

# **The Girl You Left Behind Study Guide**

## **The Girl You Left Behind by Jojo Moyes**

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## Plot Summary

JoJo Moyes's novel "The Girl You Left Behind" consists of two stories that revolve around an eponymous painting by the French artist Edouard Lefevre. The subject of his painting is his wife Sophie. When the novel begins, it is 1916, and the Germans have occupied the town of St. Peronne, where Sophie helps her sister and brother tend to the family hotel. Her husband is off at war. The German Kommandant of the area, an educated man, becomes obsessed with the painting of Sophie. Sophie offers herself and the painting to the Kommandant in exchange for getting her husband released from a prison camp in Germany. Unexpectedly, Sophie is arrested by the Germans and is never seen or heard from again.

In 2006, four years after her husband has died, Liv Halston is attempting to get by on her own. The painting "The Girl You Left Behind" is given to Liv as a gift before her husband's death. Liv begins a relationship with Paul McCafferty, who later learns that his company has tasked him with hunting down the very same painting owned by Liv, for it is claimed to be stolen during World War I, shortly after Sophie's arrest. This ruptures their relationship. Liv refuses to give up the painting, and eventually, Paul quits his own side and through an investigation, learns that the painting was given as a gift to the Kommandant in the first place. It is also learned that Sophie was actually reunited with her husband, and lived out a happy life with him in Switzerland.



# Part 1, Chapter 1 - Part 1, Chapter 8

## Summary

### Part 1, Chapter 1

It is October 1916, in St. Peronne, France. Sophie Lefevre is dreaming of food. She wakes up to learn from her sister that German troops have arrived to arrest Aurelien over a hidden pig. They believe that a man named Suel has told authorities about the pig. The Kommandant is with the German troops. If the pig is found, they will all be arrested. Sophie tells her sister Helene to deny everything. Sophie then rummages through her father's study to find a knife. She rushes down to the cellar where the pig, only half-grown, sleeps. The piglet wandered away from the Girard farm during a German search and was brought to the farm by Grandma Poilane. Sophie knocks out the piglet with chloroform. Then, she wakes her daughter Mimi. Sophie wraps the pig in a baby blanket and holds it against her body.

The German Kommandant is not Herr Becker but a new man who is thin and intelligent. He has been looking up at the house, while Helene shields Aurelien, their younger brother, with her arms. He explains to Sophie, in passable French, that they are suspected of having illegal livestock. Sophie rejects this claim, saying that Suel spreads rumors and lies about him because the women of their farm will not sleep with him. Sophie is enraged and demands that Kommandant search their house if he suspects them. The Kommandant then sees a painting of Sophie done by her husband Edouard, who is off at war. The Kommandant is clearly impressed by the painting. He tells Sophie that their conversation is not over and leaves with his men. Helene and Aurelien are very impressed with Sophie's bravery and cleverness. Sophie looks at the painting of herself a few years before, as a younger girl, happy and strong. She vows to become that person again when her husband returns.

### Part 1, Chapter 2

Sophie tells others about the pig event as they come through the hotel La Coq Rouge, owned and operated by her family. Old Rene is especially thrilled and amused at the story. Helene cautions Sophie not to tell anyone else. The Lefevre house stands next to the Fouberts' house, and their cellars are separated by a thin brick wall, of which several bricks have been removed by both families to provide an escape route for one or the other. It has been used in the past by the Fouberts to shelter an Englishman. It is now being used to shelter the pig next door. The mayor of the town is interested to know what Sophie thinks of the new Kommandant. Becker was sent back to Germany to run a reprisal camp after discrepancies were found in his bookkeeping. Neither Sophie nor the mayor knows what to think of the new Kommandant.

The mayor is impressed that Sophie voluntarily left the safety of Paris to come to Peronne to help Helene run the family shop. Peronne had been one of the first towns to



fall to the Germans in the fall of 1914. Early during the German occupation, two elderly widows were shot dead supposedly in retaliation for sniper fire. The town sealed itself up against the Germans, having stockpiled food and other supplies. Becker had then ordered that all shops be opened back up, or the owners would be shot. The village reluctantly replies. In short order, the Germans take nearly everything. To stay warm that night, Sophie and Helene share a bed with the children, Mimi and Jean. Sophie reassures Helene that Jean-Michel, Helene's husband, will come home. They focus on the future, looking forward to the day they will all eat pork, only a few weeks away. They laugh about the fact that the only thing they think about more than the pig is sex with their husbands.

Four days later, the Kommandant returns with two officers. He appears to be in his late forties. He tells Sophie that the Coq Rouge will be providing meals for officers who cannot be accommodated by the Bar Blanc. The Kommandant reveals that supplies will be delivered to Sophie for the meals she is to prepare. The Kommandant also reveals he may be billeting men in the rooms upstairs. She shows the Kommandant the nearly-bare rooms upstairs. He discovers that even the best room has a hole in the floor, from where boards were attempted to be removed for firewood. The Kommandant then leaves.

### Part 1, Chapter 3

Over at the bakery, Madame Durant tells Sophie that she should have told the Kommandant “no” when it came to feeding the officers. She and Madame Louvier think they should fight the Germans. Armand, the baker, tells Durant that they are all puppets of the Germans. Durant wonders how they will survive more Germans and less food. Armand says they need to trust in God and in their soldiers. Liliane Bethune then walks in, looking resplendent and beautiful. She orders two loaves of bread. Armand unwillingly serves Liliane, for Liliane has consorted with a German. When Liliane leaves, Armand reveals the bread has a special ingredient. The following Friday, food begins to arrive at the Coq Rouge. Sophie knows that the food will be hard to steal because the deliveries are being carefully recorded. Scraps are not to be consumed by Sophie and her family, but by the German livestock. Dinner is to be ready at eight. It is difficult to prepare such good food when Sophie and her family go without it.

The Kommandant and his officers arrive. Sophie tells Aurelien to have Helene serve the food, while Sophie puts out glasses and wine. The food is served, and Sophie goes into the back. The Kommandant appears in the back a few moments later, applauding the meal and telling Sophie that she and her family must eat the food as well. He then leaves. Sophie tells her sister Aurelien and the children not to tell anyone about having eaten a German meal, or they will all be considered traitors. The Germans leave after eleven, and the Kommandant looks at the painting once more. The Kommandant comments that Sophie's husband's style reminds him of Matisse. Sophie confirms that Edouard had studied under the artist. The Kommandant inquires if Sophie knows of the artist Hans Purrmann, who was also of the Academie Matisse. Sophie says she has much work to do, and the Kommandant says he will see her tomorrow. Sophie is taken aback by the Kommandant's knowledge of art.



## Part 1, Chapter 4

It is Paris, 1912. Sophie is working as a shop girl in La Femme Marche's central shopping area. She assists a customer with finding an appropriate scarf for his girl. Sophie Bessette had come to Paris in the summer of 1910, a year after the death of her mother and a month after her sister Helene has married Jean-Michel Montpellier, a bookkeeper from another town. Two days later, the same man returns for another scarf of a vibrant, red shade. The man finds Sophie's coloring beautiful. He returns again a few days later. Paulette, who works in perfumes, tells Sophie she obviously has an admirer. The man is Edouard Lefevre, and he wants to paint Sophie's portrait. He has no wife, so Sophie may bring a chaperone if she wishes. Sophie tells no one, but goes to see Edouard. He begins to work quickly, using charcoal. But, he does not get the result he wants. He asks her to come again. She agrees. Edouard is fascinated by Sophie because she is not intimidated by much. They end up eating together and dancing on Bastille Day. She later strips down to her chemise and white cotton petticoat. She asks Edouard to paint her that way. She is amazed by the painting that Edouard creates. They end up kissing, and Sophie wants Edouard to devour her.

## Part 1, Chapter 5

The villagers of Peronne have buried their valuables under gardens and vegetable patches to keep them away from the Germans. One such valuable is Old Rene Grenier's grandfather clock, which is now chiming every fifteen minutes. Rene will have to dig up the clock and pack it with sacking. La Coq Roque has become disputed territory, with the French locals holding sway until half-past five. The Germans arrive just before seven. When they leave, Helene and Sophie put out the fire and save the half-burned logs for cold days. Mesdames Durant and Louvier are still dissatisfied with German mealtimes at La Coq Rouge, and they are spreading rumors about Sophie receiving things from the Germans. Meanwhile, Sophie and Helene do their best to adjust to the German presence, coming to know who some of the Germans are, such as Holger, who drinks too much. Aurelien spies on the Germans when they come over. The Kommandant, incredibly polite, begins to get Sophie to talk about art. She learns that the Kommandant's own parents, though uncultured, inspired a love of learning in the Kommandant. The Kommandant has a wife named Liesl and a two year-old boy he has not yet seen. Since the Germans began dining at the hotel, there has not been a single requisition from the Germans.

Madame Poilane believes the town should break out into song when the Germans are around to drown out the clock's chiming, telling the Germans it is merely a local custom. The townsfolk come together to do so. The Kommandant wants to know why they are singing. Sophie explains it is a custom to sing to Saint Peronne to ward off the beginning of winter. The Kommandant says it is the worst singing he has ever heard. Sophie distracts the Kommandant by asking him what he and his men want to eat. As this occurs, a prisoner-of-war column is marched through town. The townspeople desperately search for familiar faces. Madame Louvier gives one of the thin prisoners some bread, but a German guard beats the man. Madame Louvier begins cursing the Germans, and the German guard merely picks up the bread and hands it back to



Louvier, suppressing his anger. People start screaming, “Vive le France!” during which time a prisoner attempts to escape, but the Kommandant shoots him down. The Kommandant goes over to see if the boy is dead. He tells the mayor to make the necessary arrangements.

The incident shatters the friendly atmosphere at dinner that night. The Kommandant does not talk about art. During dinner, a crash is heard, at which time Sophie sees the Kommandant holding a German up against the wall by the throat, while Helene has dropped a tray of glasses. Helene explains the German put his hand on her, at which time the Kommandant went mad. The other officers are able to convince the Kommandant to loosen up his grip on the German boy. Later, the Kommandant tells Sophie the glasses will be replaced, and apologizes for the young officer. She can sense the Kommandant is agitated. He asks about Sophie’s other baby, apart from Jean. Sophie realizes the Kommandant thinks she has two babies.

### Part 1, Chapter 6

Liliane comes to the door that night to deliver an envelope to Sophie. She has managed to get the letter from the Germans for her. It is from Edouard. It is full of love and hope and thanks to God that Edouard is one day closer to seeing her. But the letter is dated from two months before. Sophie cries. Christmas Eve arrives. Sophie will keep the Germans in the hotel while the other townsfolk gather in secret at Madame Poilane’s to celebrate, roast, and eat the pig. Sophie tells Helene to bring her back some meat. The mayor is saddened that Sophie will miss out, but Sophie tells him not to worry. Sophie steals potatoes, smaller carrots, and anything else she can get her hands on to give to the villagers most in need. A resistance newspaper is delivered. It gives all the townspeople some needed cheer.

Sophie and Helene are both allowed full meals on Christmas Eve by the Kommandant. The Kommandant is still fascinated by the portrait of Sophie. He says that he sees something different about it every time he looks at it. He says it is the most beautiful painting he has ever seen. He asks her to have a drink with him. She refuses. He orders her to have one because it is Christmas. They talk about war. The Kommandant does not like war, but he says he has no choice in the matter. He says he knows Sophie hates the Germans and wants to subvert them. However, since it is Christmas, he asks that their differences be set aside for just a few hours. Their conversation roams. The Kommandant is surprised to learn that Matisse was very intellectual and very conservative, despite his scandalous art. The Kommandant thinks it must be a wonderful thing to make a living doing what one loves; he himself was never very good at painting. The Kommandant reveals he knows that Sophie looks after her neighbors and that she gave some logs to the mayor because his daughter is sick. He tells her that nothing escapes his notice. Out in the hotel, the Germans sing, and the Kommandant asks Sophie to dance, to which she reluctantly agrees. He thanks her for the dance. He has tears in his eyes. The following morning, she receives a gift of three eggs, a fish, a carrot, and an onion. Aurelien translates the card as “Merry Christmas” and refuses to look at Sophie.



## Part 1, Chapter 7

As the winter approaches, so do the number of Germans in and around town. The people grow uneasy. The Kommandant rarely speaks to Sophie. As time comes on, he seems angry and unhappy over military matters. Soon, Aurelien will turn fifteen. Word comes that all boys, fifteen and over, and all girls, sixteen and over, would be put to work for the Germans locally or sent to factories. Sophie and Helene are considered essential to German welfare, so they are exempt. They know this will cause resentment in the village. Over time, the twenty-some people who visit La Coq Rouge daily dwindle to eight. People begin turning away Sophie's help, as well. Aurelien asks Sophie if she likes the Germans; she says she does not. Aurelien says the people of the village believe Sophie is no better than Liliane. They believe she is the Kommandant's favorite. They think that she did not go to the Christmas gathering so she could be alone with him. Aurelien does not know what to believe. She tells him that she loves Edouard, that she does what she can to get by, and that he should not condemn Liliane too swiftly. While out that morning headed to the bakery, only old Madame Bonnard nods to her. At the bakery, no one wants to talk to Sophie, including Armand. Sophie decides not to buy bread and heads back. She is stopped by a German officer, the one who grabbed Helene. When she cannot produce her identity papers, he orders Sophie to take off her winter clothes so that he can search her. He confiscates a little sketch Sophie is carrying of herself and her husband. At home, Sophie tells Helene what has happened.

That night, the Kommandant seems unhappy while the other officers are enjoying themselves. The following morning, Liliane is marched, beaten and bloody, down the street, followed by two German officers who keep her daughter Edith away. Sophie brings Edith inside, ashamed at the catcalls and jeers from her fellow villagers. The hotel's bar is busier than normal, and Sophie shouts and screams at those present, telling them they have been horrible toward Liliane, who has been secretly helping them all along. Even the mayor is present, and Sophie unleashes on him, but the mayor brings news that Edouard is in a reprisal camp in the Ardennes, where he was sent the previous month.

## Part 1, Chapter 8

Edouard has been sent to reprisal camp for giving a prisoner a piece of bread and fighting back when beaten for it. As the days pass, opinions about Liliane turn positive as news of her good deeds and spying for the French spreads. She has been sent away to a camp. Villagers bring clothes and other things to Edith. The mayor's daughter dies soon after. Sophie goes to the Kommandant to ask him if he can get Edouard out. She pleads that he is an artist, not a soldier, and that both she and the Kommandant are people underneath it all. She offers him the painting in return, or anything at all he wants. He is enraged, but tells Sophie to come to the barracks after she has closed up the hotel for the night. At home, Sophie looks at herself naked in the mirror, no longer seeing the beautiful girl she was just a few years before. She remembers her husband buying her a beautiful hat. The hat is safe and sound in their Paris apartment. Sophie explains the situation to Helene. Helene says she doesn't know Sophie anymore these





days, and Sophie feels as if she has been slapped. Helene leaves Sophie a written note under her door that night that reads, "Once it is done, it cannot be undone."

## Analysis

When JoJo Moyes's novel *The Girl You Left Behind* begins, it is 1916 in German-occupied France. A new German Kommandant has come to control the area. He is immediately enamored with Sophie's portrait, which was painted by her husband Edouard before they were married. War is an incredibly difficult and complex thing, and it is never entirely black and white, or wholly gray. This is especially true of the situation in which Sophie finds herself. It appears as if things in the village of St. Peronne are cut and dried. Collaborators are barely tolerated or shunned; the Germans are subverted and jeered; and, loyal French citizens are applauded and encouraged.

