

# **The Passion Study Guide**

## **The Passion by Jeanette Winterson**

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# Plot Summary

In *The Passion*, the young Frenchman Henri, sent to fight in the Napoleonic wars, meets a Venetian woman with webbed feet, Villanelle, in Russia. Together, they flee from the *grande armee*. Henri falls in love with her, though Villanelle's heart is with another. Henri kills Villanelle's husband and winds up in prison, where Villanelle visits him, eventually bearing his child though refusing to marry him.

As the novel begins, Henri, a new recruit of Napoleon's *grande armee*, has dreams of serving as a drummer. He is instead assigned the ignoble task of sating the emperor's considerable appetite for spit-roasted chicken. Though disappointed, Henri finds solace in being near the charismatic leader, this despite Napoleon's petulant, grasping behavior. Desperate for fulfillment, Henri wants to believe that Napoleon Bonaparte is worthy of his reputation.

Disillusioned, Henri finds friendship with Domino, a horse keeper who believes in living only for today, and Patrick, a defrocked priest with a penchant for tall tales. Together, they endure the hardships of Napoleon's Boulogne base camp, where France prepares to invade England. Plagued with guilt at seeing so many of his countrymen killed, Henri begins the New Year of 1805 doubting Napoleon's worth.

Meanwhile, a beautiful and mysterious Venetian, Villanelle, meets her heart's desire across a casino card table. This woman, whom Villanelle refers to as the "Queen of Spades," becomes Villanelle's lover. The two women meet whenever the Queen's husband is away. By chance, Villanelle sees the "Queen" and her husband together and is crushed by the obvious love they share. Seeing no future with the Queen, Villanelle begins the New Year of 1805 with a broken heart.

Several years pass. Napoleon and the *grande armee* arrive at Moscow, but the Russians have already put it to the torch. Disgusted and tired of Napoleon's endless war, Henri deserts with Patrick and a lovely prostitute, Villanelle. Villanelle tells them of how her fat, wealthy husband sold her to the *grande armee*. She also tells the story of how she literally lost her heart to the Queen of Spades. Posing as husband and wife, Henri and Villanelle soon become intimate.

Henri and Villanelle make their way to Venice, but Patrick falls ill and doesn't survive the trip. Despite the encouragement of Villanelle's parents, Villanelle refuses to marry Henri, referring to him as "brother." Despite this rejection, Henri recovers Villanelle's stolen heart from the Queen of Spades. The two soon run afoul of Villanelle's husband, an old enemy from Henri's past. Henri kills the husband, cutting out his heart.

Henri confesses to the crime and is imprisoned overlooking the Venetian lagoon. Villanelle makes conjugal visits while trying to arrange Henri's release. Henri, however, breaks off all contact when Villanelle, who now carries Henri's child, still refuses to marry him. As Villanelle accepts that the Queen of Spades will never be hers, Henri descends into hallucinatory madness, imagining that he is visited by the souls of long



departed friends. Villanelle occasionally trades a friendly wave with Henri from far below the prison window, their daughter by her side. Henri, with surprising lucidity, writes of his continued love her for Villanelle, bearing hew no ill will.



# Chapter 1, The Emperor, pg. 1-15

## Chapter 1, The Emperor, pg. 1-15 Summary

In *The Passion*, the young Frenchman Henri, sent to fight in the Napoleonic wars, meets a Venetian woman with webbed feet, Villanelle, in Russia. Together, they flee from the *grande armée*. Henri falls in love with her, though Villanelle's heart is with another. Henri kills Villanelle's husband and winds up in prison, where Villanelle visits him, eventually bearing his child though refusing to marry him.

As the novel begins, Henri recalls his time on the frozen Russian front, where he served as Napoleon's meal server. The emperor's love for poultry is legendary, his ravenous appetite demanding the constant slaughter and preparation of chicken. Henri is fond of Napoleon, but the little emperor is selfish, indulging in food, light and heat as his men go without. Henri recalls the time with bitterness, despairing the notion that people look back upon Napoleon Bonaparte as anything other than irrational.

Henri flashes back to when he first joined Napoleon's army. He wants to serve as a drummer, but due to his small, slight frame he is instead assigned to the kitchen at Boulogne. Now freezing in the Russian tundra, Henri misses the ordinary village he used to loathe. His memory turns to the last end-of-year bonfire, whose passionate fires belie the lukewarm hearts of he and his fellow villagers.

Henri leaves his village, joining Napoleon's army in the war against the English. After explaining to an inquisitive child that he won't kill people, but merely enemy combatants, Henri ponders the many terrible things he's heard about the English. Henri, like all of France, is enamored with Napoleon. Although Henri won't serve as a drummer, he is cheered to know he will meet the emperor himself.

