was a trap, Mary supposed, if when one said love one only meant armistice. Maybe it was foolish to imagine any more definite thing –since the heart, after all, did not declare victory. The heart declared only forgiveness...

-- Narrator (June, 1942)

Importance: When Alistair comes back from the war, he is so haunted that he is lost mentally and emotionally. Mary hopes he will find his way back to life through love with her. Love is not about an armistice or making of peace, about achieving victory or winning, but about giving oneself to another. Apart from giving love, the only thing a heart declares is forgiveness. Both Alistair and Mary have things to be sorry for, as no person is perfect –but love brings about forgiveness, and a making whole again.