Despite the hardships of war, Sophie is able to get by on her cleverness and her love of her husband, whom she thinks of incessantly. She is shocked to discover that the new German Kommandant is cultured and educated. He is able to discuss art with her. She slowly comes to see the Kommandant as not only the enemy, but also as a human being, which is dangerous territory given the national fervor of her countrymen. This is already true of the villagers who have stopped coming to Sophie's hotel because she has been forced to provide meals for German officers.

However, Sophie is determined that she will see her husband again no matter what the cost. She is prepared to give the painting to the German Kommandant, appealing to their friendship, and even perhaps offering herself to him, in exchange for her husband's release and the ability to be reunited with her. Despite repeated warnings from her sister Helene, Sophie is prepared to go through with her plan, no matter what the cost may be.

## Discussion Question 1

What is life like in occupied St. Peronne? How are patriotic citizens treated? How are collaborators treated? How are the Germans treated? Is this just? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

How does the village's opinion of Sophie change over time? Why?

## Discussion Question 3

Why do Sophie and the German Kommandant connect so quickly? Is this a dangerous situation, a beneficial situation, or a mix of both? Why?

## Vocabulary

Fragrant, requisition, impassive, speculatively, impenetrable, grotesquely, indignation, incredulous, insurrection, recalcitrant, bonhomie, intransigence, tremulous, convivial, stoicism, imperious, largesse, mollified, enigmatic, restorative, maudlin, provenance, jaunty.



# Part 1, Chapter 9 - Part 2, Chapter 16

## Summary

### Part 1, Chapter 9

Sophie heads out into the night with the portrait. She heads to the farm which serves as the German barracks. She is admitted to see the Kommandant. He invites her in. He tells her he does not want to cause her any more problems than she is already having with the villagers. She asks him if he has considered her offer. He tells her to call him Friedrich. He asks her to dance with him. He then unpins her hair and kisses her. They sleep together. He sees she is unhappy, and he is shocked. He explains he wanted the girl in the painting. He orders her to get out. At home, Helene takes care of Sophie and draws a hot bath for her and puts her to bed.

### Part 1, Chapter 10

A few days pass. Sophie and Helene go about their lives pretending as if everything is normal. Inside, Sophie trembles, feeling she has not saved her husband because she couldn't pretend to be the girl in the painting. The Kommandant does not come around. Sophie wonders if he feels guilt or shame. Word later comes that the Germans are coming for Sophie. Helene begs Sophie to leave; Sophie refuses, insisting the Kommandant is an honorable man. Sophie is given a bag of things hastily packed by Helene. The townspeople shout at the Germans, horrified to see Sophie being taken away. But, Aurelien shouts out that it is her own fault for consorting with a German officer, words which spread among the townspeople quickly. Someone spits on Sophie. She is loaded into the back of a truck and driven away.

### Part 2, Chapter 11

It is 2006. Liv Halston gets an urgent phone call at work. In truth, it is just a rescue attempt made by Mo Stewart, a formerly Goth girl from Renaissance and Italian Painting and Drawing classes from college ten years before. Mo believed Liv needed rescuing from her coworker Roger. Mo reveals she's been doing different jobs since college and is currently homeless. Liv offers Mo the chance to spend the night with her, to which Mo agrees. Liv's deceased husband liked beauty and unusual things. Their home was built with lots of blue glass. It has been featured in magazines in the past. His death is still resonant four years later to Liv. Before Liv goes to sleep, she looks at the painting David bought for her, "The Girl You Left Behind," because David insists she looks like the girl. Liv disagrees.

### Part 2, Chapter 12

Liv's days are spent in a rigorous routine, so she doesn't have to think. She has four emails. One is work-related. One is from her father, whose girlfriend has left him. One is from Abiola, asking about a get-together on Thursday. The final one is an overdraft



notice from the bank. Liv's father is an out-of-work actor who practices nudism. She tells him she will call him later and to stay dressed. She confirms with Abiola and declines to lower her price for a request for her business services in writing. She deletes the overdraft email. Liv later goes and visits her father. He asks about her social life. Liv doesn't have a social life anymore, preferring not to be around her friends Cherry and Jasmine, who remember her the way she used to be.

### Part 1, Chapter 13

Paul McCafferty meets with Mr. Nowicki, an elderly man, to whom Paul explains his case would be tricky due to the lack of provenance on his side. Jason Nowicki accompanies his father. Mr. Nowicki is seeking the return of a Degas stolen and traded to the Germans years before. Mr. Nowicki is happy the painting is going to be returned from its current place in Des Moines, Iowa, but decides he wants to have it sold rather than returned. Paul then prepares for his next case, receiving a folder full of information from Janey, his coworker. It involves a portrait of a woman, missing since 1916, the theft of which has only been discovered a decade before during an audit of the artist's surviving work by his family. There is also an image of the painting adorning a minimalist wall in a magazine article. The statute of limitations doesn't apply since the painting was stolen during the First World War, and there is evidence the Germans stole the painting during the war. The magazine feature lists the location as central London. Janey asks Paul how his own house hunting adventure is going, and he explains it is not going well.

Liv gets home around five. She greets Fran, the woman who lives out front. Fran reveals that Liv has had a visitor. Mo is back. She has made dinner for them both, but Liv shuffles around after Mo, cleaning things up. Liv reveals her love life is non-existent. Every couple of weeks, Mo hooks up with Ranic, the wine waiter at work. After dinner, Mo heads out, saying she'll be back.

### Part 1, Chapter 14

Liv is very sad. It is the anniversary of David's death. She decides to go to a gay bar, for no one there will hassle her. There, Paul talks to his brother, Greg, who tends bar, even though Paul has to avoid the customers. They both see a young woman (Liv) who has become drunk over the past hour. It is then the girl realizes her purse has been stolen. She is miserable because she had just taken out two-hundred pounds for the council tax. The police tell the girl there is little they can do unless they hear or come across something. Paul, an ex-cop himself, decides to walk Liv home. He calls an old friend from the force, Sherrie, and asks her to text him numbers for stolen bank cards. They go to the Spanish place where Mo works, for she has a spare key to Liv's apartment, but the place is already closed up for the night. Liv's father doesn't pick up when she calls him. Paul decides to bring her back to his own flat. There, he gets her a towel for her rain-soaked hair and puts on tea. She looks at a photo of Paul in uniform, with his son Jake, and sees many bookshelves. She is reassured. Jake is with his mother, so Paul offers Liv Jake's bed. Liv reveals that it is the anniversary of her husband's death and explains that is why she was in a gay bar. Paul reveals that being married longer, with kids, and all the cruelties of life, can make marriages unhappy.



Paul wipes away some of her tear-smudged makeup, and she kisses him. She feels alive for the first time in years, but Paul pulls away because she is drunk, and he says he has rules about those sorts of things. He then goes to sleep. In the morning, Liv has flashbacks of the night before, and when Paul hops in the shower, she heads out.

## Part 2, Chapter 15

The CEO of Conaghy Securities wonders if they have been invaded as the teenagers brought along by youth workers Abiola and Liv make themselves at home. The David Halston Foundation, part of Solberg Halston Architects, arranges trips for underprivileged teens to buildings with architectural interest once a month. The teens settle down, and Liv asks them how they feel. They are amazed at the atrium they stand in, breathing in clean air, and feeling open and free. Afterward, she goes to see Sven Halston. She asks for an update on the Goldstein project, one of angular organic glass, which was her husband's dream commission. Sven reveals that Jerry Goldstein has told him that he and his brother will be putting a memorial plaque to David in the atrium of the building. Sven asks about Liv's finances, which she says are not good. He offers to find a buyer for David's glass house, but Liv does not want to sell it.

At work, Paul keeps thinking back to the night before. In a meeting with Janey, the looted World War I Lefevre painting is brought up again. One of the workers named Sean is directed to look up any legal precedents on First World War cases. Paul gets a call from Sherrie, who reveals that Liv's handbag has been found. He calls Liv but gets an unknown woman who is very suspicious of him. Paul later learns from Janey that the Lefevre claimants are coming to London in a few weeks, and the address of the painting has been sent for by way of the magazine. Liv and Mo, meanwhile, have become good roommates. Their phone rings, and Mo explains it is the man who found her handbag, ringing them from down on the corner. They go down. When Liv sees who it is, she is very embarrassed, and asks Mo to go and get the handbag for her. Paul insists on seeing her, though. He reveals the bag and two others were dumped in a bin outside of University College Library. A janitor called them in. Amazingly, the thieves missed taking the two hundred pounds, though they did get her phone and cards. Paul then asks Liv out. She agrees.

## Part 2, Chapter 16

Liv and Paul end up on four dates. She becomes quite enamored with him. He is very old-fashioned. He explains that one of the reasons that he left the police in New York was because things became too gray as he advanced through the ranks. She likes that he is so American. Mo helps her to rearrange the house to make it seem less like David's and more like Liv's. But, Liv insists on the painting staying up on the wall. Liv goes out to meet Paul. He reveals that he met an English girl in New York, married her, and moved to London to make her happy. She left him and took their son Greg. Liv blurts out that she's not ready to sleep with him, and Paul handles it very kindly, saying that he understands she's been in her own space for a long time. He says they should go get a pizza, but then Liv decides to bring him back to her place.



When they get there, Liz kisses Paul and they sleep together. In the dawn, Paul is stunned as he realizes he sees the Lefevre painting up on the wall. Liv explains it was a gift to her from David on their honeymoon. Paul asks for her married name. She tells him that it was Halston. Paul gets dressed quickly, saying he's got to head into work. Liv wonders if she has said too much about her life. As Paul leaves, Liv feels hollow.

## Analysis

Sophie's decision to commit to her plan of action has disastrous consequences for her in various ways. First, she has compromised her marriage by committing adultery. She is hoping that sleeping with the Kommandant will bring her one step closer to her husband's release. Second, rumors abound of Sophie's tryst with the Kommandant. Third, Sophie's own family turns against her because of her decision (mainly, her brother Aurelien). Finally, Sophie is arrested by the Germans and taken away in a cattle truck, never to be heard or seen again by members of the village.

Nearly one hundred years later in 2006, the painting of Sophie becomes utterly priceless to Liv, who received it as a gift from her husband David, before his death. Liv has been struggling along for four years, trying to keep her life together. She is suffering emotionally and financially. Like Sophie, Liv gets along mainly by remembering her husband. Nevertheless, she meets Paul, and the two quickly begin a romance. It is as if she has met the right person at just the right time. The fact that Paul has been hired to track down the painting of Sophie and return it the Lefevre family quickly causes a rift between Paul and Liv. Paul is terrified that he sees the painting hanging in Liv's bedroom.

Interestingly enough, parallels between Sophie's life and Liv's life quickly emerge. Beyond the fact that both of them are dealing with the absence of their husbands, both are dealing with attempting to carrying on with life as normal, despite the circumstances (war for Sophie, David's death for Liv). Additionally (as previously mentioned), both women thrive on memories of their husbands, who for different reasons, are not present in their lives. However, Liv, who is seemingly moving on and getting into a relationship with Paul, feels absolutely lifeless when Paul rushes out of her bedroom.

## Discussion Question 1

What parallels are there between the lives of Sophie and Liv so far? What are the differences between their lives? How does each woman attempt to handle the issues they face?

## Discussion Question 2

Why do you believe is Sophie arrested? Why does Aurelien betray Sophie?



## Discussion Question 3

Why does Liv decide to become involved with Paul?

## Vocabulary

Compulsively, oblivious, verdict, gesticulating, litany, conscientious, incongruity, sophisticated, Herculean, detritus, emphatically, cacophonous, deprivations, unobtrusive, lurching, acutely, miasma.



## Part 2, Chapter 17 - Part 2, Chapter 25

### Summary

#### Part 2, Chapter 17

Paul rummages through the file folder on the Lefevre painting 'The Girl You Left Behind.' He hopes the painting is not the same as the one at Liv's house, but he is terrified to discover they are the same paintings. Online, he comes across an obituary for David Halston, 38 years old, who has died in Lisbon. The suspected cause is an undiagnosed heart failure. He is survived by his wife Olivia Halston. She is 28 years old. According to the file brief, the painting was stolen from a hotel shortly after the painter's wife was taken into custody by German forces in early 1917. Paul is heartbroken. Liv, meanwhile, believes Paul has left her, for he literally ran out of the room. Paul tells the situation to his brother Greg. It has been two nights since he has spoken to Liv. Paul goes to see Liv. He explains he had his son for the weekend. He needed time to think. He tells her that he works for the Trace and Return Partnership, or TARP, which tracks down missing works of art and returns them to their rightful owners. He says that the issue is Liv's painting. Liv explains that David purchased the painting from an American woman in Barcelona. Liv is enraged and orders David to leave.

#### Part 2, Chapter 18

Liv recalls her honeymoon in Barcelona with David, when they came across an American woman protesting her dead mother's things being thrown out on the street because she has nowhere to put them yet. David took control of things, telling Liv to bring the woman to the café across the street, where the woman, Marianne Johnson, explains that her mother died three months before and Marianne herself has just gotten divorced, leaving her to handle everything on her own. David arrives, having persuaded the landlord to let things stay in the apartment for one more night. Marianne explains her mother, Louanne Baker, was a journalist. It is then that Liv sees the painting of the girl, which Marianne intends to throw out, but which David insists on buying from her instead. Liv manages to dig out the receipt for the transaction and shows it to Sven and his wife Kristen. Sven reveals that Liv's painting is worth a minimum of two million pounds because the Russians are in love with his work. Sven says they need to get Liv some legal representation, and quickly. Liv refuses to talk with Paul. Paul tries to talk to her in person when she goes for a run, but she slaps him, causing him to bleed from his lip. He tells her that his job has nothing to do with his feelings for her and that it isn't some sort of ploy to get her. Liv insists she is enraged and that a hundred years is too long. The painting is hers, she says, but Paul tells her he knows she will do the right thing. Time doesn't turn something wrong into something right. He says the last thing the Lefevre family has of the young bride Sophie is the painting. He tells her that when she learns about Sophie, she might think differently. Liv, however, believes it is all about money.





## Part 2, Chapter 19

Liv goes to meet with Henry Phillips, her representative along with Paul, Janey, and Sean. Andre Lefevre, the claimant on behalf of the Lefevre family, is also at the meeting. Paul reveals that a diary entry from a neighbor notes the painting being stolen or purchased by a German Kommandant. The Hague Convention, which applies to previous wars, notes that the painting rightfully belongs to the Lefevre family. Sean lays out some options. The first is that Liv can purchase the painting for its value and retain it. Janey explains the family wants the painting, not the money. Joint ownership is also possible, but Liv says no. Sean suggests sale and division, but both Liv and Lefevre say no. Paul says their case is very strong. Liv says she'll see them in court.

Henry later tells Liv that their case could cost as much as six figures. Henry reveals that the more they can learn about the painting's provenance, the stronger their case will be. TARP's case, though strong, is not watertight. Liv asks Henry what he would do in her situation. He says the situation is unfair, but cautions her about going to court. Liv refuses to consider settling. Paul does not like Andre, because Andre does not care about the painting personally, only financially. Liv, meanwhile, wonders how she can just give up the painting of Sophie.

## Part 2, Chapter 20

Helene writes Sophie a letter, dated February 1917. Helene reveals the children are miserable without Sophie and Aurelien has disappeared. She says that Aurelien is no better than Kommandant Friedrich Hencken in his betrayal of her. She tells Sophie that she is praying for her and trusts that God is just.