Despite his religious upbringing, Henri feels God could never match the passion in his heart. Nevertheless, Henri's mother hoped he would join the priesthood. She herself wanted to become a nun but was forced by circumstances to marry instead. Henri was educated by the family priest, who taught him French, Latin and English, as well as how to gamble. Henri wishes that the priest had had the fervent belief necessary to inflame his own faith.

The narrator introduces the character of Napoleon as self-centered, grasping and passionate. He lusts for power in spite of himself, cutting himself off from love and understanding. Despite his power, Napoleon can't beat Josephine at billiards.

Henri joins his fellow soldiers at a brothel, finding it less appealing than the family priest had advertised. Henri's superior, the military cook, mistreats one of the prostitutes, earning him a swift blow to the back of the head. Put off by the experience, Henri complains of a headache and departs. They carry the cook home and the next day the



cook lies about what happened. Henri never again goes "whoring" with the men. Instead he perfects his preparation of chicken, waiting for Napoleon's arrival.

## Chapter 1, The Emperor, pg. 1-15 Analysis

As the story begins, the perspective is muddled in place and time. There is a sense that Henri, from some point in the future, is relating events from memory. As such, "now" is "then" as filtered through Henri's recollection. This explains the occasional aside, particularly with regard to Henri's perception of Napoleon, which has since changed and is now colored by hindsight. This also explains the way the narrative disjointedly jumps in time, as the mind draws connections independently from the linearity of the events themselves.

Henri's mind reels from the Russian cold, jumping from a frozen memory to the warmer memories of his village. Specifically, his thoughts turn to fire and absolution. Note, however, that Henri still comes back to the problem of the "lukewarm heart." The cold of the zero winter represents an all-consuming spiritual malaise. This touches on the central problem of Henri's character: the spiritual need for fulfillment. Henri can't find the "answering riot" that his heart so desperately craves.

Henri fails to find spiritual sustenance in the places where he has been taught to look. He doesn't share his mother's passionate faith nor does he find the sexual excitement promised by his priestly mentor. His own dreams of glory, fighting in the service of Napoleon Bonaparte, have resolved into a menial, repetitive job the likes of which could be done in peacetime.



# Chapter 1, The Emperor, pg. 16-32

## Chapter 1, The Emperor, pg. 16-32 Summary

Napoleon arrives at Boulogne, with wife and entourage in tow. Henri recalls France of his childhood, a dark, seeming apocalyptic time when the country was divided between royalists and revolutionaries. Despite his mother's royalist stance, the family priest raised Henri to think of Napoleon as a messiah, encouraging the boy to one day join the military.

The emperor's unexpected arrival throws the camp into disarray. Henri is ingloriously tasked with preparing the kitchen. Unfortunately he, despite the assistance of fellow soldier, Domino, is unable to wake, or move, the gargantuan passed-out head cook before Napoleon arrives for an inspection of the kitchen. Taking in the scene, Napoleon is impressed by Henri's efforts, insisting that the young man become his personal server.

The disgraced cook swears vengeance against the now-famous Henri, only to eventually be reassigned outside of Boulogne. The emperor inspires the enlisted men with his presence. The soldiers concern themselves with the construction and operation of the flat-bottom barges that will deploy the army across the channel. The men are too busy to worry about the projected 20,000 men expected to die in the crossing.

Henri befriends a former Irish priest named Patrick, defrocked for spying on women with his telescopic left eye. General Hoche, who reportedly tested Patrick's ability, returned from his campaign with the eagle-eyed Patrick in tow. At camp Boulogne Patrick is tasked with watching fleet movements from atop a tall, wide pillar. Whenever the emperor is abroad, Henri joins his friends Domino and Patrick on the pillar.

Up before dawn, Henri is concerned that high winds will interfere with Napoleon's plan to practice launching 25,000 ships in fifteen minutes. By noon begins torrential rain. The officers insist that the exercise must be canceled. Napoleon disagrees. Later, several ships are lost; 2,000 men are drowned. Henri, like many of the men, is disgusted, but no one speaks out against the emperor. The next day 2,000 replacements arrive in Boulogne.

Henri ponders how war has hardened him, discouraging him from feeling a woman's love. He recalls a man from his village, a famously cheerful inventor whose soul was crushed by the death of his wife. In the new recruits, Henri sees homesickness slowly burned away, replaced with lust and rage.

After the disaster, Henri resolves to begin a diary. Domino tries to dissuade him, insisting that "there's only now," but Henri is determined to remember his emotions. On leave, Henri returns to France to find everyone anxiously awaiting the coming coronation of Napoleon. His soldier's uniform is well received, and Henri plays up the



part. He eventually returns home to his parents' farm. Despite her formerly bad opinion of Napoleon, