

# **The Nightingale Study Guide**

## **The Nightingale by Kristin Hannah**

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# Plot Summary

The *Nightingale*, by Kristin Hannah, is about two sisters struggling to survive during World War II in France. One sister is rebellious and intent on fighting for France while the other simply wants to survive the war with her family intact. Both sisters learn who they are and what they are capable of as the war wages on.

The *Nightingale* begins at the Oregon Coast in 1995 with an elderly woman who is dying of cancer. Her son is helping her to move to a retirement home. Her identity is not revealed. As her son is helping her, he sees a photo of a woman named Juliette Gervaise and asks his mother who she is. The elderly woman begins to remember the story of Vianne and Isabelle.

The main plot begins just as France is being drawn in the war. Vianne, the older sister, lives in the town of Carriveau where there is an airstrip. She is married and has one daughter, Sophie. Vianne enjoys her quiet life and relies on her husband, Antoine, to take care of everything. Isabelle, the younger sister, has been living in one boarding school after another because her father is incapable of raising her and Vianne was unable to do so after suffering a miscarriage. Isabelle is impetuous and has run away from or been expelled from several schools. Isabelle has just been expelled from another school and goes to Paris to convince her father to allow her to live with him.

When France is drawn into the war, Antoine is sent to fight as a soldier as is Vianne's best friend Rachel's husband, Marc. The two women are left alone to raise their daughters and continue their teaching jobs at a school at which they both work. Vianne is certain she'll be unable to carry on alone.

Julien, Isabelle and Vianne's father, sends Isabelle away with the Humberts to escape Paris as the Nazis invade. She is to return to Carriveau to live with Vianne. When the car runs out of fuel, Isabelle begins to walk and meets a young man named Gaetan, with whom she falls in love. Gaetan invites her to join the French resistance, but leaves her behind in Carriveau. Isabelle lives with Vianne, but remains outspoken, which Vianne fears will draw the attention of the Germans and cause them harm.

A Nazi named Beck billets with Vianne. He treats Vianne and Sophie kindly even when Isabelle speaks up. Isabelle joins the resistance movement and begins distributing anti-German tracts. This work leads her to move back to Paris where she becomes a courier for the resistance movement.

Vianne continues to teach alongside her friend Rachel. When Beck asks Vianne for a list of names of Jewish people and other undesirables who work at the school, she is forced to give him Rachel's name. Rachel is fired from her job. As the war continues, rations become scarce and the winters are very difficult. Beck informs Vianne that Antoine has been placed in a prison camp.



One night Isabelle finds a downed Allied airman in Paris and brings him to the resistance group. She devises a plan to transport airmen across the Pyrenees mountains into Spain where they can safely rejoin their military forces. From that point on she becomes the Nightingale and is in grave danger of being captured by the Nazis. She is given the false identity of Juliette Gervaise to protect her family and friends.

Beck tells Vianne that she should hide Rachel because the Jews are being rounded up and sent to work camps. Vianne hides Rachel in her barn cellar, but not long enough. As they try to escape, Rachel's daughter Sarah is shot and killed. When Rachel is taken she begs Vianne to take her son, Ari. Vianne takes Ari and passes him off as a child named Daniel that she adopted from her husband's cousin.

Isabelle returns to Carriveau. When the airstrip is attacked she rescues another pilot and hides him in Vianne's farm. Beck discovers Isabelle and Vianne hits him in the head with a shovel while Isabelle shoots him. Isabelle has also been shot. Beck dies. Gaetan arrives with other resistance members and they take Beck's body and the body of the pilot away. Gaetan also takes Isabelle to a safehouse to heal. Isabelle and Gaetan finally admit their feelings and begin a love affair.

Another Nazi named Von Richter billets with Vianne. He is very cruel and rapes Vianne, getting her pregnant. Vianne accepts the son of another Jewish friend who is being sent away. She knows she can no longer stand by and watch the evil around her so she takes the boy to the orphanage at the convent. Mother Superior Marie-Therese tells Vianne she will help hide more children, so Vianne begins to rescue Jewish children whose parents are taken away.

Isabelle is captured by the Nazis but refuses those who question her about the identity of the Nightingale. They don't think she is the Nightingale because she is a woman. In order to save Isabelle, her father turns himself in claiming to be the Nightingale. He is shot and Isabelle is sent to a work camp.

When the war ends, Antoine returns home to the pregnant Vianne who tells him that she must have conceived on the first night he came home. Isabelle returns to Carriveau, but is extremely ill. Gaetan comes to Carriveau to find Isabelle and she dies in his arms. Jewish officials come to take Ari, now called Daniel, away from Vianne to return him to Jewish relatives living in America.

The novel ends with the elderly woman being revealed as Vianne. She is at a reunion of French resistance members where she tells Isabelle's story to the audience. Her son, Julien, is with her and learns about his mother's past for the first time. Ari comes to Vianne and tells her he never forgot her or Sophie and has been looking for them. Gaetan also approaches Vianne and introduces his daughter named Isabelle. Vianne tells her son that she will tell him everything, but she keeps the secret of the events surrounding his conception.



# Chapters 1-4

## Summary

The *Nightingale*, by Kristin Hannah, is primarily set in France during World War II. It is the story of two sisters affected by the war as France becomes a country occupied by the Nazis and forced to submit to German martial law. The sisters, years apart in age, differ in their approach to the war. Young Isabelle wishes to resist German rule at any cost while older Vianne seeks to survive and protect her family.

Chapter 1 begins on the Oregon Coast in 1995 with an unnamed older woman reflecting on the difference between her generation and the present day younger generations. As she grows closer to death she finds herself thinking about the war and those she has lost. Her memories of the past have become clearer as she ages.

She is preparing to move from her home to an assisted living facility at the request of her son. She is packing very little to take with her, but goes up to the attic to get one item she wants. She looks around at the things there and is reminded of her grandchildren and daughter. The woman locates a steamer trunk filled with mementos. Among the items is a poetry book by Julien Rossignol and a passport-sized photo of a young woman named Juliette Gervaise.

The woman's son finds her in the attic and she tells him she wants to take the trunk. He asks why she wants it and she thinks to herself that she should have told him the truth long ago. He asks her who Juliette Gervaise is and she begins to remember.

Chapter 2 begins in France in August of 1939. Vianne steps into her front yard and listens to the giggles of her daughter, Sophie. Her husband, Antoine, emerges from the house ready for their Saturday morning picnic. Vianne and Antoine have been together since Vianne was very young. Her mother had died when she was 14 and her father had left her and her 4-year-old sister Isabelle at the family's summer home. That summer she met Antoine and became pregnant at the age of 16. The pregnancy ended in a miscarriage leaving Vianne grief-stricken and unable to care for Isabelle.

Sophie comes out of the house and announces she is ready. Vianne gets the picnic basket and the family walks through the town of Carriveau to a spot by the river where they have their picnic. Vianne and Antoine watch Sophie play and Antoine remarks that Hitler will draw France into war soon. Vianne ignores the comment and calls Sophie to return to their house, Le Jardin. Vianne cooks a delicious dinner and the couple listens to their daughter chatter happily through dinner.

At bedtime, Sophie says she's afraid of the coming war. Vianne tells her Antoine will protect them. After tucking Sophie in, Vianne goes to sit with Antoine who tells her he has been mobilized and is to report for duty on Tuesday.



In Chapter 3, Vianne is thinking about what she knows of war. She remembers when her father went off to war and her mother cried. She remembers that the father who left for war was not the same when he returned. She'd tried to keep loving her father, but he'd sent her off to Carriveau and had very little contact with her after that.

Vianne insists Antoine will be home again soon because the Germans will be unable to penetrate the French border. She smells jasmine as Antoine holds her and thinks she will always remember telling him goodbye when she smells jasmine. Antoine tells her she is stronger than she thinks she is, but she tells him she is not.

The next morning Vianne and Sophie visit Rachel, Vianne's best friend. Rachel's husband Marc has also been mobilized. Rachel wonders if her newborn son, Ariel, will know his father. They make jokes about the things that will be better while their husbands are gone in an attempt to feel better.

On Tuesday morning Antoine suggests that Vianne and Sophie go to Paris to stay with Julien, Vianne's father. Vianne says no and that her father does not wish to live with his daughters. She assures him that she and Sophie will be fine and again says he'll be home soon. Antoine gives her an envelope of money and says he took all of their money out of the bank. He advises her to spend it wisely and make it last. Vianne goes to wake Sophie and finds her sleeping with a stuffed rabbit, Bebe, that she hasn't played with in a long time.

The family goes to the train station where the platform is filled with young men and Vianne tries not to remember the men returning injured from the last war. She and Antoine embrace and declare their love, but Vianne wonders how love can stand against war. Antoine tells her goodbye, but she can't bring herself to say it in return.

Chapter 4 jumps ahead to June of 1940. Isabelle is in school at an etiquette lesson on how to properly eat an orange. She attempts to peel her orange as instructed and it rolls off the plate. She cusses and the teacher, Madame Dufour, hears her. She sasses the teacher and the other girls stop to listen. Madame Dufour instructs them to continue with polite dinner conversation and Isabelle notes they immediately begin talking about subjects acceptable for women. Madame Dufour tells Isabelle to leave and go to see Madame Allard whom she is to tell that the experiment is over.

Madame Allard asks Isabelle why she is at the school and Isabelle begins to list the schools that have expelled her. Madame Allard tells her it's obvious she doesn't want to learn what the school has to teach and Isabelle asks her if she realizes there is a war going on. Isabelle says she's been dumped in boarding schools because her mother died and her father doesn't want her. Madame Allard tells her she will be leaving the school and that her father has been notified.

Isabelle boards the train to return to her father's home. She looks at her old suitcase and thinks about the trunks her schoolmates brought to school and the family mementos they had. When she arrives in Paris her father is waiting for her looking irritated. She tells him she wants to live with him and work in his bookstore.



The scene then shifts to Isabelle lying in the grass reading a book when she is approached by a young man named Christophe. He asks if she's reading a romance and she tells him she's reading about Edith Cavell, a heroic nurse from the Great War. He tells her it's absurd to think a girl could be a hero and that a woman's job is to wait for the men to return. She insists she could be useful in a war.

When Isabelle returns to the bookstore she finds her father doing something on the printing press. They hear a strange noise and look out of the shop to find that a crowd of people are running down the street. The Germans are coming into Paris so the people are fleeing. Julien and Isabelle return to their apartment. When the air raid siren sounds they move to the lower level of their building along with the other residents. They finally return to their apartment and Julien tells her to go to bed. She tells him she cannot possibly sleep and he tells her that she'll learn that many things are possible.

## Analysis

The author opens the novel with a chapter told in first person by an unnamed elderly lady. The use of the first person perspective suggests that the story told in the subsequent chapters is this woman's story. However, since *The Nightingale* is the story of two sisters, the reader is left wondering which sister is speaking in Chapter 1. The author provides some clues, such as that the woman has a son, but his name isn't provided either. The woman also had a daughter who apparently died since she began refinishing a chair before becoming ill and the chair now sits in the woman's attic, unfinished. Again, the author does not provide the daughter's name, thus preserving the mystery of the woman's identity. The mystery of the woman's identity draws the reader into the story and provides an element of suspense that encourages the reader to continue reading.

In addition to drawing the reader in, Chapter 1 also introduces some of the novel's major themes, including love, war, and loss. In fact, two of these themes are introduced in the very first line when the author writes "If I have learned anything in this long life of mine, it is this: In love we find out who we want to be; in war we find out who we are." This line is essentially what the book is about. Through the course of the story, the two major characters, Vianne and Isabelle, will experience the joys of love as well as the horrors of war. Their experiences with love will leave them dreaming of the life they wish they could have and the people they wish they could be, but the horrors of war will show them just what they are capable of.

The theme of love is further explored through Vianne's relationship with Antoine. She thinks of Antoine as her savior, saying he saved her when she was alone after her mother died and her father left her at Le Jardin to care for her sister. She reminds Rachel that before Antoine she was a scared girl who stammered when she spoke. Antoine was her protector when she was young and it is evident that she still thinks of him that way since she tells Sophie that he will protect them from the coming war even before she knows he has been called up. Her love for Antoine allows her to be the



person she wants to be. That is, it allows her to be a cherished and protected person in spite of the fact that her father discarded her as a child.

The theme of war is further discussed in Vianne's remembrances of the Great War in which her father fought. Vianne reflects on how war changes a person in that Julien was not the same man when he came home after the war. She also thinks about how wars claim entire generations of men as she observes the many men saying goodbye to their wives as she sees Antoine off. And, of course, she remembers the horribly injured men who returned with her father, but forces herself to put these thoughts out of her head. Later, the theme of war is more concretely included when the Germans invade Paris. Isabelle can't believe it's true, but Julien tells her the worst can always be true. Then, Isabelle and Julien are forced to cower in the lowest level of their apartment building during an air raid. When Isabelle says she can't possibly sleep after the attack is over, Julien reiterates his earlier sentiment by telling her that she'll learn that many things are possible. As the story continues, the reader will see that Julien is correct in that many things, terrible things, that the characters never thought could happen do.

The theme of loss is also introduced in Chapter 1 when the woman talks about having lost people she loved. She talks about how ridiculous referring to them as "lost" is when, in fact, they aren't lost, they are gone. Her matter of fact attitude toward death suggests that she has had a great deal of experience with death. This might later lead the reader to believe that the elderly woman is Vianne since the author mentions that she's had multiple miscarriages that have greatly affected her.

In addition to the introduction of themes, this section of the novel also introduces the two main characters of the story, Vianne and Isabelle. The characters are depicted in great contrast to one another. Vianne is a frightened, nervous woman who believes she needs a man to save her. She cannot imagine life without Antoine. Rather than preparing for the eventuality of war, she chooses to believe it won't happen and initially will not even speak about it to Antoine, saying she doesn't wish to borrow trouble. She doesn't seem to be a particularly capable woman since she admits she could not handle caring for her sister and that she knows little about finances. Even her best friend Rachel is a protective figure in her life.

On the other hand, Isabelle is a beautiful and brash young woman who believes she could be capable of anything, including becoming a war hero. She idolizes Edith Cavell who symbolizes the strength that can be found in women and what Isabelle aspires to be. She has been expelled from numerous boarding schools and has little use for the niceties that proper young women are supposed to adhere to. She notices that when her classmates are instructed to carry on polite conversation they talk about clothes and gardening and other topics that have been deemed acceptable for women. Isabelle would rather discuss things she feels are important, like the approaching war. The author indicates that she isn't afraid to speak the truth as she sees it as she has no qualms about telling Madame Allard that she knows she's at the school because her father doesn't want her. She also challenges the headmistress about the reality of war and the world outside the walls of the school.





The description of the setting is also important in this section of the novel since it shows how ideal Vianne's life is before the war begins. She lives in a lovely old stone home in the French countryside. A stone wall with climbing roses surrounds the house. The town of Carriveau is described in a way that makes the reader think of the picturesque settings one might see in travel advertisements. Some of the townspeople are mentioned by name indicating that people there know one another and treat one another kindly. This setting will change drastically as France is taken over.

The author makes use of some symbols as well. One of those symbols is the trunk that the elderly woman takes from her attic. The trunk contains mementos of her life and her family. There are bits of artwork from her children and hundreds of photographs as well as pieces from her life in France. At one point, Isabelle notes that the suitcase she uses is old and scuffed and not like the fancy trunks her classmates carry. The trunks are covered in travel stickers indicating there have been many family vacations. The girls who own those trunks take pictures of their families and other mementos out of them to display on their desks. Isabelle's desk is bare except for a photo of her mother, whom she doesn't even remember. The author specifically uses the word "mementos" in describing the contents of the trunks in both of these scenes. This indicates that the trunks are a symbol of full lives with families and memories. The mention of the trunks in both scenes might lead the reader to believe the elderly woman is Isabelle since having a trunk seemed so important to her.

Another symbol that is mentioned is the passport photo of Juliette Gervaise. At the time the picture is mentioned, the reader does not yet know who Juliette Gervaise is. However, it's clear that the picture is a symbol of the elderly woman's past and things she has kept hidden. Her past is integral to who she is. When her son asks her who Juliette is, she realizes she wants to be known now.

The author also mentions the smell of jasmine. Vianne notices the smell as she and Antoine are saying their personal goodbyes at their home. When she smells the jasmine she believes that smell will always make her think of saying goodbye to Antoine. Therefore, the jasmine symbolizes saying goodbye.

## Discussion Question 1

How are Vianne and Isabelle different from one another? Why might they be so different?

## Discussion Question 2

At this point, do you believe the elderly woman is Vianne or Isabelle? What clues has the author given to indicate this?



## Discussion Question 3

What is France like as the book begins? What is Vianne's home like?

## Vocabulary

generation, mementos, anxious, cloying, ignominiously, atrocities, medieval, bludgeoned, labyrinth, flotilla



# Chapters 5-8

## Summary

In Chapter 5, Julien sends Isabelle out of Paris with the Humberts. Isabelle leaves reluctantly. There are crowds of people leaving the city and the streets are clogged with slow moving traffic. Isabelle feels disposable.

The car runs out of gas and Isabelle is separated from the Humberts in the crowd. When she smells smoke and roasting meat she walks toward it. She meets a young man named Gaetan who invites Isabelle to sit with him and assures her he won't hurt her. When Isabelle introduces herself he notes that her surname means "nightingale."

Isabelle asks Gaetan why he isn't staying in Paris to fight. He tells her he was in prison until the doors were opened to release the prisoners when the Germans invaded. Gaetan says he is going to check on his mother and sister and then find a regiment to join. Isabelle tells him he's lucky that he can fight and thinks that it's easy for men to do as they want. Gaetan invites her to come with him to fight. She is surprised because she's used to being discounted because she's pretty. Isabelle tells Gaetan she must check on Vianne first. Isabelle feels like she's found what she has been looking for her whole life.

Chapter 6 begins with Isabelle waking up after sleeping near Gaetan for the night. She asks him why he'd been in prison and he asks her what she thinks of communists. He tells her that a girl wouldn't know anything about survival. Isabelle says there is more than one kind of prison. Finally, Gaetan reveals he was imprisoned for theft. They begin walking and come upon a regiment of French soldiers looking defeated and travelling in the wrong direction. Gaetan shoves one of them and demands to know who is fighting for France. The soldier replies that no one is. Gaetan is enraged by this and Isabelle pulls him away. As they walk on, Isabelle notices a change in Gaetan. He seems sullen and does not speak.

On their third day of walking Isabelle's feet are covered in blisters and she's barely able to stand anymore. German planes fly overhead and drop bombs and fire machine guns into the crowd. Gaetan throws himself over Isabelle to protect her. Isabelle sees an old man who has been gravely wounded and a toddler crying beside the body of a woman. They run into a church for protection and a plane drops a bomb on the roof.

In Chapter 7, Vianne is in her classroom at the school where she teaches. There are gas masks under each of the desks. She and the class have difficulty concentrating because of news of the war. The children talk about the war and Sophie looks frightened. She has been crying herself to sleep at night and now brings Bebe to school with her. Vianne tries to comfort the class to no avail.



Vianne stops at Rachel's classroom to walk home with her. On the way, they pass a trio of haggard women. Rachel says she's heard about refugees coming to town. Vianne says she is worried about Isabelle and Rachel tries to comfort her by reminding her that Isabelle has always been very good at running away from boarding schools and will surely arrive safely.

That night, Vianne goes outside to tend her garden. She hears a sound and feels a vibration. Three filthy women approach her gate and ask for water. Vianne invites them in and the oldest woman refuses saying they are in front. Vianne doesn't understand what she means, but gives them water and food. Isabelle realizes that one of the women is clutching a dead baby. The old woman urges Isabelle to return to her house and lock the doors, then they leave quickly. An enormous crowd of people passes Le Jardin, causing the house to shake. Sophie is frightened and worried that Isabelle is in the crowd.

Isabelle and Gaetan reach Le Jardin. Isabelle pounds on the door, but no one answers. They spend the night in the pergola behind the house. Gaetan tells Isabelle he could be safe with Vianne, but she says she doesn't want to be safe and that her sister won't want her. She tells him about Edith Cavell and says she wants to be a woman who makes a difference, too. She urges Gaetan to take her with him to war as he promised. He teases her into sealing their deal with a kiss after which Isabelle says she loves him and they are lucky to have found each other. Gaetan says they are not lucky.

Vianne wakes the next morning to find her garden demolished and Isabelle alone and crying in the pergola. She takes Isabelle inside where she bathes her, feeds her, and puts her to bed. When Isabelle wakes, she tries to put Gaetan's leaving out of her mind. Vianne gives her a note from Gaetan she found stuck to Isabelle that reads, "You are not ready."

The two discuss the war and Isabelle says she plans to leave and join the war effort. They listen to the radio and hear a report on the radio that France has surrendered. Vianne says it must be for the best, but Isabelle is outraged.

Sophie comes in the house and Isabelle is struck by how beautiful she is and that she's grown up. The two share secrets and Isabelle says she can make herself invisible because it's easy to disappear when no one is looking at you.

Chapter 8 begins by talking about the surrender of France. Food and other necessities are now scarce. Vianne tries to carry on by repairing her garden, but Isabelle stands staring at the sky and rants about the Nazis. Vianne refuses to listen, so Sophie becomes Isabelle's audience. When they travel to town to shop, Isabelle steps defiantly into the street to stand in front of the Germans. Vianne pulls her away. Vianne begs her to be careful or she'll get them all killed. Isabelle tells Vianne the Germans are in Carriveau because of the airstrip. Vianne says the war is over, but Isabelle tells her it's not and they should take Sophie and go. Vianne refuses.



That night Isabelle makes plans to hide the valuables instead of spending the war like other women. The next day she takes the valuables and puts them in the barn cellar instead of going shopping as Vianne asked. Vianne is angry that she didn't get any food. Isabelle turns on the radio and hears a report from General de Gaulle about the resistance movement. It gives her hope.

The Germans call the people of Carriveau to a meeting to tell them the rules they must follow. Rachel and Sarah are there and Rachel apologizes to Isabelle for the way she treated her when they were young. The Germans announce that the people must turn in all radios and are forbidden guns and operational vehicles. They must use blackout curtains and obey a curfew. The German officer tries to tell them they will live in harmony, but any resistance will be punished. He also tells them that men taken prisoner in Germany will remain there.

As the women walk home, Isabelle tries to talk about General de Gaulle, but Vianne says they must just keep on until their men come home. Rachel tells Vianne that Isabelle may not be completely wrong in saying she'll keep their radio and gun. Vianne maintains that Antoine will be home soon and will handle everything.

A German soldier comes to the door and introduces himself as Captain Beck. He says he will be billeting at Le Jardin. They have no choice but to allow him to live there. He insists he'll be a gentleman. Vianne gives him the small downstairs bedroom. Beck is polite and again says he will be a gentleman as his mother would expect. Vianne is confused by this man who looks like someone she might meet in church.

Beck tries to pay Isabelle a compliment by telling her that she has beautiful hair. Isabelle grabs a pair of scissors and stands in front of him as she hacks off her hair. Vianne asks for his forgiveness and he says she is angry and that angry people make mistakes and die. He asks Vianne to speak to Isabelle about her behavior because it could be dangerous. Vianne admonishes Isabelle and Isabelle finally agrees to try to hold her tongue.

## Analysis

The title of the novel is partially explained in this section of the novel. Gaetan, upon meeting Isabelle, remarks that her last name means "nightingale." The nightingale is a common symbol in literature. It often stands for love, loss, longing, and death. At this point in the novel, the nightingale probably best represents love since the author introduces the budding romance between Gaetan and Isabelle. The author also provides the detail that Isabelle remembers her mother calling her and Vianne nightingales as a term of endearment. As the story progresses, the nightingale symbol will take on additional meanings.

As the author further explores the theme of war, the novel takes a dark turn. The author addresses the displacement of people during wartimes. Isabelle is forced to flee Paris and the scene of the exodus is described in grim and dirty terms. The author uses



words like "chaos" and describes the throngs of people leaving the city as "a living, breathing dragon of humanity, inching forward, wheezing dirt, honking horns" (Chapter 5, paragraph 19). The crowd is noisy and large, creating a sort of wrong feeling or vibration ahead of it, which Vianne feels when the refugees reach her house. The author indicates that the smell of the crowd precedes their arrival and the refugees are desperate and starving. The author uses the imagery of the crowd being like a "pack of hungry wolves" whose "voices melded into a single desperate growl" (Chapter 7, paragraph 84).

The violence of war is perhaps best illustrated when the author describes the bombing of the crowd as they leave Paris. Isabelle sees an old man with a deep gash in his stomach who is clearly dying and a small child crying beside the body of a dead woman. This depiction of an elderly person, a woman, and a child - groups of people often seen as society's most vulnerable - reminds the reader that innocent people are often greatly affected or even killed by war. When Isabelle and Gaetan run to seek shelter, they go into a church where many other people are also hiding from the bombing. The author juxtaposes the perceived safety of a church with the violence of war when a bomb is dropped on the roof of the church, ending the chapter with a cliffhanger since the reader is uncertain whether Isabelle has survived or died.

The demoralization of people during war is also illustrated in the French soldiers that Isabelle and Gaetan encounter as they travel away from the action looking defeated and tired. Gaetan perceives their defeat as the soldiers having given up, which angers him and causes him to change from the charming man Isabelle first met into a sullen man who rarely speaks.

The picturesque setting of Carriveau undergoes a change as the author delves more deeply into the theme of war. Where Carriveau was a small, peaceful town at the beginning of the novel, it is now occupied by Nazi soldiers. The author's initial description of Carriveau when Vianne and her family walk through on the way to their picnic includes details about the bounty of food that is visible in the town, like baskets of cheese and bread, pastries, vegetables, and coffee. In stark contrast, once the war begins, food is in short supply and basic supplies like laundry detergent simply can't be had.

The people of Carriveau have changed, too. They don't congregate at the cafes anymore, and they walk through the streets with their heads down to avoid eye contact with the soldiers. The children of Carriveau are frightened and have difficulty focusing on their school work. The change is most apparent in Sophie whose eyes grow wide as her classmates talk about war. She has begun carrying her stuffed rabbit Bebe with her wherever she goes, even to school. Bebe symbolizes security and safety to Sophie.

The author begins to show what the opening lines of the story mean when the elderly woman states that people find out who they are during war. Vianne is a woman filled with hope who tries to carry on in as normal a fashion as possible. She continues to teach her students and encourage them even though they have gasmasks beneath their desks and the topic often turns to war. She is a dependent person since she continues



to believe that Antoine will come home and make everything right for her and Sophie. Isabelle, however, proves to be a brave and defiant woman. She is thrilled when Gaetan offers her the chance to go with him to fight in the war and is undeterred by the fact that she hardly knows him and that he was in prison. When she ends up in Carriveau, she can't seem to hide her defiance of the German's in spite of the fact that it could bring harm to her and her family. She steps in front of the marching soldiers and chops her hair off in front of Beck in a fit of anger. As the story continues, the author will show that while these characters remain who they are at the core, each is capable of much more and will more fully become their true selves as the situation of war forces them to adapt.

The theme of loss is most concretely apparent in the scene of the three women refugees passing by Le Jardin and asking Vianne for food and water. Vianne observes that one of the women is clutching a dead baby. She remembers what it's like to feel that kind of loss and be unable to let go. The child has undoubtedly died as a direct result of the woman having to carry it with her as she flees from the German occupation.

Loss is also illustrated through Isabelle's loss of Gaetan when he leaves her behind in Vianne's pergola. Isabelle has fallen in love with Gaetan, but Gaetan believes she's not ready to be involved in a war, so he sneaks away during the night. Isabelle feels a profound sense of loss, but reminds herself that she should have known better since she is always losing people she cares about.

The perception of women is further explored as a theme through Isabelle. Perhaps the author's most poignant depiction of the theme comes when Gaetan tries to tell Isabelle that a pretty girl couldn't possibly understand what he's been through having been in prison. Isabelle responds that there is more than one kind of prison. She means that society's perception of what she is capable of and what she should do based on her gender and looks has created limits in her life that have been like a prison to her. Isabelle longs to do something meaningful with her life, but instead she's been forced to attend finishing schools so that she can make polite conversation that is suitable for a young lady, which will enable her to one day find a good husband to care for her. As a result, she is shocked by the fact that Gaetan immediately offers her something more when he invites her to come with him to fight in the war. She is so used to people being unable to look past her pretty face that she initially believes that Gaetan only wants her to come along with him because he wants to have sex with her, so when he explains otherwise, she feels like she has finally found the one thing she has been looking for.

Unfortunately, when Gaetan leaves her behind, she begins to feel unnecessary again. She tells Sophie that she can make herself invisible. The reader might initially take this to be a silly joke that Isabelle tells her niece to form a bond with her, and in some ways that's true, but Isabelle really means that she can become invisible because people stop noticing a pretty girl because they think she's capable of little else. This conversation is a foreshadowing of who Isabelle will become when she is more fully drawn into the war because of her ability to go unnoticed.

Isabelle's defiance is her way of fighting the perception of women as being weak and needing to wait at home while the men are away at war. When she steps into the streets



in front of the marching soldiers, Isabelle wants them to see her. She doesn't want to be another woman passing by on the streets; she wants to be a person they cannot ignore.

When Isabelle arrives at Le Jardin the theme of family begins to unfold. In the previous section, the reader learned that Isabelle has always felt unwanted by her family. She believes that Vianne doesn't care about her because Vianne was unable to care for Isabelle at such a young age. And, she believes her father abandoned her. However, the author shows that the bonds of a family are strong. Vianne worries about Isabelle when she knows that Isabelle has left Paris and should be arriving in Carriveau. Sophie, too, worries about the aunt she really doesn't know since she is frightened about the prospect of Isabelle being in the crowd of refugees that passes by Le Jardin. When Vianne discovers Isabelle in the pergola she takes her inside and tenderly cares for her in a way that only a loving family member can.

Sophie and Isabelle develop a relationship when they share their "secrets" with one another. Isabelle clearly loves her niece since the only thing that keeps her from continuing to act out in front of Beck and the other German soldiers is Vianne's warning that she could be putting Sophie in danger by doing so. Sophie becomes Isabelle's rapt audience when Vianne no longer wants to listen to Isabelle's talk of war.

The theme of love is explored in a romantic sense through the story of Isabelle and Gaetan. Isabelle immediately falls deeply in love with Gaetan. While he is certainly charming, what really captures Isabelle's heart is a sense that Gaetan can really see who she is and what she wants in life instead of just seeing her beauty. Her declaration of love, though, is what causes Gaetan to leave. The author notes that when Isabelle tells Gaetan that she loves him a change comes over Gaetan. The reader might at first suppose that Gaetan is frightened of commitment, but in reality, he leaves Isabelle because he knows that loving someone will make it harder to do what is necessary to fight in the war, especially if that person is present in his life. The note Gaetan leaves with Isabelle says that she is not ready. The reader could take this as Gaetan saying she is not ready for love because she is too young and foolish or that Gaetan is saying she is not yet ready for war. Or, perhaps, he is saying both things.

Also of importance in this section of the novel is the introduction of Captain Beck as a character. Captain Beck seems to be a gentleman who treats Vianne with deference in spite of the fact that he is forcing her to allow him to live in her house. He speaks kindly to Vianne and laughs off Isabelle's childish acts of defiance while advising Vianne to talk to Isabelle so that she doesn't act out in front of the wrong people. He tells Vianne he is a gentleman and will act in the way his mother would expect him to. Vianne is taken aback by his actions since he doesn't look or act like an enemy. The reader, too, may wonder if Beck is a good guy or a bad guy. He may be a snake wrapped in a pretty package or he might really be the gentleman he insists he is.

It is possible that the author depicts Beck as a gentleman and someone Vianne feels like she met have met at church in order to illustrate the idea that there are good people on both sides of a war. Beck may be a good man who is simply following the orders he's been given just as the French soldiers are doing.





## **Discussion Question 1**

What does Isabelle mean when she tells Gaetan there is more than one kind of prison?

## **Discussion Question 2**

How has Carriveau changed since the beginning of the book?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Is Beck a good guy or a bad guy?

## **Vocabulary**

humanity, bedraggled, surname, unabashed, detritus, fathomless, miasma, unobtainable, defiantly, engage, propaganda, propriety



## Chapters 9-12

### Summary

In Chapter 9, Vianne is in her bedroom after confronting Isabelle about changing her behavior. She thinks about her mother's death and her father abandoning her and Isabelle. She regrets that she abandoned Isabelle as well.

Vianne goes to the kitchen to check on the soup she is making and Beck comes in. He tells her about his wife and a baby on the way. She realizes he wants the war to end, too. Vianne asks if he will be having dinner with them and he tells her it would be an honor. He brings wine to dinner. Isabelle asks him if he knows about the bombing in Tours and says she was there. Vianne reminds her to think about Sophie, so Isabelle shows Beck to his seat. Isabelle refuses the wine and leaves dinner quickly. Sophie follows her. Vianne apologizes and Beck tells her that Isabelle is like his six-year-old daughter.

After dinner Vianne goes outside and finds Beck there. They talk about the war and the prisoners in Germany. Isabelle comes out and Beck leaves. Isabelle tells Vianne she can't stay with Beck in the house. Isabelle says she thinks she'll cause trouble if she stays. She plans to go to Paris.

Isabelle breaks curfew to walk to the train station. A German sentry sees her and sends her home. She returns to Le Jardin and tells Vianne she must have a pass to leave town. After that, Isabelle tries to do as Vianne asks and goes to town to get food every day. One morning she sees chalk on the ground and picks it up. She stands in line at the butcher and receives ham hocks. She's told the Germans take all the best meat. Afterward, she slips into an alley and draws a V on an anti-Jewish poster. A man grabs her and tells her that what she is doing is punishable by death.

Chapter 10 starts with Vianne wishing Antoine would come home while knitting. She goes outside to chop wood. Beck comes out and asks to help her saying his mother would expect him to. His kindness makes her uncomfortable.

Rachel arrives to walk to school with Vianne and Sophie. As they leave, Beck sees them and Vianne introduces Rachel. Rachel comments to Vianne that Beck is handsome. Rachel says Vianne is lucky to have someone like Beck since the other Germans are worse.

After chalking the poster, Isabelle is taken into a room to speak to an old man. She learns the man who caught her is named Didier. She assesses the situation and reveals that she knows none of the men in the room are German. The leader of the group introduces himself as Henri and tells her about a man who is printing leaflets supporting de Gaulle. Henri asks her to distribute them saying she won't be noticed because she's a girl. Isabelle agrees to join them.



Isabelle is thrilled to be part of the effort and the men tell her about dozens of other groups like theirs. She tells them to open the curtains of an empty apartment when they want to contact her. Isabelle stuffs a stack of papers into her shopping basket and runs home. Beck offers to carry the basket and Isabelle worries he'll see the papers. Beck notices she seems nervous. She says the Gestapo were in town with their dogs and she is afraid of dogs. Beck accepts the answer and leaves. Isabelle stuffs the papers into her girdle and goes upstairs.

Isabelle leaves the house at 4 a.m. to distribute the papers. She puts papers in several mailboxes and feels invincible when she finishes. She goes to town for the daily rations and is the first person in line. She receives two-thirds of a cup of butter and it feels like a treasure.

In Chapter 11, Vianne is preparing for winter by planting a larger garden and enclosing the pergola to raise chickens. She worries about Antoine and wonders if he is a prisoner or war. One day Vianne and Sophie are coming through town on their way home from school and they see Isabelle coming from an alley looking furtive. Vianne believes she's been sneaking out of the house to meet a boy.

Sophie runs to Isabelle who slaps her hand away from the basket. As the three walk through town, Vianne tries to ignore the changes to Carriveau. Beck comes up behind them to tell Vianne he won't be home for dinner. She can feel people looking at her with disapproval. Beck quietly tells her that Antoine is a prisoner and gives her a list of names and some official postcards.

Isabelle tries to comfort Vianne saying Antoine will be alright. Vianne says she doesn't know how to be on her own. Isabelle says they've been on their own since their mother died, but Vianne says she wasn't alone because she met Antoine when she was 14. Isabelle reminds her she must learn to be on her own because of Sophie. Vianne goes to Rachel's house and tells her that Marc is also a prisoner.

Three days later, Vianne gathers the wives of the other men on the list in her classroom. She reveals that their husbands are prisoners and gives them postcards to write to them. Someone asks how she got so many postcards and another woman says she asked "her German" for a favor. Vianne protests saying she didn't ask and he's not her German. The women continue to ridicule Vianne until Rachel steps in. They write out their postcards and give them to Vianne as they leave.

Vianne returns home and asks Beck to deliver the postcards. He says he will then asks her for a list of Jews, communists, homosexuals, Freemasons, and Jehovah's Witnesses teaching at the school. She tries to refuse and he tells her he might also be able to deliver a package to Antoine. She finally agrees to give him the names telling herself that the information is public knowledge anyway. When she is done, Beck notes she left Rachel's name off the list, so she adds Rachel.

Chapter 12 begins in November. Vianne sleeps fully clothed because the house is very cold. She counts the money she has stuffed in her mattresses and realizes it will be



gone soon. As she sits and knits a scarf for Sophie for Christmas Isabelle comes in. She asks Isabelle who the boy she's been meeting is and Isabelle says she was just checking on the chickens.

Vianne takes stock of her pantry and how empty it is. She makes Sophie a small breakfast and Sophie complains that the Germans are taking all the food just as Beck enters. Vianne admonishes Sophie and Beck says the Germans don't just take, they also give back to their friends. He pulls a chocolate bar out of his pocket and gives it to Sophie.

Vianne goes to school to teach. A group of men come to dismiss the people Vianne wrote on the list from their jobs. Vianne thinks about the list all morning and finally leaves at noon. She goes to town to confront Beck who had told her the list was just a clerical matter. He apologizes saying that's what he was told. He tells her to leave before she draws attention to herself. As she leaves, she notices soldiers watching her and thinks they probably believe she's just another French woman courting a German soldier. The baker's wife sees her and asks if she was socializing.

Isabelle sees Vianne and asks what she is doing. Vianne tells her about the list and that she thought Beck might be able to help. Isabelle tells her she can't ask the Germans for favors. Vianne asks Isabelle to go to the school to pick up Sophie and Rachel's daughter, Sarah.

Vianne goes to the chapel of St. Jeanne to see Mother Superior Marie-Therese who she's been going to for advice since she was 16. She tells Mother Superior about the list. Mother Superior tells her that people all over town have been dismissed from their jobs, so it's not Vianne's fault. She tells Vianne to stay strong. Vianne says she needs to be more like Isabelle, but Mother Superior says that Isabelle will be tested by the war as well. She invites Vianne to come to the orphanage to teach a lesson.

Vianne goes to Rachel's house and tells her about the list. Rachel is angry and leaves the room. She eventually returns and tells Vianne that she must be more careful. She says that Beck may be polite and handsome, but he is still dangerous.

The winter of 1940 is especially cold, but Isabelle continues to distribute the leaflets. The Nazis have noticed the flyers and are looking for the person distributing them. One morning Isabelle sees notices posted in town about French people being shot for spying and saying that any French person arrested for any crime will be considered a hostage and will be shot for any hostile acts against Germany that occur in France. When she comments on it, a man tells her the notices aren't for beautiful young women like her.

Isabelle sees a bicycle in town and steals it. She takes it to Henri who tells her he will paint it for a kiss. She finds herself wanting things back the way they were before the war when men flirted with her. Isabelle lets Henri kiss her and he notices she seems sad. He says he knows she has someone else and she realizes she thought of Gaetan when Henri was kissing her.



## Analysis

This section of the novel includes the beginning of a major plotline of the novel, which is Isabelle's role in the resistance. To this point, the author has been building up Isabelle's character as a rebellious and impetuous young woman. It is at the point when Isabelle takes the chalk and defaces the propaganda poster that she takes her first active step toward being a part of the resistance. This act leads her to meet Henri, the leader of Cariveau's resistance movement. The author introduces Henri as a charismatic and attractive young man, which is evident by the way Isabelle quickly singles him out as the leader of the group and later allows him to kiss her. Henri tells Isabelle about a man who is risking his life by printing flyers for the resistance. This conversation is a foreshadow of an upcoming scene in which Isabelle will learn the identity of the printer. When Isabelle begins to deliver the flyers she takes a major step toward eventually assuming her identity as the Nightingale.

While the introduction of this new plotline furthers the theme of war in that it more fully introduces the resistance effort, the author also takes other steps in the continuation of the theme. It is at this point in the novel that the author talks about the loss of basic freedoms that occur during times of war. Isabelle tries to leave town to go back to Paris, but discovers that travel is restricted to those who have received a pass. People all over town are also losing their jobs because of their ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation. Rachel loses her job at the school because she is Jewish. In addition, Vianne learns that Antoine and many other men are prisoners of war and will be unable to return to their families.

The author also continues to explore the idea that a person learns who they truly are through war. In beginning to deliver the resistance flyers, Isabelle learns that she is, in fact, the brave person she aspires to be. Meanwhile, Vianne continues to believe that she is a weak woman who is dependent on Antoine to survive. At one point she even tells Rachel and Vianne that she doesn't know how to live on her own because she's never done so. However, when Vianne visits Mother Superior, her part in the war is foreshadowed when she is invited to teach a lesson at the orphanage. Vianne will eventually use her role as a teacher at the orphanage to save Jewish children. Through her efforts to save children, Vianne will learn that she is stronger than she believes she is. During the conversation between Vianne and Mother Superior, the author reiterates that the characters will learn who they are in war when Mother Superior says, "I think, as this war goes on, we will all have to look more deeply. These questions are not about them, but about us." (Chapter 12, paragraph 131) Again, the author is saying that people become more fully themselves in times of war and how they respond to the events around them will show who they really are.

The conversation with Mother Superior also foreshadows the hardships Isabelle will eventually face since Mother Superior tells Vianne that Isabelle will be tested by the war just as they all will be. The conversation is a bit ominous and leads the reader to wonder what trials may be coming for both Isabelle and Vianne.



Isabelle's induction into the resistance provides opportunity for the author to continue the theme of the perception of women as well. When Isabelle stands reading the notices that indicate French citizens will be shot for acting against the Nazis, a man tells her not to worry about it because the posters aren't meant for pretty girls like Isabelle. He clearly believes that she couldn't possibly be a part of the resistance because she's just a girl and, therefore, incapable of such acts.

Vianne herself perpetuates the theme of the perception of women when she mistakenly believes Isabelle has been sneaking out in the morning to meet a boy when she has actually been delivering flyers. The thought that her sister might be risking her life for what she believes in never even crosses Vianne's mind.

The theme of love is represented by Vianne's thoughts of Antoine. When she learns that many of the French soldiers have been taken prisoner, Vianne is struck by the thought that she has never been alone and doesn't believe she can handle it now. She reminds Rachel and Isabelle that although her mother died when she was young and she was left to raise Isabelle, she was never truly alone because she met Antoine shortly after coming to Le Jardin to live. Antoine is her true love and she depends on him. Love as a theme is also illustrated through Vianne's organization of a meeting to inform the other wives of Carriveau about the imprisonment of their husbands. Vianne recognizes that she is not the only person waiting for someone she loves to come home. She even agrees to see to it that the postcards reach their recipients in spite of the fact that the women treat her rather cruelly.

Another example of the theme of love occurs when Henri agrees to paint Isabelle's bicycle in return for a kiss. The scene is significant because it shows that Isabelle is still thinking of Gaetan, thus the author indicates that Gaetan's part in the story may not be over yet. In addition, Isabelle's thoughts about the emptiness of the kiss and her longing for a time when she enjoyed flirtation show that she is changing from the reckless girl she was at the beginning of the book.

The theme of loss is closely tied with the theme of love throughout the novel and that is especially apparent in this section as Vianne learns that she has lost Antoine to the prisoner of war camp and he will not be coming home. Vianne very nearly breaks down when she realizes that Antoine will not be coming home to make things right again. She is somewhat frantic when she tells Rachel and Isabelle that she cannot live on her own and wakes some mornings with tears on her cheeks because she has been dreaming of Antoine.

The theme of family is illustrated primarily through Vianne and Isabelle's interactions. Vianne is frustrated by her sister's dangerously rebellious attitude around the Nazis. She is angry, but at the same time, she loves Isabelle and regrets having abandoned her when she was a child. Vianne recognizes that she and Isabelle have both experienced abandonment at the hands of family. She knows that their past inextricably bonds them to one another. Though Isabelle may be a danger to Vianne and Sophie, Vianne seeks to keep Isabelle in Carriveau and argues with her when she says she is going to return to Paris.



The author also looks at family from the perspective of the "enemy" during Beck's conversation with Vianne in Chapter 9. Beck tells Vianne that he is married, has a daughter, and also has a baby on the way. The author again presents the idea that the enemy in war might also be a person who is suffering when Vianne thinks about how human Beck sounds as he talks about his family. She realizes that he, too, just wants the whole thing to be over with.

The character of Beck continues to be a grey character in that the reader still does not know if he is meant to be a good guy or a bad guy. On one hand, Beck tries to be helpful to Vianne. He chops wood for her and brings wine to dinner as though he were simply a guest at a dinner party. He reveals personal details about himself and his life and provides Vianne with a list of names of men from Carriveau who have been imprisoned. However, the author provides clues that his actions may have some underlying sinister motive. Beck tells Sophie that the Nazis give back to those who are friendly to their cause and then gives her a candy bar as though to lure Sophie and Vianne into believing him. The presentation of the candy is done in a cat-and-mouse manner since Beck waves the candy in front of Sophie and then makes it disappear before finally giving it to her. The scene comes off as ominous and leaves the reader wondering if Beck might not be the good person he tries to portray himself to be in front of Vianne. Furthermore, while it's true that Beck does help Vianne by providing a list of imprisoned men, the list comes at a cost when Beck asks her for a list of names in return. Rachel reminds Vianne that even though Beck is handsome and appears to be a gentleman, he is still the enemy and he is dangerous.

The author provides an additional example of symbolism in the bicycle that Isabelle steals. Isabelle sees the bicycle and it's almost as though she cannot control her feelings of rebellion. She grabs the bicycle and furiously pedals away on it. The bicycle will prove to be an important tool in Isabelle's part in the resistance and it symbolizes her desire to take risks for what she believes in.

## Discussion Question 1

How does Isabelle know that Henri is the leader of the resistance? What characteristics does Henri have that indicate he is a leader?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Vianne continue to fight to keep Isabelle at Le Jardin even though she could be a danger to Sophie?

## Discussion Question 3

How does Vianne perpetuate the misperception of women in her treatment of Isabelle?

## Vocabulary

stern, sentry, obliterating, defacing, queues, furtive, requisitioned, vulnerable, clerical, meek





# Chapters 13-16

## Summary

Chapter 13 begins in April 1941 with Isabelle lying on a blanket in the field. Vianne brings her a note that says "the curtains are open," which was delivered by Henri. The note is summoning her to meet with the resistance. When Isabelle arrives at the meeting she is asked to take a letter to their contact in Paris. Henri also tells her they want her to stay in Paris to receive future letters. He tells her it will be dangerous. She will have to lie to everyone she loves and she will always be afraid. Isabelle accepts the mission.

Meanwhile, Vianne agonizes over the idea of Isabelle receiving notes from a man as though she were a girl in school. She believes Isabelle still doesn't realize her actions might have consequences.

Beck and three German soldiers come to Vianne's house and tear down her stone wall saying they have orders to do so. Vianne is disturbed to realize she knows Beck well enough to be able to tell he's unhappy about having to ruin the wall.

Isabelle arrives home and asks Beck about the wall. He says the Germans want to be able to see the houses from the road because someone has been delivering anti-German propaganda. Isabelle changes the topic and tells Beck her father is sick and she needs a pass to go see him. Beck agrees to get her one. When Beck leaves, Vianne asks Isabelle about their father and Isabelle admits she lied. She then tells Vianne that she's been sneaking out to see Henri and he wants her to go to Paris with him. She pretends it's a romantic trip.

Chapter 14 returns to 1995 and the elderly woman is in a car feeling trapped by her seatbelt. She thinks about how her generation didn't expect to be protected from all danger. Her son is driving and they arrive at the retirement community she is moving to. Julien takes her to her room and reminds her that she could still come to live with him instead. She knows her death will devastate him. He hands her a stack of mail. In it is a letter from Paris that invites her to a reunion of passuers. She thinks about how if she goes she will remember all of the terrible things she's done and the man she killed. Julien asks her what a passuer is and she explains that it's someone who helped people in the war.

Chapter 15 returns to 1941. Isabelle has left for Paris and Vianne has been trying to keep busy. Beck brings her fish he's caught. She hesitates because she knows she shouldn't accept the gift. Beck senses her hesitation and says he caught it, so it wasn't stolen or demanded from anyone. Vianne takes the fish and cooks it. When she brings it to the table Beck is sitting in Antoine's chair and he offers to serve her wine. Beck carries on a conversation and Vianne thinks how odd it is for him to do so since he



hadn't talked much in the past. She realizes that with Isabelle gone, the tension is gone, too.

Isabelle arrives in Paris. She has brought her bicycle with her. She gets on it and pedals to her father's bookshop. The bookshop is in disarray, so Isabelle leaves quickly. She goes to her father's apartment and her father isn't there, either. She thinks about the past and that she is there again to beg him to let her stay.

Her father comes home and Isabelle says she's come to live with him. He's irritated that she left Vianne and Sophie alone with Beck. Julien demands she return to Carriveau and she refuses, saying this is her home and she has the right to stay. He tells her that there are no parties for her to attend and the college boys have all gone. She is disappointed that that is all he thinks of her.

Isabelle tells Julien she has seen the store and asks what he is doing for work. He tells her he is working for the German high command at the Hotel de Crillon. This upsets Isabelle and she calls him a coward. Julien tells her she has no idea what he's been through. Julien tells Isabelle that if she is going to stay, she must follow his rules.

Isabelle goes to her room and into her secret room that she accesses through a small door hidden behind the armoire. It is just as she left it. She can hear her father writing, drinking, and cursing in the next room.

Isabelle reflects on her relationship with her father and thinks he doesn't even want to be in the same room as her. Her father pounds on her door and tells her he is leaving for work and she is to go pick up the rations. He leaves and Isabelle remembers that this is the day she is to deliver the message. She dresses as though she's going out for lunch and brings a handbag with the message hidden in it. When she arrives at the meeting place, she feels a little fear for the first time.

Isabelle sits on a bench and a woman sits next to her. She speaks the pass phrase and the woman responds appropriately. They get up and go to a cafe where Isabelle hands the message to the woman under the table. The woman tells Isabelle about French people who collaborate with the Germans and instructs her to trust no one, not even her father. She tells Isabelle that her group wants to meet Isabelle and gives her instructions on where to go. As she leaves the café she bumps into a German soldier and smoothly smiles an "actress's smile" at him. She has a sense of accomplishment for completing the task.

As Chapter 16 begins, Vianne is thinking about how much easier life has gotten since Isabelle left, yet she also feels like the house is too quiet without her. Her money is almost gone and she wonders how they'll make it on her teaching salary. She gets Sophie up and they go to town.

They see a new propaganda poster and a sign saying "No Jews Allowed" at the butcher's shop. Sophie asks what it means and Vianne tells her some things aren't talked about. Vianne asks the woman handing out the meat where Madame Fournier is



and the woman tells her Jews aren't allowed. The shop is no longer Madame Fournier's shop.

When they get back home, Sophie angrily asks Vianne how they can take Madame Fournier's shop and why Vianne didn't do anything about it like Isabelle would. Vianne asks Sophie what she'd like her to do about it and reminds her that French people are being executed. Sophie says she wishes Antoine were there and they hug. Vianne announces they will be making pickles and Sophie goes to the garden to get cucumbers. Vianne wonders how they'll make it through the winter.

When Vianne goes into the house she is startled to find Beck in the living room reading a book. He notices she's upset and asks if it's because she's not sleeping since her sister left. He hears her walking around at night. She notes that he is not sleeping either and he says he thinks about his family. She tells him she thinks about Antoine, too. Beck tells Vianne he has located Antoine and gives her a letter from him. The letter assures her that Antoine is alright and he asks for his hunting gloves for the cold winter ahead.

In Paris, Isabelle readies herself to meet the resistance group there. She thinks of herself as an actress playing a role and dresses as a schoolgirl going to meet a boy. A man speaks the pass phrase and then takes her arm and leads her away. He tells her to close her eyes as they walk and she does so. He takes her to a dark room where there are other people. She recognizes Levy, a patron of her father's shop. He tells her that her outspokenness could get them all killed and a woman comments that she's very young. Isabelle says she has dressed younger today and asks if they'd suspect a young girl of anything illegal. Isabelle states that a woman can do anything a man can. She learns the woman she delivered the message to is named Anouk. The group accepts her and Levy says she'll need a new identity, which they will get for her. He tells her that she cannot tell anyone, even family, about her association with them. Anouk gives her a package to deliver.

As they talk about Isabelle's next delivery, an old man brings an RAF pilot to the room. Isabelle knows the penalty for helping British airmen is death. She realizes the man doesn't speak French and tells him in English that they are going to get him some different clothes. Anouk is surprised to learn she speaks English. Isabelle tells the pilot they are on his side and they will help.

Levy asks Isabelle where they can contact her and she says she is going to reopen the bookshop. They talk about her father working for the Nazis and Levy cautions her that it's time for her to grow up and do as she's told now. Anouk tells her that if she's caught, the Germans will treat her as a woman and they have "special unpleasanties" for women. She is told that if she is caught, they ask that she not say anything for two days.

Isabelle begins delivering packages and tells her father she is reopening the bookshop, which makes him angry. She says she knows the Germans will buy books from her. He tells her the storeroom in the back is his and he will keep it locked. She asks if he uses



the room to have affairs with women and he tells her it's a good thing her mother isn't alive to see what she's become.

## Analysis

In this section, the author continues to build mystery and suspense, drawing the reader further into the story. The reader is still left wondering which sister is the elderly woman who again makes an appearance in Chapter 14. The author provides yet another clue to her identity by indicating that she was involved in helping people during the war and that she killed a man. These details lead the reader to believe that the woman is likely Isabelle since the reader already knows Isabelle is involved in the war. And, at this point in the story, it seems somewhat unlikely that Vianne would be capable of killing someone. In addition, the elderly woman talks about how her generation knew about risks and accepted them. These words are later mirrored when Isabelle thinks about the risks of becoming a courier for the resistance.

Another mystery the author develops surrounds Isabelle's and Vianne's father, Julien. Isabelle believes he is a broken old man who has given in to working for the Germans. She sees him as a man who sits scribbling and drinking into the night. However, with one statement, Julien indicates there may be something more to him. He tells Isabelle that she has no idea what he's been through. The reader might initially think that he's simply talking about having been a soldier in the last war or about having lost his wife since Vianne has mentioned both of these things in the past. However, as the story continues, this will prove to be a clue as to Julien's real identity and involvement in the current war.

The plotline of Isabelle's part in the resistance effort is moved forward through her arrival in Paris to serve as a courier for the Paris faction of the Free French. Vianne, meanwhile, remains the more passive sister who is only trying to survive and keep her daughter safe. Isabelle's involvement in the movement in a more active way also allows the author to show growth in the character. Isabelle, for the first time, begins to realize the real danger that is inherent in what she is doing. She feels her first tingle of fear when she waits at the designated place to deliver her first package. When she meets the Paris faction, she again feels some fear as she is led, with her eyes closed, into a darkened room. She is reminded again of the danger when the British airman is brought into the room and she realizes they could all be executed for helping him. However, the author makes it clear that she hasn't completely accepted the real danger she is in when Isabelle tells Anouk that two days isn't so long to hold out if she is captured. Isabelle doesn't seem to realize that she won't just be imprisoned, she'll be tortured.

The move forward in Isabelle's plotline also allows the author to further examine the theme of war and how it makes a person who they truly are. Isabelle is told repeatedly that she must lie to everyone she knows. She lies about her father being ill and then tells Vianne that she's going to Paris to be with Henri. She also lies to her father about her reason for being in Paris. The author isn't suggesting that Isabelle is really a liar, but instead that she is a woman of extraordinary strength who is capable of lying to protect



those she loves. She also becomes a woman who is grounded enough in her convictions to stand up to her father.

In addition, the theme of war is discussed through the privileges that are taken away in war times. Vianne loses the privacy that her rock wall affords when the Germans decide to knock down all walls that prevent them from seeing houses from the road. The reader knows this action is a direct result of Isabelle's involvement in the resistance since the reason Beck gives is that someone has been distributing anti-German propaganda. Businesses are also taken away from people. Madame Fournier loses her butcher shop simply because she's Jewish.

The theme of family is represented primarily through Isabelle's return to Paris. She feels as though she's once again begging her father to let her stay, just as she did when she was younger and ran away from boarding schools. The difference is that Isabelle is no longer desperate to be with her father, but instead wants to play her part in the resistance. This makes her able to weather her father's acerbic comments and stand her ground. Julien shows that he is still connected to his family in that he is concerned for Vianne and Sophie who have been left alone with a Nazi since Isabelle has returned to Paris. Both Isabelle and Julien show their disappointment in each other and what they believe the other has become. Julien tells Isabelle he is glad that her mother isn't alive to see her today and Isabelle says the same is true for him. Of course, the reader knows that Isabelle isn't really the silly girl her family believes her to be.

This truth about Isabelle, of course, allows the author to continue to explore the perception of women. Both Julien and Vianne believe Isabelle is just a silly girl and she allows them to continue to believe that since it enables her to carry out her work with the Free French. In fact, Isabelle plays into the role as she goes about delivering packages because she knows that others see her as just a pretty girl with nothing more serious on her mind than meeting boys, going to parties, and having lunch. She tells the Paris faction that their perception of her as a young girl is her strength because if they are thinking it, the Germans are as well. Isabelle sees herself as an actress and dresses for the role she chooses on the day she makes a delivery. She learns to give the Germans her "actress's smile" and move on swiftly. Isabelle reminds Anouk, and the reader, that women are capable of anything that men are.

The author also continues to look at the theme of loss. When Isabelle goes to Paris, Vianne loses yet another family member to the war. Although she acknowledges that life is easier without Isabelle there, she clearly misses Isabelle since she isn't sleeping at night and notices how quiet the house has become. Beck recognizes her loss and reveals that he doesn't sleep at night either. Instead, he lies awake thinking about his family and worrying that his son won't know him. The author describes their feelings as a "shared loss," thus acknowledging that there is loss on both sides of a war. Vianne's sense of loss over Antoine's imprisonment is driven home by the letter she receives from him. The letter reassures her that he is alive and uninjured, but his words of love remind the reader of how deep their relationship is and how difficult the loss is for Vianne.



There are a couple of instances of foreshadowing that are of note. Isabelle goes into the secret room that is hidden behind the armoire in her bedroom in Paris. The detail might seem unimportant to the reader, but it foreshadows Isabelle's upcoming involvement in hiding downed pilots from the Germans. Her involvement is also foreshadowed when she is able to speak English to the RAF pilot and therefore able to help in his rescue. Julien's involvement in the war is foreshadowed by the way he tells Isabelle that he will keep the storeroom in the back of his shop and that it will remain locked. The author will later reveal that the storeroom is used for creating the anti-German propaganda that Isabelle has been helping to distribute.

Also of note is the development of Beck's character and the relationship between Beck and Vianne. Beck continues to treat Vianne with kindness. He brings her a fish he's caught and delivers a letter from Antoine. With Isabelle gone, Beck seems to feel more at ease and carries on a conversation with Vianne during dinner. However, the reader can't help but wonder if Beck is putting on an act to achieve his goals in much the same way Isabelle puts on an act to achieve her goals. There is, again, something sinister in the way Beck leaves his motorcycle in town and sits quietly reading in the living room. It's almost as though he's hiding there in hopes that he'll catch Vianne doing something wrong. In this way, the author draws out the suspense and leaves the reader wondering which direction the relationship between Beck and Vianne will take.

## Discussion Question 1

How does Isabelle use the way Vianne and Julien see her to aid her in performing her role in the resistance?

## Discussion Question 2

How does the relationship between Beck and Vianne change after Isabelle leaves? What do you think of Beck now? Is he good or bad?

## Discussion Question 3

Why is Isabelle finally able to stand up to her father and insist she be allowed to stay in Paris?

## Vocabulary

infractions, reluctance, requisition, perceptible, trussed, precision, colleague, pursuits, lorries, retaliation



# Chapters 17-20

## Summary

Chapter 17 begins with Vianne in her classroom teaching her students. The Gestapo and a local gendarme who is collaborating with the Nazis take a teacher away accusing him of distributing anti-German propaganda. When Vianne questions them, they ask if she helps him with the distribution. She tells him she doesn't and they fire her, telling her she shouldn't ask questions.

Vianne considers sending Antoine a letter telling him she's out of money and has no job, but realizes she can't send him such news when he is a prisoner. Beck comes in and informs her he's leaving for a few weeks to see his wife. He says he's not the man he was when he left two years ago and things change when couples are apart so long. Vianne agrees and a nightingale sings a sad song.

Beck notices Vianne is upset and she tells him about her job loss. Beck tries to comfort her and tells her she is beautiful. She tells him he shouldn't say such things and he says she is right. He assures her that Sophie will not starve and Vianne is relieved.

Isabelle has reopened the shop and Germans soldiers crowd into the shop having heard about the pretty girl at the counter. Isabelle flirts with them, but never forgets they are the enemy. Anouk enters the shop. The two women have become good friends. Anouk delivers a message tucked into a book.

On her way home that evening Isabelle finds an RAF pilot hiding near a café. She tells him to meet her in an hour and if he comes without being seen, she will help him. The pilot arrives at the designated time and she hides him in her secret room. She takes his flight suit and throws it into the river. When her father gets home he thinks he hears someone in the apartment. He searches, but doesn't find the pilot. Julien tells her it would do her some good to have some fear and that she should be afraid of everyone.

In Chapter 18 Isabelle tells the pilot, whose name is MacLeish, she will take him to her friends to help him get back to Britain. He tells her she is brave. She says she's often accused of being foolish. MacLeish assures her that he'll hear nothing but brave from him. When her father leaves for work, Isabelle gives MacLeish clothes to put on. They plan for him to follow a block behind her as she leads him to her friends.

Levy and Anouk are shocked that Isabelle has brought a pilot to them and tell her she wasn't thinking. They say they can't get anyone over the borders. Anouk suggests they go over the Pyrenees into Spain, but agrees with Levy that it's nearly impossible. Isabelle tells them that nearly impossible and impossible are not the same thing and that no one would suspect a pretty girl. Gaetan enters from the other room and Isabelle's feelings for him come flooding back. Levy tells him about Isabelle's plan. They finally agree to let Isabelle lead the pilot and the planning begins.



When Isabelle leaves for the night Gaetan is waiting for her. He tells her that it was he who recommended her to Henri. He apologizes for hurting her, then leaves. When she gets home her father tells her that he knows she hid an airman in her secret room. He also tells her he knows she works as a courier for the underground and that she is planning to take an airman over the mountains. He tells her to look for Micheline Babineau, her mother's friend who will help her on her journey. He also tells her that he forges papers for the resistance and is the one who writes the papers she had been delivering in Carriveau. He tells her he hopes she never knows how fragile she is and that everyone is fragile in war.

At the beginning of Chapter 19 Isabelle reads a notice stating that men who aid the foreign airman will be shot and women will be sent to concentration camps. She thinks she is lucky to be a woman. She thinks about how from now on she is to be known as Juliette Gervaise and her codename is the Nightingale. The airman has been trained to behave inconspicuously. She is to connect with two other airmen on the train. Once she reaches Spain she will send a message indicating the Nightingale has sung to signal her success.

They reach the mountains and Isabelle meets Madame Babineau. They are cautious in their greetings and reveal little about themselves. Isabelle asks Madame Babineau to help her find a guide to get through the Pyrenees. Madame Babineau introduces her to Eduardo who agrees to guide them.

Madame Babineau wakes Isabelle in the middle of the night to begin the journey. She offers Isabelle real coffee saying that no one suspects a woman of her age of anything so she is able to make trades. The journey is brutal and Isabelle does her best to keep the spirits of the men up as they travel. She talks with the men as they travel and learns a bit about their lives, which she uses to encourage them to keep going. When they reach Spain, they must take a rope bridge to cross a gorge. Isabelle lies to the men and tells them she's crossed it many times. They reach Spain safely and Eduardo tells Isabelle he will help her again in the future. Isabelle takes the men to the consulate and the man there is shocked to learn a girl has lead pilots across the Pyrenees.

In Chapter 20 Isabelle finds it easy to get back into France since she is a pretty young girl. She returns on a train and feels conspicuous because of her rough appearance after her journey. However, she recognizes that the real changes are within herself. When she reaches her apartment she gets the feeling that Gaetan is following her, but he doesn't show himself. She thinks that love is the most dangerous risk she could take.

Vianne is suffering due to the especially cold winter. She has no wood to burn and very little food to eat. Beck has been gone for some time and she wishes he'd come back because at least then there would be food and wood for the fire. Vianne goes to the barn to get her mother's pearls from the cellar so that she can sell them to get food for Sophie.

Vianne wakes up sick one morning, but takes Sophie to church anyway. The sermon encourages the congregation to remain loyal and resist the enemy. On the way home,





Vianne collapses just outside of her house. Beck has returned and he carries her into the house. He tells Sophie to go and get Rachel. Beck tells Rachel that Vianne doesn't eat, but gives Sophie all the food. Rachel tells Vianne she must eat some so she does not die and leave Sophie alone. Vianne sleeps for a day and when she wakes, Beck is there taking care of her.

Isabelle meets two more airmen she is to take to Spain. She is getting used to being asked if she has a husband. She interrogates the men until she's sure they are who they say they are.

In the spring, Vianne works in her garden. The Nazis no longer pretend to be polite and she has learned about collaborators. One day Sarah asks Vianne to come see Rachel because there is something wrong. Rachel shows Vianne the yellow stars the Jews are to wear. Sarah and Rachel come in the room and Vianne notices how changed they are and the way they cling together. Rachel explains to Sarah that they must wear the stars. Sophie says she'll wear one, too, but Rachel tells her this is something the friends can't do together.

## Analysis

The plotline involving Isabelle's involvement in the resistance takes a major leap forward as she becomes the Nightingale. Isabelle takes on the daunting task of transporting pilots through the Pyrenees mountains. In doing so, she is given a new identity with papers that identify her as Juliette Gervaise. The new identity is necessary so that if she is captured, she cannot be traced back to her family and friends. This new identity is one of the many lies Henri warned her in Chapter 13 that she would have to tell in order to protect those she loves. In accepting her new role, Isabelle is given the codename "Nightingale." Isabelle's leap into her role as the Nightingale occurs when a foreshadow in Chapter 15 is fulfilled through the hiding of a pilot in Isabelle's secret room. While readers may assume that the novel gets its title from Isabelle's codename, this is only partially true as Vianne will also become a nightingale of sorts as the story continues.

Another major development in the plot occurs when Madame Babineau is introduced. Madame Babineau serves as a link between Isabelle's past and her future. She was a close friend of Isabelle's mother and will prove to be the same to Isabelle when the novel takes a still darker turn in the chapters to come. Madame Babineau is instrumental in the transport of men through the mountains. She is an excellent illustration of the theme of the perception of women. She tells Isabelle that she is still able to make good trades to get things like coffee because no one would ever suspect a woman of her age. This undoubtedly could not be said of a man of the same age.

The theme of the perception of women is also continued through Isabelle's new role. In fact, she takes on the role because she knows that she has the best chance of succeeding due to being a young, attractive girl. She tells her friends in the resistance that she will be able to get away with it because the Germans would never expect someone like her to do such a dangerous thing. When she arrives at the consulate in



Spain, the man there is shocked that a woman could have travelled through the mountains to bring the pilots to safety.

As Isabelle assumes her new role, others begin to see her for the brave woman she truly is. This shift is apparent when MacLeish tells her she is brave and she says others do not see her that way. MacLeish, however, insists she'll never hear anything but brave from him. Through the pilots and their gratitude for her assistance, Isabelle receives acknowledgement of her true self. This, of course, fits right in with the author's idea that people become who they truly are in war. Finally, others are beginning to see who Isabelle is.

Isabelle's indomitable spirit shines through as she transports her first group of pilots through the mountain. She talks to the men and gets to know a bit about each of them. When one pilot nearly gives up, she reminds him that he has loved ones waiting for him, which gives him the strength to go on. Isabelle remains, at her core, the upbeat optimist that she has always been.

Vianne, too, takes a step toward becoming her true self when she first dares to question the Germans about what they are doing. This occurs when the Germans and a French policeman come to the school to fire a teacher because they believe he's involved in distributing anti-German propaganda. Vianne dares to step forward and question their actions. Unfortunately, this leads to her being fired. Vianne's job loss, though, will make it possible for her to later take on her own role in resisting German rule.

The author also reveals that through war, Julien became his true self. Isabelle learns that her father is not a broken old man who works for the Germans to protect himself. Instead, Julien reveals to her that he is the man responsible for printing the flyers she had been helping to deliver in Carriveau. Far from being a German collaborator, Julien has been a member of the resistance all along. Through this revelation, the reader begins to understand that Julien may have distanced himself from his daughters in order to protect them. Yet, he clearly cares about his daughters and, though he's apprehensive about Isabelle's involvement in the resistance, he provides her with the name of Madame Babineau as someone who may be able to help Isabelle in her efforts.

Julien's protection of his daughters ties into the theme of family. The author often portrays characters making difficult decisions in order to protect family. In this section, Vianne desperately wants to write Antoine a long letter telling him of her hardships and job loss, but realizes she must stifle those thoughts because writing a letter of that nature to Antoine while he is being held prisoner and unable to help her would only cause him pain. Instead, Vianne chooses to protect Sophie by selling her mother's pearls. The pearls symbolize Vianne's childhood as they are the last thing she has of her mother and had been intended for Sophie when she became an adult. In selling the pearls, Vianne is selling what is left of her mother.

The theme of love returns to the relationship between Isabelle and Gaetan when the two are reunited. Isabelle immediately feels a rush of emotions when she sees Gaetan. She becomes so aware of his proximity to her that when she returns from transporting



the pilots she can feel him following her. However, Isabelle realizes that love may be too great a risk to take. By this, Isabelle means that if she allows herself to love Gaetan and then loses him to the war, it may be more than she can stand. She may also be indicating that love might make her take foolish risks.

A conversation between Beck and Vianne allows the author to further examine the loss that is inherent in war. Beck tells Vianne that he needs to go home to see his wife because when people who love one another are apart for too long, things change between them. Beck is acknowledging that the war has caused him to lose his family, at least for the time being, and may claim them altogether if he isn't able to see them. Vianne acknowledges the loss. In this scene, the author returns to the symbolism of jasmine when Vianne catches its scent on the breeze that moves around her and Beck, which makes her think of the night she said goodbye to Antoine. The author also again utilizes the nightingale as a symbol of loss when the bird sings a "sad and lonely song." (Chapter 17, paragraph 50)

Also of note in this scene is the change in the relationship between Beck and Vianne. Their admission of the losses they've endured because of the war draw them closer together. There is an unmistakable romantic tension between them that neither is comfortable with. Beck tells Vianne she is beautiful and she quickly moves away and reminds Beck he shouldn't talk that way. While he agrees with her, he also tells her that Sophie will not starve, indicating that he will take care of them. Vianne is grateful for his help, but immediately feels guilty since she knows that he is still the enemy.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does the author mention the smell of jasmine when Beck and Vianne talk about Beck needing to return to his family?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Isabelle think love might be the biggest risk she could take?

## Discussion Question 3

What makes Madame Babineau able to help Isabelle in transporting soldiers over the mountains?

## Vocabulary

terminated, miserly, accord, bistro, sheepishly, yarmulke, compatriots, shambled, breeches, terrain, formidable, graffiti



# Chapters 21-24

## Summary

In Chapter 21 it is summer and very hot. Sophie is ill and running a fever. Sophie screams out deliriously and Beck comes to the room. Vianne says she can't get medicine at any price. Beck hands her a small bottle of antibiotics and Vianne realizes there will be some price to pay for it, but takes it anyway.

Isabelle arrives at the consulate in Spain having brought airmen across again. One airman wouldn't follow her orders because she is female and had gone off on his own which resulted in his being arrested. She has now brought 87 airmen across the Pyrenees. Her contact, Ian, advises her that the Germans are looking for the Nightingale and she should slow down. She refuses and says she'll be careful.

Isabelle is missing Vianne and Sophie and thinks about how Vianne had offered her a home, but she hadn't seen it at the time. However, she knows she cannot put Vianne in danger now. As she walks through Paris, Anouk appears and tells her that the Germans are recruiting women for clerical work and it's all very secretive. Paul has gotten Isabelle a position.

Isabelle dresses plainly in brown clothing so she won't stand out and goes to the place where she is to do the work. She is given a box of cards with names on them and is told to separate the foreign born Jews from those born in France. She comes across Paul Levy's card and slides it up her sleeve, then leaves. She goes to her father and they speculate about what the cards could mean. Later, they receive a pamphlet that warns them that all foreign born Jews will be deported to camps in Germany. They decide to help their Jewish friends in their building to hide. When the French police come for Madame Vizniak, they tell her they are only taking her and not her children because they are French born. Isabelle knows she cannot do more because she can't risk being discovered as the Nightingale.

In Chapter 22 Isabelle goes out into the streets to see what is going on as Jews are being rounded up. She sees buses full of women and children. She asks a French policeman where they are going and he urges her to leave because they are to shoot anyone who tries to escape. People are being herded toward the stadium. She learns from one French policeman that even the women and children are being taken to work camps.

Vianne and Sophie get a small amount of cheese and a loaf of bread for their rations. They take half to Rachel and Sarah. Beck comes to Rachel's house and tells Vianne that Rachel should not be home the next morning. He tells Rachel that her children are of no concern because they were born in France. After he leaves, Rachel asks Vianne if she trusts Beck and she says she does. Vianne says she will hide Rachel in the cellar in the barn.



That night she gives Sophie a sleeping draft and then goes downstairs where she finds Beck looking at a photo of his family. He wonders what his family will think of him when he returns. Vianne says she worries about what Antoine will think as well. Beck advises her to help Rachel escape and suggests a route. Vianne goes to Rachel's house and they travel through the woods. When they say goodbye, Rachel gets in line to exit through the gate and a guard fires on the crowd. Sarah is shot and they run back toward Vianne's house. Sarah dies and Vianne tells Rachel she and Ari must go into the cellar. Rachel doesn't know how to go on without Sarah and Vianne tells her she must for Ari. Vianne buries Sarah with the babies she lost.

Chapter 23 begins just as Vianne has finished burying Sarah. She thinks about Antoine and how she'd like to tell him she doesn't know what is the right thing anymore, to keep Sophie safe or accept a world where people are killed because they pray to a different God. Beck is waiting for Vianne when she goes inside as though he was worried about her.

Vianne and Sophie spend the day in Carriveau and nothing seems amiss. When they go home, Sophie asks if she can visit Sarah and Vianne tells her that Sarah died. She sees nothing but anger in Sophie's eyes. Vianne encourages her to tie a bit of cloth to the tree with the yarn she put their for Antoine.

Vianne gets Rachel out of the cellar and they go to Rachel's house. The police arrive to take her away. Vianne runs after the car and goes with Rachel. When they arrive at the train station Vianne sees Beck there with a whip in his hand. Rachel begs Vianne to take Ari and save him. Vianne realizes she doesn't want Sophie to grow up in a world where good people don't try to stop evil, so she takes Ari. When she returns home with Ari she tells Sophie that Rachel has been deported for being Jewish and not born in France and that Ari will stay with them.

After dinner, Vianne goes to the yard to tie lace from her collar to the tree for Rachel. Beck arrives and she asks where his whip is. He says they've all been put in positions they don't like because of the war. She asks if the Germans will eventually come for Ari and he says he believes that all Jews will be deported. He tells her he wants to protect her. The two nearly kiss and she pushes him away.

Chapter 24 begins in the fall. Isabelle is in Paris on her way to the train. The air raid sirens sound and is confronted by a German soldier as she approaches the train carrying a bouquet with a message for Anouk wrapped inside. She shows the soldier her papers and boards the train. She meets Anouk at a bistro and Anouk tells her Gaetan will be at the meeting in Carriveau. She says Isabelle is transparent and it's obvious how she feels about Gaetan, but it reminds Anouk what they are fighting for.

Isabelle arrives in Carriveau and Henri greets her. He had been worried about her because the Germans had begun to see the involvement of women in the resistance and were arresting them. He tells her the Nazis are desperate to find the Nightingale. Isabelle asks after Vianne, and Henri tells Isabelle that Vianne was fired from her



teaching job because she questioned an officer and that there is gossip about Vianne and Beck.

Vianne has been caring for Ari, but can't take him anywhere because he doesn't have papers. Beck comes while she is making dinner. Both pretend that nothing happened between them. He gives her a false birth certificate for Ari renaming him Daniel. That night Vianne tells Ari that Rachel is dead and she will be his mother from now on. She tells him his new name is Daniel.

## Analysis

In this section Vianne begins to shift further toward her eventual role in the war. She witnesses the death of Sarah and the capture of Rachel and it seems to push her over the edge toward becoming, as the author suggests, who she really is due to the war. Vianne realizes she can no longer sit back and only protect Sophie while evil occurs around her. When Vianne sees the look of anger in Sophie's eyes at the loss of Sarah, it seems to be the final impetus for Vianne to take action. She does not hesitate to take Ari into her family even though it may bring danger to herself and Sophie.

In addition to Vianne's shift, this section also further explores the theme of war by including scenes of mothers and children being ripped from each other as they are taken to work camps. Both Vianne and Isabelle witness such things. While Vianne is able to save Ari, Isabelle finds herself unable to help her neighbors because of her role as the Nightingale. Isabelle knows that if she were to help, it would draw attention to her and might endanger her ability to fulfill her duty as the Nightingale.

The theme of loss is most clearly and heartbreakingly evident in the death of Sarah and in Rachel being sent to a work camp. The scene of Sarah's death is told in agonizing, chaotic, and colorful detail, describing the red bursts of the bullets, the sound of the machine guns, and Sarah's colorless lips as she dies. These details allow the reader to fully picture the scene and feel Rachel's grief at the loss of her daughter. Because of the war, however, Rachel and Vianne cannot even spend time in grief for the child. Instead, Vianne must rush Rachel into the cellar to hide and bury Sarah alongside the graves of her lost babies. Before being rushed into the barn, Rachel has only a moment to wonder how she can live without her child. Of course, Vianne's answer to that is that Rachel has no choice but to go on because she has Ari to take care of.

Upon Sarah's death, the author again returns to the symbolism of the cloth pieces tied to the tree. Vianne explains to Sophie that she has been tying cloth to the tree to help remember those who are lost and those who are missing. She encourages Sophie to tie a bit of lace on the tree to represent Sarah.

Vianne's reminder that a mother must take care of her children and cannot take the time to fall apart ties into the theme of family. The author often points out that parents must do the impossible when it comes to their children. When Rachel is taken to the work camp, she gives Vianne her son rather than keeping him with her. This separation from



her child is more acceptable to Rachel than bringing him with her to suffer. Also in this section, Vianne makes the decision to accept a bottle of antibiotics from Beck when Sarah becomes ill. Accepting a gift from the enemy goes against everything Vianne believes and she knows it comes with a price, but she also knows that it is the only choice she can make because her daughter needs it.

Also within the theme of family is Isabelle's missing Vianne while she is in Paris. Though the two sisters rarely get along when they are together, Isabelle begins to realize that Vianne had offered her a home. However, before the war began, Isabelle couldn't see Vianne's offer for what it was. In fact, she never even considered life with Vianne as a choice because she had been so hurt by the way Vianne had sent her away when she was a child and Vianne was unable to care for her. But, with the war, Isabelle sees things in a new light and seems to wonder what her life might have been like if she'd just stayed with Vianne and Sophie. Now Isabelle realizes she no longer has that choice because returning to Le Jardin would put her family in danger. The protection of family members even when that protection seems hurtful is an idea that the author returns to many times. The reader sees it not only in the relationship between Isabelle and Vianne, but also in the relationship of Julien Rossignol and his daughters.

The theme of the perception of women is continued, once again, through Isabelle. In this section, the author includes the fact that even those Isabelle is trying to help sometimes see her as merely a girl. One of the airmen that Isabelle is guiding through the mountains refuses to take orders from a girl and so goes his own way. This results in the airman being captured.

The theme of love is carried on primarily through Isabelle and Gaetan, though it is also illustrated to some extent in the developing relationship between Beck and Vianne. Anouk sees the way Isabelle feels about Gaetan and tells her she is transparent when it comes to her feelings. While both Isabelle and Gaetan believe that their love is a detriment in war, Anouk clearly thinks it's a risk they should take since she tells Isabelle that love is really what they are all fighting for.

The relationship between Beck and Vianne continues to grow in a romantic direction, though both characters know it's wrong. The author paints them both as lonely people who miss their spouses and find a connection over that loss. In this section, once again they share an intimate moment that nearly leads to a kiss before Vianne puts a stop to it.

The author continues to use Beck as the human side of the enemy at war. He tells Vianne that he sees the bad things that are happening and he wonders what his family will think of him when he returns from the war. He is a man with a conscience and morals who is forced to follow orders. His ideals lead him to try to help Vianne to hide Rachel before she can be taken to the work camps and to provide false birth records when Vianne decides to keep Ari and adopt him as her son.

There are a couple of uses of language that are of note within this section. The first is an excellent simile that compares Isabelle to a wren found in Chapter 21, paragraph 70.



The author writes, "One of the best ways to disappear in plain sight was to dress like a wren-brown, brown, and more brown." While the simile describes the practical need for Isabelle to blend in, the use of the wren is clever in that Isabelle is really a nightingale disguising herself as a wren.

The other bit of language use of interest is an excellent use of imagery also found in Chapter 21. In paragraph 50, the author describes Isabelle walking through Paris in the fog. The author writes, "As she passed the glittering gold dome of the Invalids, a light fog moved through the streets, plucking color from the trees." This description not only allows the reader to visualize the scene, it shows that there is still beauty to be found in France even during the ravages of war.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Isabelle believe that returning home to Vianne is no longer an option?

## Discussion Question 2

In what way does being a woman sometimes hinder Isabelle's work as the Nightingale?

## Discussion Question 3

How has the relationship between Beck and Vianne changed since the beginning of the book?

## Vocabulary

evasion, circuitous, prefecture, disgorged, distended, frugal, punctual, naivete, perused, internment, carmelized





# Chapters 25-28

## Summary

In Chapter 25 Isabelle witnesses the Carriveau airfield being bombed and an American pilot go down as she is on her way to meet with members of the resistance. When her friends arrive she makes the decision to take the pilot to the barn at Le Jardin. Isabelle stays in the cellar with the airmen while Gaetan and Henri go to get a doctor and figure out how to retrieve the pilot from the cellar the next day. The pilot dies while Isabelle sits with him.

The next morning Beck tells Vianne that an American plane went down and they can't find the pilot. He is angry and says that the French often lie to the Nazis even though the Nazis have been polite. As Beck leaves the house Vianne notices the barn door is slightly open. She thinks Rachel has escaped and is in the barn. Instead, she finds Isabelle there with the dead pilot. Vianne is angry and orders Isabelle to leave and never come back because she is putting Vianne and Sophie in danger.

Vianne tries to keep busy, but is worried about Isabelle being discovered. She knows Beck will be humiliated if the airmen is found at Le Jardin and she considers telling him. When Beck returns to the house he is agitated because they haven't found the pilot. He searches Vianne's house and then goes out to the barn. As Beck lifts the cellar door and takes aim with his gun Vianne hits him in the head with a shovel. He falls dead. Isabelle says she shot him in the chest. Henri returns and agrees to take both bodies away. Isabelle suggests that Sophie and Vianne go into hiding, but Vianne says she will stay and will tell the Nazis that Beck left to look for the pilot and never returned.

Isabelle collapses and they discover she has been shot. Vianne stitches the wound and insists that Isabelle remain with her. Gaetan says they will take her to the safehouse. Henri convinces Vianne to let Isabelle leave and they hide her in a coffin to take her away.

Chapter 26 takes place in 1995 on the Oregon Coast. The old woman is looking at the invitation when the phone rings. The caller speaks in French and asks if she'll be at the reunion. She says people want to see Juliette and she has not existed for quite some time. She packs a bag and leaves her son a message saying she's going to Paris for the weekend. She knows he will worry because she's let him believe she's weak all his life.

In Chapter 27 Vianne travels with Gaetan to the border with Isabelle hidden in the coffin. Vianne and Gaetan discuss Gaetan's feelings for Isabelle. He tells her he loves Isabelle, but hopes Isabelle doesn't know. Vianne tells him she regrets arguing with Isabelle. She also tells Gaetan she will try to be brave with the Nazi's come looking for Beck, but he must tell Isabelle to start being more afraid.



Isabelle dreams of a fire and a nightingale singing a sad song. She thinks that the song means loss. The song turns to the song of a prince hiding in the woods, and then to a wolf. She wakes and thinks she hears Gaetan's voice and feels his kiss, but then thinks it cannot be because she is always alone.

Vianne sits on Beck's bed and feels sad about having killed him. She wonders how she could have turned on Isabelle so quickly when she discovered her, but then made such an easy choice to kill Beck to save Isabelle. Sophie enters the room and Vianne reminds her that if the Nazi's take Vianne away, Sophie and Ari are to wait three days and then go to the convent. When someone pounds on the door she sends Sophie upstairs.

Two soldiers come in and ask about Beck. Vianne says she doesn't know where he is. She says her children are upstairs and that the soldiers can go up there, but her baby may have tuberculosis. One soldier goes upstairs and then they take her away and question her. Von Richter, the man who questions her, tells her he will now be billeting with her.

When Vianne leaves Von Richter's office she sees Paul, the French policeman, taking Madame Fournier and her son Gilles away. She realizes being French will no longer protect Ari. When she returns home she tells Sophie they will have another German billeting with them and she must do all she can to remain invisible to the man. She also warns her that they cannot let on to Ari's true identity. Von Richter arrives at Le Jardin.

At the beginning of Chapter 28 Isabelle wakes up in pain. Gaetan is still with her. She remembers what happened and asks about Vianne. Gaetan assures her that Vianne is fine. Isabelle remembers Vianne telling her she isn't welcome at Le Jardin and that pain is worse than her wound. She tells Gaetan that killing Beck will haunt Vianne because hating is hard for her. Gaetan says it won't be by the time the war is over.

Isabelle says she believes the only sane thing in war is love. She tells Gaetan that the only thing she'd regret if she died would be their not being together. Gaetan says they can't be together and she asks him if he would want to be with her if there were no war. He doesn't answer but cannot hide his feelings for her.

Vianne has nightmares about Beck and Isabelle. She and Sophie are in the downstairs bedroom because Von Richter has taken over the upstairs room. When she goes out of the room she finds Von Richter drinking real coffee as he has every morning. He never lets her have any. He has also taken the warmest blankets and all of the pillows for himself. He informs her he is having guests for dinner and that she will cook and keep her son away from them. She goes back into the room and holds Daniel and talks to Sophie until he leaves.

Isabelle realizes that she now feels fear because she has something to lose in Gaetan. She wonders how a woman who has done the things she's done for the resistance can be afraid. Wearing only a towel she goes to Gaetan and then removes the towel.



## Analysis

In this section of the novel the action in the plot begins to ramp up leading toward the climax. Vianne is forced to kill Beck when he discovers Isabelle hiding in the barn with the airman. Vianne is questioned by the Nazis about his death. Isabelle is injured and in the time that she recuperates, she and Gaetan give in to their feelings and make love for the first time. The author successfully builds the suspense since the reader wonders if Vianne's involvement in Beck's death will be discovered and the reader knows the love story between Isabelle and Gaetan is most likely doomed because both are in such dangerous positions within the resistance.

Prior to Beck's death, the relationship between Beck and Vianne continues to evolve. When Vianne learns of the airman hidden in her barn cellar, she is concerned for Beck because she knows he'd be humiliated if the man were found where Beck is living. If Vianne still viewed Beck as the enemy, she wouldn't care if he were humiliated. Yet, Beck remains a character that isn't entirely sympathetic. He is angered by the disappearance of the airman and tells Vianne that the French repay the good intentions of the Germans with lies. He even searches Vianne's house for the pilot. He also doesn't hesitate to pull a gun on Isabelle and shoot her when he discovers her. In spite of all this, when Vianne hits Beck with the shovel, she still feels as though she killed a good man and feels guilt and sadness over his death.

The loss of Beck ties into the theme of loss. The author suggests that the death of someone on the opposing side is still a loss. Vianne knows that Beck will be greatly missed by his wife and children and that at his heart he was a good man following orders. In addition to the loss of Beck, there is also the loss of the pilot who dies as Isabelle sits with him in the cellar.

The theme of family is again shown through the relationship between Isabelle and Vianne. When Vianne discovers Isabelle hiding a pilot in her barn cellar, she is furious. She goes so far as to tell Isabelle that she is no longer welcome at Le Jardin. However, Vianne does not hesitate to kill Beck when her sister is in danger. And, when Vianne travels with Gaetan as they take Isabelle to the safe house to recuperate, Vianne warns Gaetan not to break Isabelle's heart. She also asks Gaetan to tell Isabelle that she must start being more afraid so that she doesn't take unnecessary risks. Even though Isabelle is terribly hurt by Vianne's words, her first thought when she wakes up after being shot is for Vianne and her safety.

When Isabelle wakes after being shot she and Gaetan have a discussion about how hard Beck's death will be for Vianne. Isabelle knows that hating isn't something that comes easily to Vianne and it will weigh heavily on her. Gaetan tells Isabelle that by the end of the war, hating will be easier for Vianne. His cynical words point toward the author's suggestion that people become who they are during war in that Gaetan indicates that all people are capable of hating and the difficulties of war can bring that out in even the kindest person.



The theme of war is also advanced through the arrival of Von Richter. He is a cruel man and his billeting with Vianne brings the war right into Vianne's home. Vianne witnesses the selfishness and cruelty of the Germans everyday through Von Richter's actions. He eats elaborate meals and throws the leftovers to the chickens rather than sharing them with Vianne and Sophie. He also drinks delicious smelling real coffee in front of Vianne and never offers her any. His actions are in sharp contrast to the way that Beck treated Vianne since Beck often shared food and even offered Vianne good wine.

Despite the war, love remains. In fact, Isabelle believes love is the only sane thing still happening in her world. The author continues the exploration of the theme of love through the interaction between Gaetan and Isabelle. Though Gaetan refuses to tell Isabelle that he loves her, he does admit his feelings to Vianne as they take Isabelle to the safe house. However, he tells Isabelle that they cannot risk loving one another. Still, he cannot hold back his feelings when Isabelle offers herself to him and they make love for the first time.

During the time that Isabelle is recuperating she has an interesting dream full of symbolism. She dreams of hearing a nightingale singing a sad song. The nightingale could either symbolize Isabelle since she is literally renamed the Nightingale, but it might also symbolize Vianne since she is also a nightingale through the surname of Rossignol. Isabelle might be dreaming of Vianne singing a sad song at the loss of her sister. Or, perhaps, Isabelle is singing the song at the loss of her sister. The song transforms into a song sung by a handsome prince. The handsome prince is clearly Gaetan who has been caring for Isabelle during her recovery. But then the song becomes the howl of a wolf. The wolf symbolizes the war that is always at their heels.

The author includes another chapter from the viewpoint of the still unknown elderly woman. The author again suggests that perhaps the woman is Isabelle since she says that the people at the reunion really want to see Juliette, but she hasn't existed for quite some time. The author avoids saying that Juliette is dead, so the reader is lead to believe that perhaps the elderly woman is Isabelle who is saying that she hasn't been Juliette for a long time. Of course, this leads the reader wondering what might have happened to Vianne if the elderly woman is Isabelle.

## Discussion Question 1

What does Gaetan mean when he says that hating will be easy for Vianne by the end of the war?

## Discussion Question 2

How does the author continue to portray Beck as neither good nor bad? What does he say to Vianne that suggests he may not be the gentleman he portrays himself to be?



## Discussion Question 3

How does Isabelle's dream reflect what is going on in her life?

## Vocabulary

rendezvous, provisions, descended, monstrosity, conscious, exterior, obscured, staggering, sane, penance



# Chapters 29-32

## Summary

In Chapter 29 Isabelle and Gaetan spend the next week together making love. She realizes she still knows very little about his life before the war. He tells her he knows that every time they kiss it's good-bye because they must get back to the war. He tells her they are not lucky and she tells him he is wrong and kisses him.

In Carriveau the people are preparing for another hard winter. Vianne takes Sophie and Daniel into town for her rations. When she reaches the front of the line Yvette asks her who Daniel is and she says she adopted him from Antoine's cousin. She also asks about Beck and Vianne tells her he disappeared.

When Vianne tries to go home she finds the streets are all barricaded. The Germans are rounding up Jews. A woman pushes her child at Vianne and begs Vianne to take them. Vianne takes the boy and returns quickly to Le Jardin. Von Richter is there and Sophie is frightened. Vianne tells Sophie they must try to save the boy or they are as bad as the Germans. Von Richter approaches and stands by the tree with the fabric tied to it. There is now a black ribbon for Beck. He asks about the boy and she says he's an orphan whose mother died of tuberculosis. Von Richter orders her to take him to the orphanage. He then tells her he will be leaving the next day because the Germans are taking over the Free Zone.

When Von Richter leaves Vianne tells Sophie she'll be back soon and Sophie indicates she's proud of Vianne. Vianne takes the boy to Mother Superior. She asks Mother Superior to hide the child at the orphanage. Mother Superior says she can get some papers for the child like Baptismal certificates, but can't get identity papers. Vianne says she will get them. Mother Superior says she'll take the boy and can make room for more Jewish children. She tells Vianne that Vianne is now the leader of the effort to save the children and she must have a teaching position at the orphanage as her cover.

In Chapter 30 Isabelle and Gaetan arrive in Bayonne. They pose as young lovers on their way to a beach town and move easily through the crowds of German soldiers. When they reach a road block Isabelle smiles at a soldier and asks what is going on. He tells her that they are taking over the Free Zone and orders Isabelle and Gaetan to move on. Isabelle and Gaetan keep walking. Gaetan tells her this development will make her work more dangerous.

Isabelle and Gaetan arrive at Madame Babineau's cottage where there are three pilots waiting. Isabelle and Madame discuss the pilots and Madame gives Isabelle a note from Henri telling her Vianne is fine but has another soldier at her house. Madame notices Gaetan looking at Isabelle and tells her that ordinarily she would tell Isabelle to be careful, but they shouldn't add love to the list of things they are careful about. That night



Gaetan tells Isabelle he is joining a guerilla group and will be working with explosives. He says he won't see her for a while, perhaps a long time.

Vianne goes to Henri for papers for the boy. Henri says Vianne reminds him of Isabelle and she says she is not a brave woman. Henri agrees to help with the papers and Vianne asks him not to tell Isabelle. Henri says Isabelle would be proud of her.

A few days later Vianne goes into town and Henri meets her on the street. He gives her a loaf of bread with the papers inside. He tells her to come and see him again if she needs more papers. As she walks home she comes upon Von Richter who insists on carrying the basket with the bread in it. Vianne coughs and says she thinks she's caught the flu. Von Richter shoves the basket back at her and tells her he won't be home for supper.

That night Vianne fills out the false identity papers. She realizes she has to keep a record of all the children so they can be returned to their parents at the end of the war. She creates separate lists that when put together will identify each child and their family.

Chapter 31 returns to Oregon in 1995. The elderly woman is at the airport leaving for France. She tells the tattooed girl sitting next to her that she's running away or perhaps returning home after years of running away. The girl says she's running away, too. The elderly woman says she is sick with cancer and the girl realizes she is dying. Julien arrives just as the plane is about to begin boarding. He informs her he will be going to Paris with her. As they board the plane she panics a bit and Julien helps her with her suitcase. She thinks that she is a mother and mothers never have the luxury of falling apart in front of their children no matter how old they are. On the plane Julien says he knows there is something she wants to tell him and she says she doesn't want to talk about it now.

Chapter 32 starts in France in 1944. The Germans have occupied France for eighteen months. Isabelle is in Paris. She sees her father and thinks he's aged so much in the last few years. Her father asks her to take a break from transporting pilots and she wonders if people say such things to men. He asks her if she needs a place to stay. She says she can't stay with him because he'd be at risk. He asks about Vianne and Isabelle tells her father that she has people looking out for Vianne.

At midnight Isabelle meets Gaetan. He is now in a guerilla group called the Maquis. Isabelle gives Gaetan a message from Paul and he says he must leave immediately. Gaetan doesn't tell Isabelle he loves her, but she knows it's because he is afraid.

Vianne has now hidden thirteen children at the orphanage. She is in her classroom at the orphanage. Von Richter comes into her classroom and takes her into the hallway where he questions her about Henri. She says she knows Henri but they aren't friends. Von Richter tells her Henri has been arrested. He says if he discovers Vianne is lying he'll question her children and send them all to prison. She begs him not to hurt her children and then realizes she's revealed her weakness to him. Later, Vianne is at the



town hall being questioned by Von Richter. She insists she has nothing to do with Henri and he says if Vianne is lying he'll hurt her and enjoy doing it. He sends her home.

Isabelle again leads airmen to Madame Babineau's. She desperately wants to unburden herself to Madame but knows that is another luxury they don't have in war. Instead she tells Madame that she is fine. They hear a car drive up the cabin. Men burst in and arrest them all.

## Analysis

This section of the novel includes the climax of both Vianne's and Isabelle's stories. Vianne jumps into the resistance effort when she decides she cannot raise Sophie in a world where good people stand by and watch the evil perpetuated by others. When a Jewish woman asks Vianne to take her son, Vianne does not hesitate in spite of the fact that she is now living with the cruel Von Richter. She knows her actions may even put Sophie at risk. Sophie is also aware of the danger involved, but she is proud of her mother for finally taking action. Sophie, who has been enamored of Isabelle since the beginning of the book, now sees a bit of Isabelle's spirit and bravery in her mother and admires her. Vianne becomes the leader of the effort to save the Jewish children in Carriveau.

The development of Vianne's character into a braver, more self-sufficient woman accentuates the author's theme of war and becoming oneself during war. Vianne has always been the woman other people need to take care of. She has always relied on Antoine and Rachel to make things right. Now, Vianne knows that if she wants things to be right, she must take action. She is more like her sister than she ever dreamed. She is a brave woman capable of taking risks. Even Henri, who doesn't know Vianne well, can see how like her sister she is since he tells Vianne she is like Isabelle. Vianne, of course, still doesn't see this in herself and insists she can never be brave like Isabelle.

The author also shows how intelligent Vianne is. When she takes the boy and Von Richter approaches her to ask about him, she has the good sense to lie and say that his parents died of tuberculosis. Vianne knows the Germans, and particularly Von Richter, are excessively worried about germs and illness. Von Richter, of course, quickly exits the situation without asking more questions. His suggestion that the child be taken to the orphanage may or may not be what leads Vianne to ask Mother Superior to help her hide the children. This may have been Vianne's idea from the moment she took the child, or it may have been an idea sparked by Von Richter's suggestion. Vianne also shows her intelligence when she devises a way to keep track of the children she saves so that they can be reunited with their families after the war.

The theme of war is further exemplified in the action going on around Vianne. The Germans have begun rounding up the Jews, even those who are French born, and sending them to camps. The author doesn't go into detail about what goes on at the camps, but that is in keeping with Vianne's knowledge of the war at the time. It wasn't until after the war had ended that people began to know the details of the atrocities





perpetuated by the Germans. The ramping up of the war is changing the people of Carriveau and the author reminds the reader of this through Vianne's interaction with Yvette when she takes Sophie and Daniel to pick up rations. Yvette questions Vianne about Daniel's identity in a way that suggests she is digging for information to share with the Germans in order to garner their favor. The people of Carriveau have become desperate, leading some of them to collaborate with the Germans in order to survive.

As Vianne's story reaches its climax through the theme of war, Isabelle's story reaches its climax through the theme of love. Isabelle and Gaetan finally consummate their relationship, though Gaetan still cannot tell her he loves her. The two spend an almost ideal week together, but Gaetan cannot shake the feeling that their love may put them at more risk. He knows that in loving Isabelle, he has more to lose in the war. When Isabelle tells him they are lucky to have one another, he tells her they are not lucky. This reminds the reader of the conversation between Gaetan and Isabelle when they first met. Gaetan told Isabelle then that they are not lucky and he obviously has not changed his mind.

When Isabelle is healed and she and Gaetan go to Madame Babineau's house to transport more pilots, Madame Babineau can see the love between them. She notices the way that Gaetan looks at Isabelle. She tells Isabelle that she might ordinarily say to be careful, but love isn't something they should be careful about. Madame Babineau's statement illustrates the idea that love makes people who they want to be. Madame Babineau does not want to be a woman who must be careful in all things, yet the war forces her and everyone around her to be cautious. So, when she sees that Isabelle and Gaetan are in love, she tells Isabelle that love is the one thing they shouldn't add to their list of things to be careful about.

Shortly after this conversation, the author reminds the reader that in spite of the happiness between Isabelle and Gaetan, there is still a war going on. Isabelle is captured by the Germans and her story reaches its climax. The chapter ends with a cliffhanger when Isabelle is dragged away.

While having shown the reader what women are truly capable of in times of war, the author doesn't fail to remind the reader that the perception of women is one of the themes of the novel. When Isabelle sees her father, he invites her to stay with him and says that being the Nightingale has become even more dangerous. He asks Isabelle to take a break from her work as the Nightingale. Isabelle cannot help but wonder if her father would have asked her to take a break if she'd been a man. Even though Isabelle is not regarded as a courageous woman capable of many things, she still cannot escape being looked at as a woman and therefore weak.

Julien's invitation to Isabelle to stay with him carries on the theme of family. In the past, Julien sent Isabelle away many times and refused to allow her to stay with him. Now, he asks his daughter to remain with him as he is fearful for her safety. Isabelle tells him she cannot stay because it would put him at risk and she won't do that. Though the two have had their differences and Isabelle was certain her father could not love her, it's clear that their family ties bind them together and there is love there.



The members of the Rossignol family seem to have a great deal of difficulty in expressing their love for one another, but it's always evident in the way they protect the members of their family and show concern for their wellbeing. Isabelle has members of the resistance looking out for Vianne and they update her on Vianne's situation. She knows that she cannot stay at Carriveau or even visit because her work as the Nightingale puts everyone she loves in danger. Julien has protected both of his daughters by sending them away when he couldn't care for them and by keeping them in the dark about his involvement with the resistance movement. Vianne attempts to protect Isabelle by warning Gaetan not to break Isabelle's heart.

The author includes another brief chapter from the point of view of the elderly woman. This chapter also incorporates the theme of family. The woman feels a sense of panic as she gets on the plane to fly to France. However, when her son reminds her he is there, she thinks about how she cannot fall apart in front of her son. She knows that a mother never has that luxury, even when her children are grown. This thought might lead the reader to believe the elderly woman is Vianne since she has frequently shown her strength as a mother, thus the author continues to build the mystery around the identity of the elderly woman.

The author also returns to the symbolism of the apple tree with the ribbons tied on it. While Vianne stands in her yard talking to Von Richter, Von Richter is near the apple tree with the ribbons on it. The author notes that now there is a black ribbon there for Beck. It's interesting that Vianne would choose a black ribbon to represent Beck. Perhaps the color black simply represents the swastika Beck would have had on his uniform, but it might also represent Vianne's mixed feelings for him. She cared for him enough to include his memory on her tree, yet she used a black ribbon because she still isn't certain his intentions were always good.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why does Vianne decide she must help the Jewish boy?

## **Discussion Question 2**

In what ways has Vianne grown to be more like Isabelle?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why does Vianne choose to tie a black ribbon to her tree for Beck? Why is the ribbon black?

## Vocabulary

bliss, constriction, barricaded, amassing, irrational, cylinder, extendable, distilled, infraction, retaliation, disrupt



# Chapters 33-36

## Summary

In Chapter 33 Isabelle is being held captive by the Gestapo. She knows she needs to hold out under questioning for two days to allow her friends time to protect themselves. The Germans say they know she works for the Nightingale and they want his name, so Isabelle knows they don't know who she is. She continues to tell them she is Juliette as they torture her. She thinks about all of the people she loves, especially Vianne, and wonders why she didn't tell them she loved them everyday.

Vianne is in town and there is a dead body hanging from every streetlamp in the town square. The violence of the Nazis has escalated and the people of Carriveau hear rumors of mass shootings of French citizens. As she walks, someone grabs her and pulls her into a dark alley, then reveals himself to be her father.

They go to Rachel's empty house to talk. He tells her that Isabelle has been arrested. Vianne asks what she can do and Julien tells her to stay in Carriveau and keep Sophie safe. Vianne wants to tell him about the children she is helping to hide, but doesn't. When he tells her what Isabelle will feel after the war, Vianne realizes he is confessing his own thoughts after he went to war. She knows he is also saying goodbye and that he plans to sacrifice himself for Isabelle. As he walks away she grabs his sleeve and a strip of cloth tears away. She tells him she loves him. She ties the scrap of fabric to the apple tree that has withered and died since she began tying cloth to it.

When Vianne goes home she finds Von Richter waiting for her. He tells her he knows Daniel is not her son and asks what she'd do to keep him. She says he will do anything and he rapes her.

In Chapter 34 Isabelle is still being held and tortured. She still tells them she doesn't know anything about the Nightingale. They bring her father in wearing shackles. Her father tells the men he is the Nightingale. Isabelle says it's not true and that she is the Nightingale, but they don't believe her because she is a girl. She begs her father not to do this, but he smiles and says it's done. In that moment she remembers all the good things about him and knows this is the only way he can express his love. The Germans take Julien outside and shoot him.

The morning after the rape Vianne goes to Giroton where Isabelle was being held to try to help her father and Isabelle. She sees her father's body strapped to the fountain.

Isabelle is given her Juliette papers back and taken to see Vianne. Isabelle wants to run to Vianne and tell her she is sorry and that she loves her, but knows she can't because she has to protect Vianne. Instead, she tells Vianne to go away.

Isabelle is taken to a train bound for a concentration camp where she finds Madame Babineau. Madame tells Isabelle to call her Micheline and Isabelle reveals her true



identity. Micheline says she knew that Isabelle was Julien's daughter from the start and tells Isabelle that her mother tried to help her father after he served in the war, but he was broken. She says love stories don't always have happy endings. Isabelle thinks about the warning to "be afraid" from Vianne that Gaetan had delivered to her and now understands. Yet, she thinks she wouldn't have done anything differently. The train arrives at the concentration camp and Isabelle and Micheline get off. Isabelle wills herself to stay alive.

Chapter 35 begins in August with Vianne having been raped by Von Richter again. She gets out of the bed and wonders if Antoine and Isabelle are still out there somewhere. She is bruised and aching. Von Richter has been getting meaner and angrier because the Germans are losing the war. Sophie is in the living room and Vianne asks what she is doing up so late. Sophie tells her she knows what has been going on and she is not stupid. Vianne says she is trying to protect Sophie. Sophie tells her Isabelle would have killed Von Richter and Vianne says she's not strong like Isabelle.

Vianne takes her class to the pond to go swimming. The children seem oblivious to the destruction around them and Vianne wonders if that is because destruction has become their norm. Vianne vomits and realizes she is pregnant.

A week later Sophie urges Vianne and Daniel to come outside. They hear church bells and Von Richter tells her the Germans are leaving Carriveau, but says the war isn't over. Von Richter calls Vianne a whore and says he'll forget her, but doubts she'll ever forget him.

Things get better in Carriveau after that, but the war isn't over. Vianne still isn't able to relax. She tells Sophie that Antoine and Isabelle will be coming home soon. Sophie asks what they will tell Antoine about the baby. Vianne walks out to the road and sees Antoine coming toward her. They embrace, but she feels a sense of shame. Vianne tries to tell him about Von Richter, but Sophie runs out of the house before she can. Sophie looks at Vianne and tells her they shouldn't talk about the war and Vianne realizes Sophie wants her to lie. Daniel comes out of the house.

At dinner, Daniel chatters away, but Vianne and Sophie are quiet. They realize how different Antoine is. As they prepare for bed that night, Vianne can hear something different in Antoine's voice and thinks it is loss. He tells her that he finally decided to run from the Germans when they started to lose the war and began beating him so badly he thought it would be better to be shot. When Antoine begins to undress her, Vianne thinks about Von Richter and begins to cry tears of shame, love, and loss. Vianne says she could tell Antoine everything, but it might be better to just forget the past.

Two months after Antoine's return, Vianne tells him she is pregnant. She tells him that she must have conceived the night he came home. Antoine assures her they won't lose this baby and that they should choose to see miracles. Vianne wonders if this is his way of saying he knows the truth.



Chapter 36 starts in February of 1945. Isabelle is still in the concentration camp. Isabelle and Micheline are chosen to be in a road crew. They are harnessed to a steel wheel and whipped to keep pulling. Isabelle wills herself to just keep taking steps. Later, Micheline tries to encourage her and tells her not to cry because the women who cry are the women who die the next day. Isabelle is sick with pneumonia and possibly typhus. She knows the war is ending and she must stay alive. Micheline and Isabelle are moved to another camp and are forced to walk two days to reach the train.

When Isabelle gets off the train, she hears someone yell "Juliette" and at first it means nothing to her because she is so used to being called her prisoner number. She then sees it is Anouk calling her. Anouk tells her they are killing the prisoners to cover what they've done. She also says Henri, Paul, and Gaetan were arrested and Henri was hanged. Isabelle is called away from the fence and as she goes she sees Anouk mouth "goodbye," but she cannot respond because she is tired of goodbyes.

## Analysis

The theme of war returns more fully to the atrocities of war. As the Germans begin to lose the war, their violence escalates and there are stories amongst the people of Carriveau of mass shootings of French people. Carriveau has undergone a marked change since the beginning of the novel. Having been a lovely, picturesque town when the book began, it is now a place of destruction. At one point, Vianne goes into town and sees bodies hanging from streetlamps. When she takes the children in her classroom to the pond to swim, she's struck by how they have grown so used to the destruction around her that they don't even seem to notice it anymore.

Isabelle's time in the concentration camp also lends itself to the theme of war. Isabelle continues to be the strong woman she is even through these new hardships. She and Micheline serve as support systems for one another. They encourage each other to just keep going.

During Isabelle's torture and questioning immediately following her capture, the author uses her thoughts to underscore the theme of family. As Isabelle is suffering, all she can think about is her family, especially Vianne. She wonders why she hasn't told them everyday that she loves them and Vianne's name becomes like a prayer for her. Though Isabelle has never been close with her father or Vianne, she clearly loves them and uses her thoughts of them as a shield of sorts. The desire to see them again is one of the things that keeps her going and helps her to survive. Yet, when Vianne comes to visit Isabelle in prison, Isabelle tells her to go away. She does this in order to protect Vianne since she knows that Vianne's association with her puts Vianne in great danger.

Julien's sacrifice for his daughter is the ultimate example of the theme of family. Julien was unable to take care of his daughters, but that doesn't mean he stopped loving them. He proves this beyond question when he gives his life for Isabelle. Before doing so, Julien visits Vianne one last time. In telling her that she must be there for Isabelle when Isabelle returns, Julien shares his own story and feelings after returning from the Great



War. He wants his daughter to understand the choices he has made and know that they were out of love. For her part, Vianne shows a strong desire to really connect with her father in that she wants to tell him that she's been rescuing children. She wants him to be proud of her, yet she doesn't tell him her secret. Vianne likely understands that knowing about her role in the resistance could endanger her father, so she tries to protect him.

The Rossignol family again shows their love through protection when Julien protects Isabelle by turning himself in as the Nightingale. When Isabelle sees her father and hears him confess to being the Nightingale, she knows he will be killed. This is the one thing that can break Isabelle's resolve to hold out under questioning. She confesses to being the Nightingale, but of course the Germans don't believe her because she is a woman. In fact, it is clear to Isabelle from the time they begin questioning her that they don't know the identity of the Nightingale because they keep referring to "him." Obviously they believe the Nightingale to be a man, which falls in line with the author's theme of the perception of women.

Vianne makes a great sacrifice in protecting her family as well. When Von Richter indicates he may know Daniel's true identity, she concedes to having sex with him in order to protect Daniel. Von Richter rapes her over and over again, but she remains quiet about it for the sake of her children. Even when Sophie confronts Vianne about the issue, Vianne tells her that she is protecting Sophie and Daniel.

The theme of loss is most poignantly displayed through the death of Julien. As he leaves Vianne, Vianne grasps at his sleeve and thinks about how she isn't ready to lose him. She realizes that she's always loved him. The author does an excellent job of tying the themes of family, love, and loss together when she writes, "Love had turned into loss and she'd pushed it away, but somehow, impossibly, a bit of that love had remained. A girl's love for her father. Immutable. Unbearable but unbreakable." (Chapter 33, paragraph 133) The author foreshadows Julien's death when a bit of cloth tears away from his sleeve as Vianne clutches it. The piece of sleeve will become the ribbon Vianne ties to her tree in his memory.

Isabelle's goodbye, or rather lack of goodbye, to Anouk also elaborates on the theme of love. When Isabelle sees Anouk behind a fence the two talk briefly. Anouk tells Isabelle the Germans are killing the Jews to hide what they've done. As they part, Isabelle cannot bring herself to say goodbye to Anouk because she has grown so tired of goodbyes. This scene indicates that at this point Isabelle has suffered so much loss that she simply cannot bear anymore.

The author explores the theme of love in a discussion between Isabelle and Micheline. Micheline tells Isabelle about Isabelle's parents when they were younger. She talks of how different Isabelle's father was when he returned from the war and how her mother tried to save him. She tells Isabelle that not all love stories have a happy ending. The author leaves the reader wondering if Isabelle's and Gaetan's story will have a happy ending.



Love is also shown in Antoine's return to Le Jardin. By this time Vianne is pregnant and Sophie knows. Sophie wants to see her parents together again, and so she suggests they just forget the past and never talk about the war. Vianne knows that what Sophie wants is for Vianne to lie about the baby. While Vianne does not tell Antoine she was raped, he seems to know his wife so well that he guesses the truth. In his love for Vianne, though, he tells her he chooses to see the baby as a miracle. Vianne, however, continues to feel a sense of shame and it is somewhat unclear as to whether or not the two will have their happy ending.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why does Antoine tell Vianne he chooses to see her pregnancy as a miracle?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What does Isabelle's conversation with Anouk reveal about Isabelle?

## **Discussion Question 3**

How is Julien's death foreshadowed?

## **Vocabulary**

chafed, confession, immutable, hale, infamous, bracketed, vivacious, unanimous, putrid





# Chapters 37-39

## Summary

In Chapter 37 Vianne is in her father's apartment in Paris hoping to find Isabelle, but she can tell no one has been there for a long time. She goes to a hotel that is serving as a reception center for concentration camp prisoners who are returning home. Everywhere there are people looking for loved ones and pictures and notes posted on a wall. Vianne goes to a Red Cross worker and says she is looking for Isabelle, Rachel, and Marc. She also says she has a list of Jewish children to reunite with their parents. Vianne is taken to an office where she gives a man the list of nineteen children. He looks at her as though she is a hero.

As Vianne, Antoine, and Rachel look at the photos on the wall a woman tells them Rachel and Marc are both listed as dead and there is no record of Isabelle. They are advised to go home and wait for Isabelle to return. Sophie says that perhaps Isabelle made herself invisible.

On the train ride home Vianne tells Sophie that Daniel is truly her brother now and that the baby she is carrying is innocent of his or her creation. They must let love be stronger than hate or there will be no future for them.

Isabelle and Micheline hear a commotion at the camp and discover that the guards have all gone and they have made it.

Vianne continues to wait for Isabelle to return home. She knows things are different between herself and Antoine and they've merely been playacting at love. He takes her outside for a surprise. Outside there is a makeshift stage with a sheet for a curtain. Daniel and Sophie put on a show for Vianne. The moment feels ordinary and magical at the same time and Vianne feels joy.

Two men come to the house looking for Ari. They say he has family in America and they are taking him to be with them. Vianne doesn't want to let him go, but the men tell her he must be returned to his family and his people. The men explain that where Vianne sees the heartbreak of one little boy, they see the heartbreak of the Jewish people and they are trying to band their people together after having lost a generation. Vianne wants to fight for Ari, but knows there is no enemy here, just loss on both sides. Vianne packs Ari's things and explains to him that he has another family. She tells him about Rachel and Marc, then sends him with the men. It's the hardest thing she's had to do in the war. As Ari leaves, Sophie runs out of the house and gives him Bebe.

In Chapter 38 Isabelle and Micheline are at a Red Cross station. Micheline takes Isabelle to a train to return to Carriveau. Isabelle speaks to Micheline in the past tense and says she's not the girl she was. Isabelle wonders how she can move forward with



her life. When she arrives in Carriveau, Vianne is waiting for her at the train station. Vianne hugs Isabelle and Isabelle finally feels like she really made it.

Vianne takes care of Isabelle at Le Jardin. Isabelle apologizes for Beck. Vianne apologizes as well and says she failed Isabelle many times. She asks Isabelle to start over with her so they can be the sisters her mother wanted them to be. She tells Isabelle she is proud of her. Isabelle knows Vianne was raped and she says that she learned in the camps that the Germans couldn't touch her heart or change who she was inside. Isabelle coughs up blood and Vianne thinks about the blood when her mother died.

A few days later, Isabelle wakes and goes outside and thinks how alive the world looks. Allied troops drive by. Isabelle asks Vianne if the war is over and says Gaetan promised to find her after the war. She is afraid Gaetan won't be able to find her at Le Jardin. Isabelle is still terribly ill and somewhat delirious.

Vianne reads Isabelle a letter from their father that he left with her when he went to rescue Isabelle. The letter apologizes and says he loved them. Isabelle wanted to hear those words her whole life and now feels only loss. She tells Vianne to hold her family close and Vianne tells her not to say goodbye.

A week later Isabelle is sitting in the backyard when Gaetan arrives. Isabelle worries that he will not think she's pretty anymore. Gaetan tells her she is as beautiful as he remembered and tells her he loves her. As Gaetan holds her she thinks "don't forget me" and wishes she had the strength to say it out loud.

Chapter 39 takes place in France in 1995. The elderly woman and Julien land in Paris and the woman feels like she is home. She readies herself for the reunion. As they walk to the reunion, she stops to buy her son a macaroon because she remembers they were her mother's favorite.

When they get to the place where the reunion is being held, she tells her son she is afraid but they must go in. She stops to pick up her nametag and sees another name she recognizes that affects her. She picks it up. As a woman leads her to her seat, the room goes quiet. The man at the microphone says someone very special has arrived and asks her to speak. She goes to the podium and begins to talk about her sister Isabelle. She remembers how Isabelle died in Gaetan's arms. She looks at the nametag in her hand and it is Sophie's. Sophie died of cancer. She looks at her son and sees the confusion on his face. When she is through speaking, the audience stands and claps and she knows they are the families of the men Isabelle saved.

Gaetan approaches Vianne and introduces his daughter. The young woman is named Isabelle. Julien asks his mother why she never told him all of this. She tells him that men tell stories, but women just get on with it. As they talk, a man approaches them and when Vianne turns she sees it is Ari. He tells her he never forgot her or Sophie and that he has looked for them for many years. Vianne introduces Julien to Ari and Ari tells him about the nineteen children Vianne saved. Vianne says she is a Rossignol and therefore



a nightingale, too. Vianne has never told Julien the truth about who his father is. She thinks how Julien's birth brought their family back to life. She tells Julien that she'll tell him everything, but knows she'll keep one secret.

## Analysis

With the war ended, the story of the two sisters draws to a close. Vianne searches for Isabelle at the receiving center, but is unable to find her. Alluding to a conversation from the beginning of the book, Sophie suggests that Isabelle made herself invisible. The reader knows this to be true in a way. Isabelle entered the camp under the name Juliette Gervaise, a name that Vianne is not looking for. Vianne is looking for Isabelle Rossignol, so is unable to find her. Fortunately, Micheline is still with Isabelle and is able to put her on a train to return to Carriveau.

The way the sisters seek to be together again speaks to the theme of family. In spite of the difficulties these two women have been through and the arguments they've had, they are home to each other and they want to be together now that the war has ended. When Isabelle does return home and is gravely ill, Vianne takes loving care of her. She also finally tells Isabelle that she is proud of her. Vianne's realization that she is proud of her sister's efforts in the resistance stems from the fact that she finally saw what Isabelle did from the beginning, that one can't just stand by and watch evil without becoming as bad as those who are committing the evil acts.

While Vianne cares for Isabelle, Isabelle also offers Vianne some comfort. Isabelle is aware that Vianne was raped and tells her that what was done to her doesn't change who she is. She explains that that thought kept her going in the camps. Isabelle knew that no matter what was going on around her, the Germans couldn't touch her heart or change who she really is. This idea ties back to the theme of war in that Isabelle states the war didn't make her someone else, it made her know who she is and that she couldn't be changed.

As Vianne cares for Isabelle, she notices blood and that makes her think of the blood she saw when her mother died. This detail foreshadows Isabelle's death.

The theme of love is expressed in an exchange between Sophie and Vianne. Vianne tells Sophie that they cannot allow hate to win, but that love must be stronger. If love isn't stronger, they will have no future. What she means is that they cannot dwell on what was done to them, but must live in their love for each other so that they can move past the war and rebuild their lives. Antoine seems to realize this, too. He sets up a wonderful surprise for Vianne with the Sophie and Daniel putting on a show. This sweet little scene reminds Vianne of what she had before the war and she describes the moment as both magical and ordinary. The idea that their lives could become normal again and they could have moments like this is what creates the magic for Vianne and it seems to begin to rebuild the love between her and Antoine.



Another example of the theme of love is in the reunion of Isabelle and Gaetan. Isabelle worries that Gaetan won't find her and that if he does, he'll no longer think she is beautiful. However, when Gaetan returns, he immediately wraps her in his arms and tells her she is as beautiful as he remembered. Gaetan, no doubt, sees Isabelle for the woman that she is and that is where her true beauty lies—the beauty that the Germans could not touch. Now that the war is over, Gaetan can finally tell Isabelle that he loves her and he does. Isabelle wants to ask Gaetan not to forget her, but she can't speak the words. This hints that Isabelle dies, but the author leaves that final fact for the last chapter told from the perspective of the elderly lady.

Isabelle's death is just one example of the theme of loss. Vianne also learns that she truly has lost Rachel and Marc as both are on the deceased list. The pictures and notes on the wall at the receiving center are a poignant illustration of loss. It's a scene that has played itself out in history many times when wars and disasters occur. The scene might bring to mind similar scenes from modern history, such as the search for survivors after 911 or Hurricane Katrina.

Vianne experiences what is perhaps the most difficult loss of all for her when Daniel is taken from her by Jewish officials who are returning him to relatives in America. Vianne has come to care for Ari as her own child, so his loss must be like that of having miscarried babies before Sophie's birth. However, Vianne seems to understand the pain of the Jewish people at having lost an entire generation and the need to find a way to pull their culture back together and move on. Like the good mother that she is, Vianne does not fall apart in front of her children. Instead, she calmly packs and sends Ari with the men. Sophie gives him Bebe, her symbol of safety and security.

In this final section the identity of the elderly woman is finally revealed to be Vianne. The author reveals her identity with great skill as Vianne steps to the podium at the reunion and begins to speak by saying "My sister, Isabelle, was a woman of great passions." (Chapter 39, paragraph 76) Having revealed the identity of the elderly woman, the author uses the reunion scene to wrap up the plotlines for the remaining characters. The reader learns that Sophie died of cancer, Gaetan went on to marry and have a daughter but never forgot Isabelle, and Ari never forgot Vianne and Sophie. In addition, Vianne's son, Julien, learns about his mother's past and the woman she really is.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Vianne's character throughout the novel is that she never fully comes to realize who she is, in spite of the fact that the author posits that people become who they are in times of war. Each time someone treats Vianne as a hero for having saved Jewish children, she doesn't understand or says that her sister is the hero. When she first hands over her records of the children to the Red Cross, the man looks at her with wide eyes. Vianne doesn't seem to realize that he is surprised by her bravery and admires what she's done. The reader might also remember that when Vianne received the invitation to the reunion in Paris, her first thought is that Juliette was the one everyone really wanted to see. Of course, this was the author's clever way of misleading the reader into thinking the elderly woman might be Isabelle, but it also indicates that Vianne doesn't think what she did to save the children is of much interest. When she arrives at the reunion and steps to the podium, she only talks about Isabelle



and never mentions what she did. In fact, when Julien asks her what she did during the war, she only tells him that she survived. It is Ari that reveals to Julien that his mother is a hero who saved nineteen children.

## Discussion Question 1

What does Isabelle mean when she tells Vianne that the Germans could never touch her heart?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Sophie give Ari Bebe as he is taken away?

## Discussion Question 3

How does Vianne see herself in terms of what she went through during the war? Is she a hero or merely a woman who did what she had to to survive?

## Vocabulary

mausoleum, cadavers, liberation, synagogue, elongated, garbles, podium, solemn, incredulity



# Characters

## Vianne Mauriac / Elderly Woman

Vianne Mauriac is one of the two main characters. She is the sister of Isabelle Rossignol, the wife of Antoine Mauriac, and the mother of Sophie Rossignol. Vianne's mother died when she was young, leaving her and Isabelle to be raised by her father. Her father, unable to care for her and Isabelle, left her in the family's summer home, Le Jardin, to be raised by a stranger. Vianne, in turn, was responsible for raising Isabelle. Vianne quickly became involved with Antoine and eventually the two were married. When Vianne suffered a miscarriage and was unable to care for Isabelle, Isabelle was sent away to her father who placed her in a boarding school. This caused a rift between the sisters.

Vianne is also estranged from her father, Julien. Throughout the years Vianne has sent him birthday cards, but he doesn't respond. She remembers what her father was like when he returned from the first war and fears that Antoine will be the same way when he returns.

Vianne is a quiet woman who, at the beginning of the novel, thinks she is incapable of caring for herself and her daughter without Antoine. She relies on Antoine to make everything right. When Antoine is called away to fight in the war she continues to believe that he will somehow return to her and fix everything. It isn't until Vianne learns that Antoine is in a prison camp and unable to return that she begins to realize that she must be self-sufficient for Sophie's sake.

During the war Vianne is forced to share her home with two German soldiers. The first soldier, Captain Beck, is kind to her and to Sophie. The two develop a friendship of sorts and there is even suggestion of romantic feelings between them. The second soldier, Von Richter, is very cruel and rapes Vianne, which results in a pregnancy. Vianne pretends that she conceived on the night Antoine returned from the prison camp, but both know the truth.

Vianne is a fiercely protective mother and does what she must to protect Sophie and, eventually, Ari, whom she takes in as her own son when Rachel is sent to a work camp. She argues with Isabelle over Isabelle's impetuous nature and outspokenness toward the Germans because she knows that calling attention to themselves could result in punishment or death. As the war goes on, Vianne realizes that she can no longer simply live for protecting Sophie. She knows that she cannot allow Sophie to grow up in a world where good people just sit by and watch evil happen. As a result, Vianne begins to rescue Jewish children who are separated from their families and place them in the orphanage at the convent. In the end, she is responsible for saving the lives of nineteen children.



At the end of the book, the author reveals that Vianne is the elderly woman who appears in several chapters set in the 1990's that are dispersed throughout the novel. She has been narrating the story. As an elderly woman, she is dying of cancer and her son, Julien (the child conceived through rape), is helping her to move into a retirement home when Vianne receives a letter inviting her to a reunion in France of people who were involved in the resistance movement. Vianne has never told Julien her story or the story of Isabelle's actions as the Nightingale. Instead, she has let Julien believe she is a weak woman who has always relied on her husband and her son to care for her. In the end, Vianne decides to tell him everything except the facts of his conception.

Vianne is the author's primary vehicle for portraying the idea that war brings out a person's true identity since she undergoes a major shift as a result of the war. At the outset of the book, Vianne is weak and relies on both Antoine and her best friend, Rachel, to take care of her. The war, though, brings out her true nature as a woman who protects the people she loves, including Sophie, Ari, and Isabelle. Vianne proves to be brave and knows that she must ultimately do the right thing instead of only doing what is safe. Therefore, the author uses Vianne to show that war has brought out her true nature as a person with a strong moral compass who is able to defy her tendency to seek safety when the lives of others are at stake.

## **Isabelle Rossignol / Juliette Gervaise / The Nightingale**

Isabelle Rossignol is one of two main characters. She is Vianne's sister. When Isabelle's and Vianne's mother dies when Isabelle is a very young child, Isabelle goes with Vianne to live at Le Jardin. Isabelle is a willful child and doesn't do what their caretaker tells her to, which makes her difficult for Vianne to manage. Later, when Vianne marries Antoine and suffers a miscarriage, Vianne is unable to care for Isabelle and sends her to her father who places Isabelle in a boarding school.

Isabelle runs away from and is kicked out of several boarding schools as she grows up. She feels as though no one wants her. When the war begins she wants to prove to the world that she is important and someone who can make a difference in the war effort. However, since she is a pretty and young girl, no one takes her seriously.

At the start of the book, Isabelle is expelled from yet another school and goes to live with her father in Paris. When the war starts, Julien attempts to send Isabelle to Le Jardin. Along the way, Isabelle is separated from the people she's been sent with and meets Gaetan, who ends up being the love of her life. Isabelle is drawn to Gaetan because he is going to join the resistance movement and invites her to come along. Isabelle sees him as the first person to ever look at her and see something more than just a silly girl. However, when she tells Gaetan how she feels about him, Gaetan decides she may be too young and naïve to join the movement.

Upon arriving in Carriveau, Isabelle is unable to hold her tongue in front of the Germans and isn't afraid of being noticed. Her actions anger Vianne who believes she will get them all killed. Isabelle does change her outward actions in the interest of protecting



Sophie, but she secretly joins the resistance and delivers anti-German propaganda. Isabelle becomes a master at using her pretty girl appearance to hide the brave woman she is inside. Her appearance later makes her the perfect person to carry out her role as the Nightingale in which she transports Allied airmen out of France over the Pyrenees mountains. The Germans believe the Nightingale must be a man; therefore Isabelle is able to transport many, many airmen to Spain before being caught.

As the Nightingale, Isabelle is given a false identity and goes by the name Juliette Gervaise. Isabelle later learns it is her father who created her false identity and he has known all along that she is involved in the resistance effort. Vianne keeps Isabelle's Juliette Gervaise papers and still has them when she is a very old woman.

When Isabelle is eventually captured by the Germans, they still do not believe she is the Nightingale, only someone working with the Nightingale. She is able to hold out under their questioning until her father is brought in and confesses in front of her that he is the Nightingale. At this point, Isabelle breaks and says she is the Nightingale. However, the Germans don't believe her and kill her father.

Isabelle is the author's chief vehicle for portraying the theme of the perception of women. At the start of the novel Isabelle struggles to be seen as something more than just a pretty, silly girl. She longs to be a hero and make some kind of real difference in the world, but the way others see her holds her back. However, she begins to see that this misperception of her is actually an asset because it allows her to hide. She knows that no one would ever suspect a girl of defying the Germans and she uses that to the best of her ability, doling out smiles and flirting with the Germans who enter the bookshop so that they will never guess that she is the Nightingale.

## Gaetan

Gaetan is a member of the French resistance and later joins a guerilla group as an explosives expert. He is Isabelle's love interest and helps her to join the resistance movement, though she does not know at the time that it was he who recommended her. Gaetan meets Isabelle as Isabelle is leaving Paris on foot to return to Le Jardin. He is the first to see Isabelle as something more than just a pretty face, though her beauty certainly doesn't escape his notice.

Though Gaetan loves Isabelle, he feels that he cannot tell her so because it might put them both in danger. He believes they may make unsafe decisions due to their love. As a result, Gaetan attempts to distance himself from Isabelle by abandoning her during the night at Le Jardin. Later, the two meet up again and though Gaetan again attempts to resist a deeper relationship, he eventually is unable to do so. It is Gaetan that saves Isabelle and transports her away from Le Jardin after she is shot by Beck. Gaetan admits to Vianne that he is in love with Isabelle and that he will do his best to protect her. However, he isn't able to admit to Isabelle that he loves her until she forces the issue and asks him what he would want if there were no war. He and Isabelle fall deeply





in love. They continue throughout the book to meet when and where they can while both go about their own roles in the resistance.

After the war Gaetan keeps his word to Isabelle and finds her at Le Jardin. He tells her that he loves her and Isabelle dies in his arms. When Vianne attends the reunion as an elderly woman, Gaetan seeks her out and introduces his daughter, whom he has named Isabelle. Vianne is grateful that he has remembered Isabelle and knows that Isabelle would be grateful as well.

## Captain Beck

Captain Beck is the first German to billet at Le Jardin. Beck repeatedly tells Vianne that he is a gentleman and will behave in the way his mother would expect him to. Vianne is surprised by this polite man who looks like someone she could meet in church. He tells Vianne about his wife and children and helps her to get medicine when Sophie becomes ill. He also makes certain there is food for Sophie in the winter when times are particularly difficult.

Eventually Beck and Vianne develop some romantic feelings for one another, though the feelings seem to primarily stem from their loneliness and missing their spouses. Both resist the feelings and never betray their spouses.

While Beck does conduct himself in a gentlemanly manner, it's never entirely clear whether or not he is a sympathetic character. On one hand, he does help Vianne in many ways. However, he uses her tentative trust of him to get her to provide a list of Jews and other "undesirables" working at the school with her. Vianne also witnesses him whipping Jews as they are forced onto trains to be transported to work camps, but he insists he is only following orders.

In the end, Beck is killed when he discovers Isabelle hiding in the barn cellar. Vianne hits Beck in the head with a shovel to save her sister and Isabelle shoots him. Both sisters believe they are the one to have delivered the killing blow, but the author never makes it clear which sister was ultimately responsible for his death.

## Sophie Mauriac

Sophie Mauriac is the daughter of Vianne and Isabelle. She is just a child when the war begins. Sophie is best friends with Sarah de Champlain. When Sarah is forced to wear a star to indicate she is Jewish, the fiercely loyal Sophie says she will wear one, too. Of course, she is told this is one thing she cannot do with her best friend.

When Isabelle comes to live at Le Jardin, Sophie is enamored with her. She admires Isabelle's bravery and wishes her mother could be more like Isabelle.

Sophie grows into an astute teenager who is acutely aware of the things going on around her. She realizes that what is being done to the Jewish people in France is



unfair. She also understands and complies when Vianne explains that they are taking Ari in and must pretend his name is Daniel and they've adopted him from Antoine's cousin. When Von Richter begins forcing Vianne to have sex with him, Sophie indicates to her mother that she knows what is going on. Later, she also tells Vianne that she knows about the pregnancy and encourages Vianne to lie to Antoine about the baby when he returns.

Sophie is Vianne's reason for finally resisting the Germans. Vianne does not want Sophie to grow up in a world where evil is allowed to go unchecked. When Vianne begins to help hide Jewish children, Sophie tells Vianne she is proud of her.

At the end of the novel, Vianne reveals as an elderly woman that Sophie died of cancer.

## Rachel de Champlain

Rachel de Champlain is Vianne's neighbor and best friend. She is a Jewish woman. Her husband Marc is sent to fight in the war along with Antoine. Rachel is one of Vianne's support people upon whom Vianne has relied for many years. Rachel has a positive attitude and tries to make the best of a bad situation. She tries to find the humor in life and attempts to lift Vianne's spirits by making jokes.

Rachel teaches at the school with Vianne. When Beck asks Vianne to give him a list of Jewish teachers at the school, Rachel's name is initially left off the list until Beck reminds Vianne that Rachel should be named as well. Rachel is then fired from her teaching job. When Vianne confesses that she gave Beck the list of names, Rachel is angry at first, but quick to forgive her best friend.

Vianne attempts to hide Rachel in her barn cellar when the Germans begin rounding up Jews for the work camps, but she is unsuccessful and Rachel is sent to a camp where she ultimately dies.

## Sarah de Champlain

Sarah de Champlain is Rachel's daughter and Sophie's best friend. She and Sophie are approximately the same age. While Sarah doesn't appear in the novel a great deal, she is important because her death is, in part, the impetus for Vianne become actively involved in saving Jewish children during the war. Vianne is greatly affected by the death of her best friend's child in such a violent fashion, so when she is asked to take Ari, Vianne does not hesitate. Later, when she is asked to help another Jewish child, having already saved one child, Vianne realizes that she must do what she can to save others.



## **Ariel (Ari) de Champlain / Daniel**

Ariel de Champlain is the son of Rachel. Ari is the first Jewish child that Vianne saves during the war. When Sarah is shot and Rachel is sent to the work camp she asks Vianne to take Ari. Vianne vows to take Ari and protect him like her own child. She changes his name to Daniel and tells people he is the orphaned son of Antoine's cousin.

At the end of the war, Ari is taken from Vianne to be reunited with his relatives in America. When Vianne attends the reunion in France, Ari finds her and tells her he never forgot Vianne or Sophie and has looked for them for many years.

## **Von Richter**

Von Richter is the second German soldier to billet with Vianne. Unlike Beck, he is cruel and sadistic. He drinks real coffee in front of Vianne and eats elaborate meals without ever offering Vianne or Sophie anything. He also takes the nicest upstairs bedroom leaving Vianne and Sophie with the smaller room downstairs that was previously occupied by Beck. Von Richter rapes Vianne and impregnates her. The child who is conceived is raised as Antoine's child and is named Julien Mauriac.

## **Antoine Mauriac**

Antoine Mauriac is Vianne's husband and protector. He and Vianne met when Vianne was sent away from her father to live at Le Jardin when she was a young girl. Antoine is sent to fight in the war leaving Vianne to care for Sophie on her own. Before he leaves he withdraws all of their money from the bank and tells Vianne to hide it and spend it carefully. When Vianne loses her job and is out of money, she is tempted to write to Antoine and tell him, but by this time he is in a prison camp and she knows she cannot burden him.

When Antoine returns from the war Vianne is pregnant with Von Richter's child. She tells him she must have gotten pregnant on the night Antoine returned. Antoine seems to know the truth, but tells Vianne he chooses to see miracles.

## **Julien Rossignol**

Julien Rossignol is the father of Vianne and Isabelle. Julien served in the first war and returned home greatly changed. When his wife died, he was unwilling or unable to care for Vianne and Isabelle. He sends them to Le Jardin to be raised by a stranger. Later, when Vianne cannot care for Isabelle and sends her back to Julien, Julien places her in a series of boarding schools. As a result, he is estranged from his daughters.

Julien owns and operates a bookshop in Paris. He writes poetry and prints books of it in the back room of his shop. When Isabelle begins to run the shop, he tells her that he will



be keeping that room locked. Later, he reveals to Isabelle that he has been working with the French resistance and is the one who prints the falsified identification papers and the anti-German propaganda that she has helped to distribute. Julien is the one who gives Isabelle her Juliette Gervaise identity.

When Isabelle is captured and questioned about the identity of the Nightingale Julien turns himself in as the Nightingale in order to save her. He is shot and his body is displayed tied to a fountain as an example.

## **Julien Mauriac**

Julien Mauriac is Vianne's son. He is conceived when Von Richter rapes Vianne, but Vianne never reveals that to him. Julien is only included in the novel as the adult son of the elderly woman who is caring for his mother and helping her to move into a retirement home. When Vianne makes the decision to go to Paris for the reunion, Julien joins her. He is shocked to learn that his aunt was the Nightingale and even more shocked when he learns that his mother was responsible for saving nineteen Jewish children.

## **Marc de Champlain**

Marc de Champlain is Rachel's husband. He is sent to fight in the war and is captured and sent to a prison camp. Marc dies while in the prison camp.

## **Henri**

Henri is the leader of the French resistance in Carriveau. He is a known communist and, therefore, a dangerous person to be associated with. He draws Isabelle into the movement and gives her the job of delivering anti-German flyers. Isabelle leads Vianne to believe she is going to Paris on a romantic vacation with Henri when she is really going to Paris to act as a courier for the resistance. Later, Henri assists Isabelle in carrying out her work as the Nightingale.

## **Anouk**

Anouk is a woman and a member of the French resistance. She and Isabelle work together in France. They become close friends. Anouk tells Isabelle she can see that Isabelle has feelings for Gaetan. She encourages Isabelle to pursue the relationship because she believes love is what they are really fighting for. Anouk ends up in a work camp where Isabelle sees her briefly through the fence and is able to talk to her for a few moments before she is forced to move on. Anouk is outside a building where Jews are being cremated. She tells Isabelle they are being killed so the Germans can cover up what they have done.



## Madame Micheline Babineau

Madame Micheline Babineau was a friend of Isabelle's mother. When Isabelle begins her work as the Nightingale, her father tells her to find Madame Babineau because she will help Isabelle. Madame Babineau puts Isabelle in touch with Eduardo who serves as Isabelle's guide through the mountains. When Isabelle leads pilots through the mountains they start their journey at Madame Babineau's house.

Madame Babineau is captured with Isabelle and both are placed in a work camp. They encourage one another to keep living. When they are finally released Madame Babineau helps Isabelle, who is very ill, to return to Le Jardin.

## Eduardo

Eduardo guides Isabelle and the pilots through the mountains to Spain. He's a no-nonsense man who walks quickly, forcing Isabelle and the men to do the same in order to keep up. He doesn't speak much, but is a brave and faithful man who tells Isabelle that he will always be there when she has more pilots to transport.

## Didier

Didier is a member of the French resistance. He is an older man and helps Isabelle in her efforts as the Nightingale.

## Levy

Levy is a member of the French resistance. He is friends with Isabelle's father, but does not let on to that fact until after Julien reveals that he, too, is working with the resistance.

## The Humberts

The Humberts are the family that Julien sends Isabelle with to leave Paris at the start of the war. When their car runs out of gas and they are forced to walk, Isabelle is separated from them, which leads her to meet Gaetan.

## Mother Superior Marie-Therese

Mother Superior Marie-Therese is a nun at the convent where Vianne hides the Jewish children in the orphanage. She is Vianne's confidant and assists Vianne in her efforts to save the children.

## **Nathan Lerner and Phillipe Horowitz**

Nathan Lerner and Phillipe Horowitz are the two men who come to take Ari from Vianne and take him to his relatives in America. It is their job to reunite Jewish children with their Jewish relatives in an effort to save their culture.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Nightingales

Nightingales are referred to often throughout the novel. The nightingale traditionally symbolizes love and/or loss in literature. In this case, it symbolizes both. Isabelle and Vianne's last name means "nightingale" and their mother, whom they lost at a young age, called them her nightingales when she tucked them into bed. Later, Vianne hears a nightingale singing a sad song as she thinks about her husband, Antoine, who is in a prison camp. Juliette is given the codename Nightingale as she begins the dangerous work of transporting Allied airmen to Spain. Her position causes her to alienate those she loves in order to protect them and, ultimately, she loses her life to the task.

## Juliette Gervaise Papers

Vianne keeps Isabelle's Juliette Gervaise papers in a trunk. The papers are discovered by her son when she is an old woman. The papers symbolize the past that Vianne has never talked about. She keeps the past hidden away just as she keeps the Juliette papers tucked away in a trunk.

## Jasmine

Jasmine grows in the yard at Le Jardin. Vianne smells it as she says goodbye to Antoine and again when Isabelle dies in Gaetan's arms. On another occasion, she remembers smelling the jasmine when Antoine left while she is standing in the yard with Beck. For Vianne, the scent of jasmine symbolizes saying goodbye.

## Bebe

Bebe is Sophie's stuffed rabbit. When Antoine is sent to war she begins carrying the rabbit with her and sleeping with it again. When Ari is sent away to live in America with his Jewish relatives she gives the rabbit to him. The rabbit symbolizes a sense of security. Sophie feels safer having it with her and believes the rabbit will do the same for Ari.

## Trunks

Trunks symbolize lives that are filled with family and memories. Vianne, as an elderly woman, has a trunk that is filled with mementos from her life, including her children's artwork, photographs, and pieces from her life in Frances. Also hidden in the trunk are the false Juliette Gervaise pictures. As a young girl, Isabelle is jealous of the trunks she sees other girls arriving with at the boarding schools she attends. Their trunks are



covered with travel stickers and contain pictures and other mementos of family vacations. In the case of the elderly Vianne, her trunk becomes a place in which to hide her painful memories until the picture of Juliette Gervaise is discovered by her son and she makes the decision to tell him about her life and Isabelle.

## Edith Cavell

Edith Cavell is young Isabelle's hero. Edith Cavell was a nurse in the Great War. Isabelle reads books about her and aspires to be like her, so she wants to fight in the war when it begins. For Isabelle, Edith Cavell symbolizes bravery and heroism.

## Bicycle

Isabelle steals a bicycle she sees standing in the streets of Carriveau. She uses it to help her deliver the anti-German tracts around Carriveau and later takes it to Paris when she becomes a courier. Having stolen the bicycle, Isabelle feels a sense of bravado and a certain thrill at having defied the Germans. Henri paints the bicycle for Isabelle, giving it a new appearance. The bicycle symbolizes Isabelle's defiance and doing her part for France in the war. Having been painted, the bicycle takes on a new appearance just as Isabelle sometimes changes her appearance to play a role when she is on a mission.

## Coffee

During the war coffee becomes scarce for the people of France. Vianne and Rachel are forced to drink fake coffee made from acorns. This fake coffee is bitter. They long for real coffee, which they often see the Germans enjoying at cafes in town. When Von Richter moves in with Vianne, he drinks real coffee in front of her and never offers her any. The coffee comes to symbolize a better life lead before the Germans invaded France. It also symbolizes the way in which the Germans take away the conveniences and niceties the French people once had.

## Pearls

Vianne owns a string of pearls that once belonged to her mother. She plans to give them to Sophie one day. When Vianne runs out of money, she begins to sell all of her valuables until only the pearls are left. She is finally forced to sell the pearls when she worries about Sophie having enough food for the winter. The pearls symbolize Vianne's mother and the love of a mother for her child.





## Fabric Strips on the Apple Tree

When Antoine leaves to fight in the war, Vianne ties a piece of yarn to the apple tree in her yard. Each time she loses someone else she ties another piece of cloth to the branch. By the end of the novel, there are pieces for Antoine, Rachel, Sarah, and even Beck. While the other trees in the yard remain healthy and vibrant, this tree twists and shrivels. The fabric strips symbolize the people Vianne has lost while the shriveled tree symbolizes the grief Vianne has to bear.



# Settings

## Carriveau

Carriveau is the French town where Vianne lives. At the start of the book Carriveau is a pretty little town where the people are friendly and go about their daily routines. The townspeople know one another and greet each other as they move through town. While Carriveau is a small town, it does have an airstrip, which makes it attractive to the Germans when they invade.

As the war goes on the town becomes less of a lovely place to live and more a place of gossip and incrimination. The supplies become exceedingly scarce with the Germans taking the best of everything for themselves. With so many Nazis around, the people become fearful and begin to turn on one another. Vianne is the subject of gossip because Beck lives with her. Some suggest their relationship is more than just a soldier billeting at a woman's house. People become nosy and Vianne is questioned by a woman about the identity of Daniel in a way that suggests the woman is looking for some bit of information to give the Germans to garner their favor.

## Le Jardin

Le Jardin is the name of Vianne's house. Vianne's father, Julien, gave her Le Jardin when she was just a girl because her mother had died and he did not want to - or was unable to - raise Vianne and her sister Isabelle. Instead, Vianne and Isabelle lived at Le Jardin and were raised by a stranger. Le Jardin, which means "the garden," is a picturesque little house with stone wall covered with roses, a gazebo in the yard, and a vegetable garden. The house is well-kept and the author makes it sound like a picturesque place to live.

Through the course of the war Le Jardin undergoes a change. The Germans knock down the lovely stone wall and the gate hangs from the hinges. Vianne is forced to turn the gazebo into a chicken coop so that she and Sophie can have eggs to eat. The Germans take many of the antiques and other valuables from the house and Vianne is also forced to sell some of them to survive.

On the property of Le Jardin is a barn with a cellar. The cellar door is hidden beneath Antoine's car, which remains parked there while he is away at war. Isabelle uses the cellar to hide some of the valuables from the house to keep them from the Germans. Later, Vianne attempts to hide Rachel there so that she will not be sent to a work camp. Finally, Isabelle hides a pilot there, which leads to Beck's death.



## Paris

Julien Rossignol lives in Paris and Isabelle wants to stay there when she is expelled from her final boarding school. When the Germans invade France Paris is quickly overtaken. People flee the city on foot and in cars causing a major traffic jam. During this traffic jam, Isabelle is separated from the family Julien sent her away with, leading her to meet Gaetan. When Isabelle becomes a courier for the resistance she moves back to Paris and insists on living in the apartment there with her father. She even reopens his bookstore, which he had closed when the Germans came in and seized several books. It is while living in Paris that Isabelle takes on the task of transporting downed airmen and becomes the Nightingale.

## Pyrenees Mountains

Isabelle transports the downed airmen across the Pyrenees into Spain. The author includes the Pyrenees as a setting only on the first time that Isabelle travels through them. This allows the reader to gain a real sense of how difficult and dangerous Isabelle's work is. The temperatures in the Pyrenees drop to dangerously cold levels and the terrain is very difficult to traverse. However, Isabelle musters all of her strength and leads the men through, encouraging them to keep moving all the while. Both the men she transports and the people she delivers them to are shocked that a young woman could take on the risk of hiking through the mountains while leading downed pilots.

## Work Camps

Isabelle is placed in a work camp after being captured. The author spares the reader the darker details of what these camps were really like, but provides enough detail to indicate that the conditions are deplorable, leading to illness and a great deal of death. Isabelle and Micheline encourage one another to survive the camps so that they can one day return home. They are put to hard physical labor and are sick and starving upon their release.

## The Oregon Coast

The chapters told from the point of view Vianne as an elderly woman are set in the United States at the Oregon Coast. Very little is said about the place itself. Vianne moves from her house to a retirement home. The home is described as pleasant, but looking like any other retirement home.



# Themes and Motifs

## Love

In the very first lines of the novel, the author states that "in love we find out who we want to be." The theme of love carries throughout the novel as the author explores what that line means. Love is seen through the relationships of several of the characters, such as Vianne and Antoine, Isabelle and Gaetan, and Julien and his deceased wife.

The relationship between Antoine and Vianne is the first to be presented in the novel. Vianne admits that Antoine was her savior. When Vianne was abandoned by her father and left with a stranger to raise Isabelle, she met Antoine who just made everything right. Vianne was a young girl when the two met and Antoine always took care of her. Because of this, Vianne believes she has no idea how to survive on her own when Antoine goes off to war.

Before she learns that Antoine has been placed in a prison camp, Vianne firmly believes that he is out there fighting to protect her and Sophie. She seems to think that he will, at any moment, come home and take care of everything for her no matter what others around her might say. Even after she learns of Antoine's imprisonment, she still holds fast to the belief that he will return and take care of her again.

Vianne thinks about Antoine often and about what she might say to him if he were there. Her imagined conversations typically occur when she is struggling with a difficult situation. For example, when she runs out of money, her first thought is to write to Antoine and tell him her troubles. However, her love for him prevents her from doing so because she doesn't want to burden him with worrying about her. Later, when Vianne struggles with the idea of raising Sophie in a world where bad things happen and good people just stand by and watch, she thinks about talking to Antoine about her decision to save the Jewish children.

Antoine's return at the end of the war does, in fact, start to make things right again in Vianne's world. Antoine immediately accepts that Vianne has taken Ari in and does not question or negate her decision. He simply accepts Ari and includes him in the family. When Vianne tells Antoine that she is pregnant, but tries to pretend that the baby is his, he instinctively understands what has really happened. Instead of being angry or upset, he tells Vianne without saying that he knows she was raped, that he chooses to see miracles. At the end of the book, the reader learns that the child was a boy whom Vianne named Julien and Antoine raised as his own.

The relationship between Isabelle and Gaetan is more passionate and, for some readers, will read as more romantic. For Isabelle, it's love at first sight. Gaetan is the first man she meets who isn't interested in her only for her beauty. Instead, he invites her to join him in the resistance effort. As the two travel on foot toward Carriveau, Isabelle tells Gaetan that she loves him. This declaration comes so quickly that it scares



Gaetan and he abandons her at Carriveau. Isabelle believes Gaetan has decided he doesn't want her, but in truth, Gaetan knows that love can be a great risk during war because it gives a person so much more to lose. Even with Isabelle and Gaetan are later reunited and consummate their relationship, Gaetan still cannot bring himself to tell Isabelle that he loves her. In fact, he never says it until the war is over and he finds Isabelle at Le Jardin where she dies in his arms. Before Isabelle dies, Gaetan tells her she is still as beautiful as he remembered, confirming for the reader the fact that Gaetan has always loved Isabelle for the person she is rather than just her physical beauty.

Both Vianne and Isabelle illustrate the author's idea of finding out who we want to be in love. Vianne wants to lead a simple life. She wants to be a wife and a mother. She wants to be protected and cherished instead of abandoned to care for herself as she was when her father left her at Le Jardin when she was young. She finds that identity in her relationship with Antoine. Isabelle wants to be a woman who is regarded for more than just her good looks. She does not want to be a "lady" raised in boarding and finishing schools to talk about polite subjects and know the proper etiquette. Instead, she wants to be like her hero Edith Cavell and make a difference in the world. Her relationship with Gaetan allows her to be that person. Gaetan certainly recognizes that Isabelle is beautiful, but he sees beyond that to her spirit and her ability to do more. Through her relationship with Gaetan, Isabelle is drawn into the war and allowed to become the hero she aspired to be.

## War

The author uses the theme of war in two ways. First, the author uses war as a frame for the story of Isabelle and Vianne. The atrocities of war are the backdrop for the plot and the author creates a picture of the hardships inherent in war. There are descriptions of people killed by bombs and being shot. People are displaced from their homes when the Germans invade France. Cities are bombed and both Vianne and Isabelle witness horrific deaths. The French people lose many of the basic freedoms they were used to before the war. Food becomes very scarce and people are forced from their jobs because of their religion, sexual orientation, or other aspects the Germans find undesirable. Their possessions are requisitioned by the Germans to the point where Vianne has very little left by the end of the war. As the Germans begin to lose the war, their violence toward the French escalates. There are mass shootings and Von Richter becomes even more cruel to Vianne.

Julien Rossignol serves as a reminder of the lasting effects the atrocities of war have on the people involved in them. Vianne remembers how her father returned from the Great War a broken man. Micheline echoes this when she talks to Isabelle about having known her parents when they were younger. Julien was never the same after fighting in the war and it left him unable to care for his children after his wife died.

Another way in which the author uses the theme of war is described in the first lines of the novel when she writes "in war we find out who we are." Both Vianne and Isabelle discover themselves as each seeks to survive the war. Vianne, who has always



believed herself to be a weak woman needing protection, discovers she is so much more. She is, in fact, quite capable of being self-sufficient as she learns when she has to care for Sophie by herself after Antoine goes to war. In fact, she is so capable and such a fierce mother, that she takes Ari in and raises him as her own when Rachel is taken away. Finally, when she can stand no more of the evil going on around her, Vianne decides to take a stand. She begins to save Jewish children at great risk to herself and to Sophie, especially since she has a German soldier billeting in her house. By the end of the novel, Vianne proves that she is a brave, capable woman, but one who has never lost her hopeful nature. She holds on through the war believing that Antoine would return and they would resume their lives and she tells Sophie that they must let love be stronger than hate in order to go on. Yet, she never quite sees herself as the heroic woman she is since she is always surprised at the reactions of others to her having saved nineteen Jewish children. In fact, she repeatedly says that Isabelle is the brave one, not her.

Isabelle discovers that she is, in fact, a hero like her idol Edith Cavell. She is defiant and spirited and refuses to be ignored. Isabelle steps out in front of the German soldiers as they march down the street so they cannot help but see her. She jumps into the resistance effort with little hesitation as soon as she's given a chance and she continues to take on greater risks until she finally becomes the Nightingale and transports men across the Pyrenees. The war allows Isabelle to show her heroic side in a way that a time of peace never could.

## Loss

The theme of loss permeates the novel as Vianne and Isabelle lose so many people they love. The first loss of the novel occurs when Antoine leaves to fight in the war. Vianne is frightened and saddened at the prospect of having to care for herself and Sophie without her beloved Antoine. When he leaves, Vianne ties a piece of cloth to her apple tree to remind her of Antoine every time she sees it. She will continue to do this with each new loss she suffers.

Next, Isabelle loses Gaetan, or at least she believes he does. After Isabelle declares her love for Gaetan, he abandons her at Le Jardin and sneaks away in the night leaving her with a note indicating she isn't ready. This is not the first time Isabelle has felt a sense of loss and abandonment since she believes her father abandoned her when she was a child.

Vianne also suffers the loss of Rachel when she is sent to a work camp. This loss happens after Vianne witnesses the brutal shooting death of Rachel's daughter, Sarah, who is shot as Rachel tries to escape with her children. Vianne is left to bury Sarah by herself after hiding Rachel in her barn cellar. Vianne's attempt to hide her friend are unsuccessful and Rachel is lost when she is discovered and taken away.

Isabelle and Vianne endure the loss of their father, Julien, just as they have begun to repair their relationship with him. Before going to rescue Isabelle, Julien comes to see



Vianne to say goodbye. In doing so, he explains in part why he wasn't able to care for his daughters when they were children. Vianne realizes she isn't ready to lose her father and when a piece of his shirt sleeve rips away as he leaves, she adds it to her apple tree to mark his loss. Julien is executed by the Germans after turning himself in as the Nightingale in order to spare Isabelle. He leaves a letter for his daughters telling them he always loved them. When Isabelle reads the letter she realizes the love she always had for her father has turned into loss.

Vianne also feels Beck's death as a loss even though he is the enemy. As Vianne and Beck get to know one another they develop a tentative friendship. Beck talks about his wife and children and gives Vianne insights into the man he is outside of his role as a soldier. When Vianne is forced to kill him to save Isabelle, she feels his death as a loss and feels guilty over killing someone she believes was a good man. She even adds a black ribbon to her tree for Beck.

Vianne's most difficult loss is the loss of Ari after the war is over. When Vianne learns that both Rachel and Marc are dead, she accepts that Ari/Daniel will be her son for real now. However, when the Jewish officials come to take him away, Vianne understands the loss the Jewish culture has experienced and does not fight when they take Ari to live with his relatives in America.

In the final chapter of the book, the author reveals that Vianne has also lost Isabelle and Sophie. Isabelle died in Gaetan's arms on the day he came to Le Jardin to find her. Sophie died of cancer.

## Perception of Women

The theme of the perception of women is primarily illustrated through Isabelle. From the start Isabelle is frustrated by the way people see her as just a pretty girl. She is treated as though she isn't capable of more than the polite conversation and etiquette she is forced to learn in boarding and finishing schools. Isabelle finds these teachings irrelevant in the face of a war and believes herself capable of so much more. She idolizes Edith Cavell who was a hero in the Great War and aspires to find a way to make a difference, too. When she tells one boy that she is reading a book about Edith Cavell and that she wants to be like Cavell, the boy scoffs at her because she's just a pretty girl. At every turn, Isabelle encounters men who treat her differently because she's pretty.

When Isabelle joins the resistance she turns the tables and uses the way she looks to aid her in deceiving the Germans. Isabelle knows that the Germans won't suspect her of anything because all they see is her pretty face. When she goes to Paris as a courier for the resistance she even has to convince the Paris group that she is capable of carrying out her duties. Isabelle is forced to argue her ability with Anouk, another woman, whom Isabelle tells she is capable of doing anything a man can do and Anouk ought to know that better than anyone else in the room. As a courier, Isabelle learns to dress the part for whatever task she is carrying out. She frequently uses her pretty face to get into or



out of situations or ask questions that a man could never get away with. As she works with the resistance, Isabelle reopens her father's bookshop and uses it as her cover for being in Paris. The German soldiers flock to the store to flirt with the pretty shop girl, thus adding another layer of protection for Isabelle.

When Isabelle becomes the Nightingale and transports men over the mountains, she knows that being a woman means the Germans will never suspect her as the Nightingale. They would never believe that a woman could hike through the mountains. Indeed, when she reaches Spain for the first time the man at the consul is shocked that a woman could do such a thing. As the Nightingale, Isabelle occasionally runs into some resistance from the men she is trying to help. One man refuses to follow the orders of a girl and ends up getting arrested.

When Isabelle is captured by the Germans it is clear that they have no idea that she is the Nightingale because they say they know she works for the Nightingale and demand to know who "he" is. They obviously think the Nightingale is a man and are even willing to believe that an old man like Julien could be the Nightingale before a woman.

## Family

The theme of family is important since *The Nightingale* is truly the story of two sisters and their father and their enduring love regardless of the space between them due to their shared past. Isabelle and Vianne grew apart as they were growing up because of the circumstances of their upbringing after their mother died. Their father was unable to care for them and so left them at Le Jardin with a stranger. Isabelle, being a willful child, refused to behave and made life more difficult for Vianne. When Vianne married at a young age and suffered miscarriage, she was unable to take care of Isabelle, so their father sent Isabelle to a boarding school. This situation created a rift between the girls because Isabelle feels like she was abandoned by her family. However, through the course of the novel, the author shows that in spite of it all, the women remain sisters and cannot help but love one another. They also cannot help but love their broken father.

As a girl, Isabelle continually ran away from the schools where she was placed in an attempt to return to her father. Isabelle feels like she has lived her life begging her father to love her and let her stay. When the war begins and Julien sends her away yet again, Isabelle is understandably angry and hurt. She doesn't realize that Julien is sending her away to protect her because Carriveau will be a safer place than Paris. Julien sees protecting his daughters as a way of being a father to them. As the story goes on, the author indicates that Julien sent his daughters away when they were young as a means of protecting them. He realized he couldn't be the father they needed because of the death of his wife and the trauma of the Great War. He continues to protect them during the war by not revealing his role in the resistance until he must. Finally, Julien makes the ultimate sacrifice when he gives his life in order to save Isabelle.





Vianne and Isabelle do not see eye-to-eye at the start of the war. Vianne wishes to just blend in and remain unnoticed by the Germans so that she can keep herself and her daughter safe. Isabelle, however, refuses to be unseen. She is outspoken and brash and Vianne fears her actions will endanger them all. The two argue and Vianne tells Isabelle she must learn to keep her mouth shut for Sophie's sake. When Isabelle goes to Paris she asks Henri to look after Vianne for her and Henri gives her reports on Vianne's life. When Isabelle hides an airman in Vianne's barn, Vianne discovers her and they argue again with Vianne telling Isabelle to leave and not come back. But, when Isabelle is shot, Vianne jumps in and tries to get Gaetan to leave Isabelle at Le Jardin to be cared for. When he insists that he must take Isabelle with him, Vianne rides with him for a time and tells him to take care of Isabelle and not to break her heart. So, even though she is angry at Vianne, she cannot help but love her sister. At one point she has a conversation with Henri about how she and Isabelle fight all the time. Henri comforts her by saying that is the nature of siblings and he and his brother do the same, but they always love each other.

Isabelle tries to protect Vianne as well. She lies repeatedly to Vianne about what she is doing because she knows that Vianne will be in danger if she knows about Isabelle's involvement with the resistance. She is hurt by Vianne's angry words when Vianne discovers her with the airman, yet when she is captured and questioned by the Germans, Vianne's name becomes like a prayer to her and she wonders why she hasn't told her family that she loves them every day.

At the end of the war, Vianne searches for Isabelle and Isabelle strives to return home to Le Jardin. The two are reunited and finally reveal their true feelings for each other. They express a desire to start fresh and become the sisters their mother wanted them to be. Though Vianne had once admonished her sister for her impetuous nature, she now tells Isabelle that she is proud of her, and those are the words Isabelle has needed to hear.

# Styles

## Point of View

The *Nightingale* uses two different points of view. The chapters that are set in 1995 when Vianne is an old woman are told from the first person point of view of Vianne and are in the present tense. They include only her thoughts and what she sees and hears immediately around her. The author's choice to use two different perspectives is effective in hiding the identity of the elderly woman until the end of the novel. In fact, the elderly woman's thoughts frequently lead the reader to believe she might be Isabelle rather than Vianne. Using the present tense to tell this portion of the story brings a modern feel to the chapters and makes the action in them more immediate to the reader.

The majority of the story, which occurs in France during World War II, is told from the third person omniscient point of view. The author also shifts to past tense, which gives the chapters a sense of being the old woman's memories. The author tells the story of Vianne and Isabelle including their individual thoughts and actions. By using third person omniscient to tell the story of Vianne's and Isabelle's lives during the war, the author is able to delve into how the war affects each woman. It also allows the author to more fully explore how the relationship between the sisters impacts the choices that each makes as they try to survive the war. For example, Vianne is fiercely protective of Sophie because she lost other children to miscarriages. She believes Sophie is the only child she will ever have. Isabelle makes rash decisions in an attempt to be noticed and admired by her father who she believes does not love her because he could not raise her.

## Language and Meaning

The language of *The Nightingale* is fairly straightforward and appropriate to high school level readers and above. The author includes some French words, which help give the chapters set in France a more authentic feel. However, the words are few and far between and are easily deciphered through context clues. There are also some historical terms related to World War II, such as Gestapo, Nazi, and swastika, that may allow for a discussion of the war and the history behind the book. There are also some European words and spellings that may be unfamiliar to younger readers, such as aeroplane for airplane and airman for pilot.

The style of the language does not change throughout the novel because the entire story is actually told by Vianne. The author does an excellent job of remaining consistent in language usage so that the reader cannot tell which sister is the elderly woman until she reveals her identity at the end of the book.

There is a great deal of dialogue between the characters of the novel, which keeps the action moving and the reader involved in the lives of the characters. The dialogue is



generally of a rapid-fire nature with short sentences and back-and-forth exchanges rather than lengthy monologues. The author does not attempt to invoke either French or German accents in any of the characters, which makes the dialogue easier to read and understand. The only difference sometimes shown between German and French characters is in the way Beck occasionally uses the wrong word to express his thoughts. This may be a calculated move on his part to make him seem less threatening to Vianne.

## Structure

The *Nightingale* consists of 39 chapters. It is not broken into sections. Some of the chapters take place in the U.S. in 1995, but the majority of the chapters occur in France during World War II. The chapters set in 1995 from the point of view of the elderly woman are short in comparison to those set in the 1940s.

When the time period shifts, the chapters include headers that indicate which time period the chapter is set in, which makes it easy for the reader to follow the story. There are sometimes large leaps in time in the chapters set during the war. This allows the author to move the story forward to cover the span of the war without drawing out the action to a point that might become tedious to the reader.

The novel begins and ends with chapters told by the elderly woman who is revealed to be Vianne at the end of the book. Doing so makes it clear to the reader that the chapters told during the war are indeed Vianne's remembrances and it has been Vianne telling the story all along.



## Quotes

If I have learned anything in this long life of mine, it is this: In love we find out who we want to be; in war we find out who we are.

-- Elderly Woman (Chapter 1 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** These are the opening lines of the novel spoken by Vianne as an elderly woman. The reader does not yet know who the elderly woman is. These lines introduce two of the themes of the book, love and war. In the end, the author reveals that the elderly woman is Vianne and she clearly became the brave woman she is when she began saving Jewish children during the war.

You'd be surprised the things I know, Gaetan. There is more than one kind of prison.

-- Isabelle (Chapter 6 paragraph 14)

**Importance:** Isabelle says this to Gaetan when he tells her she wouldn't know what it's like to be in prison like he does. Isabelle is referring to the "prison" she's been in as a female. She is seen as merely a pretty face who is incapable of doing important things. She's been shuffled from one place to another her entire life with little regard for what she really wants. This quote ties directly into the theme of the perception of women since Isabelle is commenting on the way people see her because she is a girl.

For the first time, her romantic novels made sense; she realized that the landscape of a woman's soul could change as quickly as a world at war.

-- Narrator (Chapter 7 paragraph 119)

**Importance:** This quote occurs immediately after Gaetan and Isabelle first kiss. Isabelle's heart had been closed off by the losses she'd experienced. She had lost her mother and been abandoned by her father and sister. At Gaetan's kiss, Isabelle feels her heart open and she feels true romantic love for the first time. She realizes how quickly love could change her life, as quickly as war has changed the world around her. This quote is an example of the theme of love in that through loving Gaetan, Isabelle becomes the person she wants to be. That is, she becomes someone open to love and someone who is loved.

She had no idea how to respond to this stranger who dressed like the enemy and looked like a young man she might have met at church.

-- Narrator (Chapter 8 paragraph 192)

**Importance:** This is Vianne's reaction when Beck arrives to billet at Le Jardin. Beck tells her that he will be a gentleman while he is staying with her because that is what his mother would expect. Beck immediately comes across as a kind man, which confuses Vianne because he is the enemy. She does not expect the enemy to seem like any other man she might meet. This quote exemplifies the relationship between Beck and Vianne which remains complicated throughout their time together. Beck is never revealed to be either a sympathetic nor a non-sympathetic character. Instead, the



author allows him to remain a grey character. That is, there are instances in which he commits evil acts, such as whipping Jews and shooting Isabelle, but there are also times when he is quite good, such as providing medicine for Sophie and telling Vianne to hide Rachel.

This essential difference had always been between them. Vianne the rule follower and Isabelle the rebel.

-- Narrator (Chapter 9 paragraph 74)

**Importance:** This quote sums up the nature of the two sisters. Vianne is the kind of person who follows the rules and just tries to blend in without causing trouble. She believes that if she remains inconspicuous she can get by and that is how she will survive the war. Isabelle, on the other hand, refuses to stand by while the Germans invade France. Instead, she boldly steps in front of the German soldiers marching in the streets of Carriveau so that they cannot help but see her. She is intent on fighting in some capacity. Vianne and Isabelle argue over Isabelle's impetuous nature because Vianne believes that Isabelle will put them all in danger through her actions, thus widening the rift between them.

Don't think about who they are. Think about who you are and what sacrifices you can live with and what will break you.

-- Mother Superior Marie-Therese (Chapter 12 paragraph 134)

**Importance:** Mother Superior Marie-Therese says this to Vianne when Vianne seeks her counsel after she gives Beck the list of names that results in Rachel being fired. Vianne still thinks she cannot manage without Antoine, and certainly not in the face of the Germans. Mother reminds her that she has to determine what she can put up with. As the story goes on, Vianne discovers that she cannot stand by and watch evil happen. She draws the line at allowing Jewish children to be sent to work camps or left alone when their parents are taken away. Instead, she decides to sacrifice living in relative safety to help the children.

How can I possibly go without remembering all of it-the terrible things I have done, the secret I kept, the man I killed...and the one I should have.

-- Elderly Woman (Chapter 14 paragraph 42)

**Importance:** The elderly woman, later revealed to be Vianne, says this after receiving the invitation to the reunion of those involved in the French resistance. The author uses this quote to build suspense and continue to tease as to the identity of the elderly woman. In the end, the reader learns that the terrible things Vianne speaks of are the difficult decisions she had to make during the war to keep herself and Sophie safe. The secret she kept was the events surrounding Julien's conception. The man she killed was Beck and the man she should have killed was Von Richter.

And you, of all people, should know that a woman can do anything a man can do.

-- Isabelle (Chapter 16 paragraph 88)



**Importance:** Isabelle says this to Anouk when she first goes to Paris to be a courier for the resistance. The resistance members believe she's just a young girl who won't be capable of performing the necessary duties. Anouk tells Isabelle that she's too young, but Isabelle says she's not young anymore, but her looks will help her because no one will suspect her. Isabelle points out to Anouk that as a woman, she should know that women can do the same things as men. This quote ties into the theme of the perception of women since Isabelle is pointing out that the way that people look at women can be an asset in their war efforts.

I forge papers, Isabelle. That's why I work at the high command. I began writing the very tracts you distributed in Carriveau, but...it turns out that the poet has a forger's hand. Who do you think gave you the name Juliette Gervaise?  
-- Julien Rossignol (Chapter 18 paragraph 164)

**Importance:** This is the point at which Isabelle's father reveals his true self to Isabelle. He is not merely a weak and broken man. Like Isabelle, he is a member of the resistance. From this point Isabelle begins to see her father in a different light and in some small way the relationship between the two is repaired.

But the real changes were within. The pride of what she'd accomplished in the Pyrenees had changed her, matured her. For the first time in her life, she knew exactly what she wanted to do.  
-- Narrator (Chapter 20 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** This quote occurs after the first time Isabelle transports airmen across the Pyrenees. From this point on, Isabelle is truly the Nightingale and there is a change in the way she acts. She becomes more responsible and seems to finally understand the gravity of the situation she is in and the danger to those around her if she makes an error. This is not to say that Isabelle stops taking risks, but instead that she knows the impact of the moves she makes. Also, Isabelle finally feels like she's become the person she has longed to be since the start of the novel. She is a brave hero as she had hoped to be.

I don't know the right thing to do anymore. I want to protect Sophie and keep her safe, but what good is safety if she has to grow up in a world where people disappear without a trace because they pray to a different God?  
-- Vianne (Chapter 23 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** Vianne thinks this after Sarah dies. It is what she imagines saying to Antoine if he were with her. Vianne is agonizing over how she can stand back and watch the Jewish people being killed and sent to camps in order to keep Sophie safe. She knows she has a very difficult decision to make in that she truly wants to avoid drawing attention to herself and to Sophie because she knows it would be safer. However, she also knows that the right and moral thing to do is to find a way to help the Jews. This is the point at which Vianne begins to change in her attitude toward the war. She has always been passive, but now she begins to see that she may not be able to continue living this way.



Vianne heard the confession that lay beneath. He was telling her his own story in the only way he could, cloaked in Isabelle's.

-- Narrator (Chapter 33 paragraph 121)

**Importance:** Vianne's father comes to Vianne when Isabelle is captured. He tells Vianne that she must be there when Isabelle comes home. He talks about how Isabelle will one day worry about whether or not she did the right thing and it will be up to Vianne to tell her that she did. Vianne knows that Julien is speaking not only about Isabelle, but also about his own experiences in the Great War. Julien is explaining to her why he treated Vianne and Isabelle the way he did when they were children.

The other apple trees were hale and healthy, but this one, the tree of her remembrances, was as black and twisted as the bombed-out town behind it.

-- Narrator (Chapter 33 paragraph 37)

**Importance:** The apple tree referred to in this quote is the tree that Vianne has been tying bits of cloth to in remembrance of people who are missing or who have died. The ribbons symbolize her losses and the tree, having had to bear the weight of Vianne's losses, has begun to shrivel and die as Vianne's heart might do if she were to allow herself to crumble under the stress of the war. The tree has begun to reflect the devastation of the town and the people around it.