## Part 2, Chapter 21

Paul reads the letter from Helene to Sophie. The Lefevre case has become his number one priority. Paul has been able to trace the painting in parts: From 1917 onward for thirty years, it is missing, only to turn up in the home of Louanne Baker, who kept it at her home in the United States for another thirty years before moving to Spain, where she died. The painting was purchased by David Halston. Paul wonders where the painting was for thirty years and what happened to Sophie. Paul recalls a letter from the Kommandant to his wife in which he writes that he cannot take his eyes off the painting. Liv, meanwhile, does her best not to pay attention to the negative press she has received. Henry tells her to brace herself because the opposition will play dirty. Liv makes it a point of not talking to any reporters at all. Liv commences emailing as many experts as she can find on Twentieth Century French Art. Marianne Johnson has already been contacted, and she doesn't know where her mother got the painting. Mo is curious to learn more about Sophie and her family, as is Liv. She enlists Mo's French skills to help her out with a plan.

## Part 2, Chapter 22

Liv and Mo head to France to speak to Aurelien Lefevre's son, Phillipe Bessette. Although he is nearly deaf and in a nursing home, he is still quite sharp. They head to



Paris and then to Saint Peronne. They find La Coq Rouge and eat there. Mo buys the dinner. The next day, they go to meet with Phillipe. Phillipe explains that it was encouraged not to speak of Sophie growing up. Part of it comes from the fact that many said Sophie was a collaborator. As such, the family erased her from memory. Phillipe directs them to a book with a red cover, full of things from Sophie. Phillipe kept that book of letters and other collected things because it humanized her in his eyes. He reveals he did not give the Lefevre family the information because they do not care for Sophie, only for money. He says he hopes the Lefevre family loses their case. Phillipe adds that following her arrest, Sophie was never seen nor heard from again.

#### Part 2, Chapter 23

It is 1917. Sophie is on board a truck. She is horrified by the devastation of war beyond the little town. She is taken to a railway station and put into a freight car. Liliane, battered and near death, is also on board. One of the imprisoned Frenchmen on board reveals that the Germans use them for work and feed them poorly so they will not think of escape. Sophie helps Liliane along at the next stop, but the Germans grow impatient and hit Sophie with a rifle butt. Sophie ties Liliane's broken fingers to splints picked up from debris on an old factory floor where they spend the night. Sophie and Liliane are singled out and driven off elsewhere. Sophie believes it is because the Kommandant is keeping his word. Liliane is not so sure. Through the truck, they see a sign for Mannheim. They have not gone south to Ardennes, but into Germany.

#### Part 2, Chapter 24

Liv reads through everything Phillipe has given her, including letters. She is amazed at the beauty and compassion in Sophie's words. She finds it hard to believe that a woman who loved her husband so much could just betray him. Paul, meanwhile, is saddened that another weekend with his son has ended. Janey tells Paul that he is absolutely crucial to TARP. Liv comes to see Paul. They spend the night before the case together. Paul reveals the next morning that he has spoken with the Lefevre family in private about Liv's financial situation, and they have agreed to a six-figure settlement. Paul also reveals that he has found an article by Louanne which says she was given the painting from a store of stolen paintings near Dachau after World War II. Paul doesn't understand why Liv refuses to give up the painting, even when she could make money from it in a settlement. Liv explains that the Lefevres don't care about Sophie. Paul says that she shouldn't risk her home and what money she has on a principle. He thinks the painting has to do with David, but Liv insists she's moved on and rushes out.

#### Part 2, Chapter 25

Henry guides Liv past the paparazzi into the courthouse. The case begins. Christopher Jenks, legal representation for TARP and the Lefevres, outlines the history of the painting, working to build the case that the German Kommandant wanted it badly. Angela Silver, Sophie's lawyer, asks over lunch if perhaps it could be proved that the Kommandant and Sophie had a consensual relationship in which the painting was given to him as a gift. Liv does not believe this is possible. Henry argues that Sophie is



cloaked in shame for her actions during the war. Liv nevertheless vows to find out what happened to Sophie.

## Analysis

Liv's refusal to give up the painting of Sophie leads to battle lines being drawn in ways Liv could never have imagined. Beyond the pending court case rupturing her relationship with Paul, Liv is being utterly vilified and harassed by the media and various interest groups. The focus seems to be consistently on the painting and its supposed theft; however, Liv begins to see the painting in an entirely different light.

For Liv, the painting is not just a painting. It has a human story to it. It is that aspect of the painting which she finds interesting. She is interested in Sophie, her story, and her fate. A handful of people, such as Phillipe, confirm that they hope the Lefevre family loses their case because the Lefevres are interested only in money, not in the life of Sophie herself. Here, Liv finds a kindred spirit. Phillipe hands her a collection of evidence –writings from Sophie's life –which Liv reads through to learn more about Sophie herself.

Even Paul attempts to persuade Liv to give up the painting, if for no other reason than the court case will bankrupt her. He has gone so far as to get the Lefevre family to agree to a settlement on Liv's behalf, but she refuses this as well. Like Sophie, Liv knows what is right and what is just, and she will do whatever she can to make sure the desired outcome is achieved, regardless of the consequences.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Paul attempt to get Liv to settle before the case heads to court? What is Liv's reaction? Why?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does the painting matter so much to Liv that she is risking even her home in the process?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Phillipe hope the Lefevre family loses the case? Why does he entrust Liv with Sophie's personal writings?

## Vocabulary

Proprietorial, restitution, monolithic, fluent, remonstrated, sporadically, sanctimonious, belligerently, humanity, harangue, benign, quell, prostrate, tetchy, surreptitiously, envious, indelible, dubious, sonorous, pomposity.



## Part 2, Chapter 26 - Part 2, Chapter 35

### Summary

#### Part 2, Chapter 26

The more of Sophie's life Liv can glean from Sophie's writings, the closer she feels to Sophie. Some scraps of Sophie's writings are missing, but others are fully in place. Court resumes. Christopher Jenks places Louanne Baker at Dachau through her own writings and various references, including an article where she says she came into possession of one of the paintings as a gift. Liv's team argues that Louanne does not say what painting she was given and that the painting itself is not listed among the records of the Allied Collection Point of stolen works of art. Louanne's daughter Marianne is called to the stand. Marianne passionately argues that her mother would never have taken something that belonged to somebody else, especially if it had been stolen. Janey wears a smug look of satisfaction. At home that night, Liv calls Berrington Realtors.

#### Part 2, Chapter 27

Shaky cases begin coming in with TARP's exposure in the media. One such case is with a Miss Harcourt, who wants to haggle over the price of recovery. Paul refuses to take her case.

#### Part 2, Chapter 28

Liv's house is put on the market. Mo reveals she was married once, but it didn't work out. Mo reveals she believes that Liv should hand the painting back to the Lefevres. Liv says she can't do that because the Lefevres don't care about Sophie. Mo also announces she is moving in with Ranic. Before Mo leaves, she asks Liv what David would have done if he had been alive and found out about the ownership claims. Sven later asks Sophie to stop by the office, where he tells her the Goldstein Brothers have pulled out their contract with the firm because their family lost everything to the Nazis. They don't want to be linked to someone who thinks that it is okay. The only way the Goldstein brothers will continue is if Liv is relieved of her honorary directorship and the Halston name is removed from the company.

#### Part 2, Chapter 29

Sophie becomes sick in Mannheim. As they travel, the German guard in the back of the truck with them falls asleep. Sophie is urged by Lilliane to jump for their lives. Sophie refuses, and Lilliane refuses to escape without Sophie. Instead, she grabs the gun from the soldier's holster and shoots herself in the head.

#### Part 2, Chapter 30



Greg feels poorly for Liv, and Paul tells him to back off. As Paul heads into court, the crowds outside move to attack Liv, and Paul rushes to her defense, along with Henry and the police. Safely inside, Henry and Liv head down toward court. Paul later learns that Janey has been feeding the media things from the case and that she had something to do with the protest outside that got violent. Paul is angered by this. He says they are destroying someone's life. Janey says Liv decided to destroy her own life when she decided to fight them. Paul sends Liv a note saying he will fix everything. He then goes to see Marianne Andrews. She is angered over how her mother's name and the Halstons' name are being dragged through the mud. He explains the entire situation about him and Liv to Marianne. She allows Paul to go through her mother's old notebooks which are packed away. He finds an old handbag Marianne has been looking for. He comes to the year 1945 in the notebook, and discovers what he needs. Marianne says she will bring the evidence to the court. He tells her not to mention his being there to anyone.

### Part 2, Chapter 31

Marianne brings the April, 1945, journal to Liv and Henry. Henry requests a brief adjournment while the journal is photocopied and the copies distributed to the Lefevre team and TARP. Marianne accidentally mentions to Liv that "he" found her lost handbag as well. In court, Marianne reads aloud from her mother's journal. The entry for April 30, 1945, reveals that the American troops don't want Louanne coming to Dachau, for they need every man they can find to arrest the Nazis and help the prisoners. Because of this, Louanne herself is being left in charge of a storage facility for stolen art. She'll have a fire crew and two Marines at her disposal. While outside the facility smoking, Louanne recounts a woman arriving to drop off a painting, which once belonged to her husband, of a beautiful young girl. The woman reveals the painting destroyed her marriage. The woman insists that if Louanne doesn't want the painting, it should be burned. So Louanne takes the painting. Angela Silver rams home the point that the painting was never in the storage facility. Silvers stresses that the painting's last two transfers were untainted, innocent exchanges. Therefore, the painting should remain with Liv.

After lunch, court resumes. Christopher Jenks presses Marianne on the name of the woman who gifted the painting. Liv realizes that Paul is the one who found the journal. In a 1948 journal entry, Louanna references the painting as "Liesl's painting." According to census data from 1945, Kommandant Friedrich Hencken and his wife Liesl settle near Berchtesgaden streets away from the storage facility for art. German records also reveal that Sophie Lefevre died in the camps at Strohen from the Spanish flu. The question of her fate has been unknown because the Germans misspelled her name. Paul later apologizes to Liv about the outcome, but she thanks him for trying. He agrees to have a drink with her after he tells Janey that he quits.

### Part 2, Chapter 32

Paul and Liv join Greg and Jake for pizza for dinner. Paul is deeply saddened that Liv is selling her house. Liv explains that she has come to realize that the only things that



matter are people and the ones you love. Paul vows to make everything up to her. At home, Liv burns two scraps of paper from Sophie's recollections.

### Part 2, Chapter 33

Paul stays up late, going over evidence once more. The next morning, Paul is gone, leaving a note asking Greg to watch Jake a little longer. Liv goes to her father's house for a Christmas party. Her father tells her he is very proud of her for carrying on and being heroic. When Liv learns from Greg that Paul has disappeared, she prays and has faith that she will learn what is going on soon enough. She knows that she must trust him. Monday morning rolls around. It is time for court to resume.

### Part 2, Chapter 34

Liv shows up in court with the painting. She addresses the court before the verdict is read. Liv says the case has destroyed her husband's good name, as well as his association with the Goldstein building. Her decision to fight was hers and hers alone. She says that the painting has also destroyed Sophie's legacy as well. In her mind, she knows now that her husband's name is publicly linked with the Goldstein building. The painting is then taken into protective custody. David suddenly appears in court with an old woman in a wheelchair and her granddaughter. The painting, he declares, was never stolen. The old woman is Edith Bethune. Edith gave it to the Kommandant.

### Part 2, Chapter 35

To the last moment, Sophie hopes she will see Edouard. However, she realizes that she might never see him as she is brought into camp. Miraculously, she sees Edouard in the camp, and they embrace. Edith reveals to the court that both husband and wife were freed based on their service to the German state. They were sent to Switzerland, courtesy of Kommandant Hencken himself. Sophie and Edouard are ordered not to contact anyone in France. It is Helene who orders Edith to give the Kommandant the painting. Edith, who hates the Kommandant for what became of her mother, tells him that Sophie is dead from the Spanish flu. Edith reveals that a message scribbled on the back of the painting which translates as "To Herr Kommandant, who will understand: not taken, but given."

## Analysis

Just as it happened with Sophie, all of Liv's friends begin to distance themselves from her, especially in lieu of the negative press coverage of her side of the case. Liv finds that she is in solidarity with Sophie, who faced the same challenges and issues, but under different circumstances. Just as all of Sophie's family and friends abandoned her, so do many of Liv's friends. However, for Liv, the line stops with her family. Her father is incredibly proud of her and spares no expense to tell her. Sophie, however, did not seem to have the benefit of the support of her own family in the end.



It is Paul who comes through for Sophie when no one else can. He brings to the courtroom the elderly Edith Bethune, daughter of Liliane. Edith explains that the painting was a gift for the Kommandant for reuniting Sophie with her husband. The family hid the secret of Sophie's and Edouard's survival to let them live in peace in Switzerland. Edith is the final piece of the puzzle that Paul knows has been missing. Edith, though only a child at the time, has been able to remember everything with remarkable clarity because the events had tremendously impacted her life.

## **Discussion Question 1**

What is the final missing piece of the puzzle that Paul is able to present in court? What difference does this final missing piece make?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What ultimately happens to Sophie at the prison camp? Why?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What is the truth about the Kommandant and the painting? How does this revelation impact the case?

## **Vocabulary**

Sanguine, unorthodox, specious, theatrically, masochism, evasive, disrepute, apotheosis, nonchalantly, inflammatory, acclimatize.





## Part 2, Chapter 36 - Epilogue

### Summary

Part 2, Chapter 36

The court explodes in chaos. Liv and Paul embrace. Liv is amazed and overjoyed that Sophie survived and spent her life with her husband in the end. The court clerk returns the painting to Liv.

### Epilogue

Anton and Marie Leville live in a small house close to a lake near Montreux in Switzerland. They mostly keep to themselves, but they are kind and friendly. Mr. Leville paints. Mo later apologizes to Liv by email, and Liv invites her over for Christmas. Baby Jean dies from influenza in the final months of the war. Helene never recovers from this loss. Edith stays on with Helene, working at the hotel. She is there when Helene's husband finally returns home. In 1925, the family goes on vacation and the hotel is closed for three weeks. They have traveled to Switzerland, they explain, for Helene's health, which improves substantially when they return.

Liv is now writing a book on Sophie's life, communicating regularly with Edith. Liv has moved in with Paul. Edith predicts that a host of Edouard's beautiful paintings will one day appear. This gets Liv interested in the idea. She tells Paul that he is good at finding things.

### Analysis

Edith fills in the final pieces of Sophie's life and begins to correspond regularly with Liv. Liv has been contacted by two publishing companies to write a book about Sophie's life, which she is now doing.

Sophie is ultimately reunited with her husband, and they live their lives out in Switzerland, visited secretly by Sophie's family years later. Indeed, even Helene is reunited with her husband. Liv and Paul are ultimately reunited as well, being able to work past the court case. Paul has come to realize that is Liv right. He switches sides to join her when no one else will. As Liv and Sophie come to realize, people are all that matter in life, especially the people that one loves.

### Discussion Question 1

Why does Paul ultimately switch sides?



## Discussion Question 2

What ends up happening to Sophie and Edouard? Why do they choose to live their lives out this way?

## Discussion Question 3

What catches Liv's attention at the end of the novel? Why? What does she seemingly intend to do about it?

## Vocabulary

Shambolic, climes, giddily.



# Characters

## Janey

Janey is Paul's work partner at TARP. She is ruthless, incisive, and obsessed with fame and winning. She stirs up public and media resentment against Liv. She is condemned by Paul when he quits working with her.

## Greg

Greg is the brother of Paul who follows Paul to London following Paul's divorce. Greg is gay and runs a gay bar. Greg is kind and thoughtful. He enjoys spending time with his brother and nephew. Greg encourages Paul's relationship with Liv.

## Liliane Bethune

Liliane Bethune is the most despised figure in the village of Saint Peronne, for she is sleeping with the Germans. The bread baked for her includes human excrement. She is spit on and treated with contempt. When it is later revealed that Liliane is a spy for the French, she is beaten and taken to work camps. Sophie stands in solidarity with Liliane, taking care of her when she comes across Liliane in the work camps. Liliane later commits suicide in German captivity.

## Edith Bethune

Edith Bethune is the seven year old daughter of Liliane. When Liliane is taken away by the Germans, Edith goes to live with Sophie and Helene at the hotel. At Helene's request, she is the messenger who delivers the painting of Sophie to the Kommandant. Edith is sought out by David. she appears in court to affirm the painting was a gift to the Kommandant.

## Kommandant Friedrich Hencken

Kommandant Friedrich Hencken is the German commander for the region in and around St. Peronne. He is thin, educated, and cultured. He has a wife named Liesel and a baby he has not yet seen. Hencken becomes friends with Sophie through discussions about art and his admiration of the painting of Sophie done by Edouard. The Kommandant becomes obsessed with the painting. In exchange for her husband's freedom, Sophie gives herself to the Kommandant, who is ultimately true to his word. The Kommandant is later given the painting as a gift by Helene. It is delivered to him by Edith. The painting ultimately destroys his marriage to Liesel.



## Helene

Helene is the sister of Sophie and Aurelien, wife of Jean-Michel, mother of Jean, and a resident of the town of Saint Peronne. Helene is a kind, caring, and dutiful sister who warns Sophie about her involvement with the Kommandant. When Helene learns her sister is living safely in Switzerland, she carefully conceals the fact in order to protect Sophie and Edouard. It is Helene who sends Edith Bethune to give the Kommandant the portrait of Sophie as a gift in exchange for her freedom.

## Edouard Lefevre

Edouard Lefevre is an artist and French soldier married to Sophie. After Edouard studies under Matisse, he falls in love with Sophie who is working in a shop in Paris. Edouard asks her to model for him. Edouard is very conservative, and he is utterly devoted to Sophie. He is captured during World War I and forced into a prison camp. He is later freed through Sophie's efforts, and the two spend the rest of their lives happy in Switzerland.

## Paul McCafferty

Paul McCafferty is an American living in London. He works to return stolen art through the company named TARP. Paul is in his thirties and divorced. He has a son named Jake and a brother named Greg. Paul is very kind and old-fashioned. He begins a romance with Liv, only to discover to his horror that the painting he has recently been tasked with finding is in Liv's possession. He pleads with her to settle on the case, but she refuses. Later, Paul does more research and comes to discover that the painting was never stolen. So, he joins Liv's side. It is Paul who brings Ethel Bethune to court. Edith reveals the truth about Sophie, Helene, and the painting. Paul and Liv later reunite and begin a real relationship.

## Liv Halston

Olivia "Liv" Halston is a beautiful thirty-two year old young woman who lives in London. She has been reeling for the past four years since the death of her husband David. Liv treasures the painting of Sophie by Edouard that was purchased for her as a gift by David on their honeymoon. Liv becomes romantically involved with Paul, who has been assigned the case of returning the same painting to the Lefevre family. This ruptures their relationship, and Liv decides to fight for the painting because she is moved by the life story of Sophie. It is later revealed through David's research that the painting was originally a gift. Since it was never stolen, it rightfully belongs to Liv. Liv and David are reunited.



## Sophie Lefevre

Sophie Lefevre is a beautiful young French woman who is one of the two main characters in JoJo Moyes's novel *The Girl You Left Behind*. She is married to Edouard, who is away at war. Sophie lives with her sister Helene and her brother Aurelien. The siblings run the family hotel in the town of St. Peronne. St. Peronne is under German occupation. Sophie slowly becomes friends with the new German Kommandant, Friedrich Hencken, through the subject of art. Hencken becomes obsessed with a painting of Sophie by Edouard. When Sophie learns that her husband is imprisoned in a work camp, she destroys her reputation and her honor in the town by offering both the painting and herself to Hencken in exchange for the release of her husband. Sophie is later arrested by the Germans. She endures illness and beatings while in captivity. Miraculously, she is reunited with Edouard at a work camp. Eventually, the two are released by the Germans for service to the state. They live out their lives in Switzerland.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Magazine Article

A magazine article about Liv's home's architecture is how the Lefevres discover the location of Edouard's painting. It is how Paul comes to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that the painting he has been tasked with finding is, in fact, owned by Liv.

## Red Book

A red-covered book is kept by Phillippe with all of the reminiscences and writings of his Aunt Sophie. He keeps it hidden, giving it only to Liv because she actually cares about Sophie, rather than just the painting of Sophie. Liv learns all about Sophie by reading the red volume of writing, and it helps her to become closer to Sophie.

## Bread

Bread is baked and sold by Armand in the bakery for the people of the village of Saint Peronne. Armand cruelly defecates in the bread he bakes for Liliane.

## Scarves

Edouard frequents the store in which Sophie works, looking for beautiful scarves for his models to wear. It is during these conversations over scarves with Sophie that Edouard falls for her and seeks to paint her.

## The Girl You Left Behind

"The Girl You Left Behind" is a portrait of Sophie created by Edouard Lefevre before they are married. It is done in the Impressionist style and hangs in the hotel Coq Rouge. There, it is seen by the German Kommandant, who becomes obsessed with it. When the German Kommandant frees Edouard from prison, the painting is given to him as a gift by Helene. From there, it remains with the Kommandant through World War II, when it is given away to American reporter Louanne Baker by the Kommandant's wife, who says the painting destroyed her marriage. Baker keeps the painting with her for the next thirty years until her death, when it is discovered by her daughter and sold to David. David gives Liv the painting as a gift. The painting becomes the subject of a very public court case between Liv and the Lefevre family.

# Settings

## St. Peronne

St. Peronne is a rural village in France, and is where Sophie, Helene, and Aurelien work at their family's hotel and bar, the Coq Rouge. St. Peronne suffers under German oppression from occupation, and its residents go through extreme emotions, hating even suspected traitors and lavishing praise on heroes. St. Peronne ultimately decides against Sophie, condemning both her, and her memory.

## Paris

Paris is the capital of France. It is a safe region during the 1940's, not reached by the Germans. Sophie and Edouard live in France at the start of the war. When Edouard goes off to fight, Sophie returns to her hometown of St. Peronne to help her family run the hotel.

## London

London is the capital of England. Liv lived there with her husband David before his death. It is where Paul lives with his son and works for TARP. London becomes the primary setting for the events of the novel that take place in 2006.

## New York

New York is an American city and Paul's hometown. He worked with the New York City Police Department moving to England.

## Barcelona

Barcelona, Spain is the home of American journalist Louanne Baker during the final years of her life. It is the city where her daughter Marianne sells the painting "The Girl You Left Behind" to David and Liv.



# Themes and Motifs

## War

War is a major theme in the novel *The Girl You Left Behind* by JoJoe Moyes. Thematically, war involves open combat between two or more opposing sides and the effect that the combat has on related parties, such as civilians.

In this novel, World War I, which lasted from 1914 to 1918, is the setting. The region of France in which Sophie lives is occupied by enemy German forces. Having been scarred by numerous battles, the landscape is hardly recognizable. The people are oppressed by the German invaders. The French citizens are murdered, beaten, and held to account by German law and dictates. As such, the French citizens work to subvert the Germans. French citizens either work with the Germans or turn against their own for working with the Germans. Liliane Bethune is a French woman who seems to be working with the Germans. As such she is despised by other French citizens. In reality, she is a French spy.

French citizens are also sent into forced labor camps and suffer everything from illness and rape to physical brutality and seeing their possessions looted or stolen.

War also means that people who in other times might have been friends are enemies. Such is the case between the German Kommandant and Sophie, who share a mutual love of art and beauty. Indeed, something similar to, but not becoming, a genuine friendship develops between the two war-weary people based on art and beauty. When Sophie ventures out into France as a prisoner being taken to Edouard, she is stunned by the devastation of the land around her by war. It haunts her deeply and intensifies her desire to get Edouard to safety.

## Love

Love is a dominant theme in *The Girl You Left Behind* by JoJo Moyes. Love involves emotional connections and commitments to another, either romantically or familial. Both types appear in the story, and both are deeply instrumental to the progression of the plot.

Romantic love appears between Sophie and Edouard. The same type of love develops between Liv and Paul later in the plot. Sophie's love for her husband Edouard means that she will do whatever it takes to free him from German captivity. She goes so far as to offer her own body and Edouard's portrait to the German Kommandant to do this. Liv's love for Paul is like an awakening because she has been at a standstill for four years since the death of her beloved husband David. Liv's love for Paul means being able to accept him into her arms even when he was on the opposing side in the court battle over the painting. It is Liv who comes to voice the revelation that material things in life don't matter. It is loved ones that are important.





Familial love also appears throughout the novel, primarily between Sophie and Helene, and between Liv and her father. Sophie returns from the safety of Paris to St. Peronne to help her sister and brother manage the family hotel during German occupation. Sophie cares for her family, standing up to the German Kommandant to save the lives of her family members for hiding a pig. Helene, in turn, cares for Sophie and admonishes her against sleeping with the enemy. Even when Sophie sleeps with the German Kommandant, Helene tends to her and helps restore her to health. Liv takes care of her father, who is in an on-again off-again relationship, and who is an out-of-work actor. Her father, in turn, provides much-needed moral and emotional support during Liv's court case. He tells Liv he is extremely proud of her.

## Beauty

Beauty is a major underlying theme in JoJo Moyes's novel "The Girl You Left Behind". Beauty appears in the novel as both a subjective opinion and an objective value, contrasted against war. Beauty includes that which is emotionally pleasing, reassuring, or moving to the human soul. Beauty in the novel primarily revolves around Sophie and Edouard's portrait of Sophie, "The Girl You Left Behind".

In terms of a subjective opinion, a painting one may find beautiful may not be found beautiful by another. As such, Sophie notes, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. The portrait of Sophie, however, is found beautiful by many, and as far less than beautiful by others. The Kommandant, Sophie, Edouard, and Liv all find the portrait to be beautiful. Liesl, the Kommandant's wife, and Marianne Johnson do not find the painting to be anything special. The Kommandant also finds Sophie to be beautiful, even though she no longer finds herself to be beautiful.

Yet, it is the Kommandant and Sophie who are able to agree on the fact that one must seek out beauty, even in the midst of death and destruction caused by war. Here, beauty is presented as an objective philosophical value, in which something beautiful must be admired and celebrated, as well as loved and cherished against a greater darkness. As such, the portrait assumes a philosophical depth and complexity it had not previously received.

# Styles

## Point of View

JoJo Moyes tells her novel "The Girl You Left Behind" from both the first and third-person limited-omniscient perspectives. The first part of the novel, set during World War II, is told by Sophie. This allows the reader to experience the terror of war on the civilian front firsthand, and to understand the things that Sophie feels through those struggles. The second part of the novel is told in the third-person perspective in the present tense, to secure in the mind of the reader the difference between the past and the present, and to help differentiate the stories. This also allows the reader to get to know Paul further, before Liv does. Additionally, both forms of narrative are told in the limited-omniscient perspective, which adds a sense of gentle suspense.

## Language and Meaning

JoJo Moyes tells her novel "The Girl You Left Behind" in contemporary, casual language fitting both the past and present parts of the novel. In the section of the novel dealing with World War I, the use of conversational language considered common then, with words such as impenetrable, intransigence, and mollified are used. This evinces a forgotten time, and a more refined way of speaking. Language used in the contemporary section of the novel will be all too familiar to readers, and helps to create more clearly the distinct atmosphere of both World War I and the contemporary world, one bridged by a work of art.

## Structure

JoJo Moyes divides her novel "The Girl You Left Behind" into three parts, including an epilogue. The first two parts are subdivided into chapters, while the epilogue stands alone. The first part of the novel occurs in 1916, at the height of World War I, and is the story of Sophie, her painting, and how she came to disappear from town. The second part of the novel is the story of Liv's fight to keep the painting, and examines the idea of ownership and art in the modern world. The epilogue explains what happens to Sophie and her husband following World War I.



## Quotes

I know they will come back. And I do not want the Germans to have gleaned even one more minute of fear from me.

-- Sophie (chapter 2 paragraph 48)

**Importance:** Having dealt with German occupation for years, Sophie is determined that the Germans will no longer make her afraid. She has been living with fear long enough. She does not hesitate to challenge the German Kommandant or the Germans. This reveals Sophie to be an incredibly brave young woman.

On the canvas I saw a girl I did not recognize. She gazed back at me defiantly, her hair glinting copper in the half-light, her skin as pale as alabaster, a girl with the imperious confidence of an aristocrat.

-- Sophie (chapter 4 paragraph 134)

**Importance:** Sophie's reaction to Edouard's painting of her is one of stunned amazement. Edouard sees so much more in Sophie than Sophie sees in herself, and it comes out in the painting. It is Sophie's inner nature that comes out, and it is seen and obsessed over by the German Kommandant and others.

This is what the Germans were here for, not discussions about art and delicious food. They were here to shoot our sons and husbands. They were here to destroy us.

-- Sophie (chapter 5 paragraph 66)

**Importance:** Following the Kommandant's shooting of an escaping French prisoner, Sophie has a harsh dose of reality when she comes to realize that the near-friendship she has with the Kommandant is outdone by the war. The Germans have not come to discuss art and beauty, but to kill and destroy.

Herr Kommandant. You act as if we are friends. So, I'm begging you. Please help my husband. I know what goes on in those places, that he has little chance of coming out alive.

-- Sophie (chapter 8 paragraph 34)

**Importance:** Upon learning that her husband has gone to a camp, Sophie pleads with the Kommandant to help her. As she offers the painting and her own body as payment for the Kommandant's help in returning her husband from the war, he has taken a course of action from which there will be no going back.

She's... my favorite thing in this house. Actually, she's my favorite thing in the whole world." She pauses. "David gave her to me on our honeymoon.

-- Liv (chapter 16 paragraph 136)

**Importance:** As she talks with Paul, Liv explains how important Sophie's portrait is to her. The painting affects her so deeply for two reasons. First, it was given to Liv by



David, her beloved husband who is now deceased. Second, Sophie appears to be a remarkably strong woman, and this is appealing and moving to Liv.

It's never just a painting.

-- Paul (chapter 17 paragraph 77)

**Importance:** When Paul explains the situation with Liv and the painting to his brother Greg, his brother tells him that the issue is just a painting. But, Paul knows from speaking to Liv about her painting that it is not that simple. A painting isn't just something that hangs on a wall. A painting can matter deeply to people.

Time doesn't make a wrong right.

-- Paul (chapter 18 paragraph 84)

**Importance:** Pleading with Liv to settle the case, Paul is taken aback to learn that Liv's primary defense of her ownership of the painting is that so much time has passed. Paul tells her that a wrong committed long ago doesn't make it right in the present.

It's not just a painting! She was betrayed by everyone around her. She had nobody in the end! And she's... she's all I've got left.

-- Liv (chapter 28 paragraph 37)

**Importance:** Proving Paul's thought that a painting is never just a painting to be true, Liv argues that the painting of Sophie matters to her in ways that money does not. She not only cares deeply for Sophie's life, but she sees various parallels between her life and Sophie's life.

So this... the painting, the house... it hit me when I heard what happened to Sophie earlier. It's just stuff. They could take all of it, quite frankly. The only thing that matters is people." She looks down at his hands, and her voice cracks. "All that really matters is who you love.

-- Liv (chapter 32 paragraph 64)

**Importance:** When things get darkest for Liv, Paul comes back into her life. She realizes that what is truly important is not the painting of Sophie, but Sophie herself. Likewise, she tells Paul that the things that matter in life are people, not material things. This revelation sets Liv down a new path in life.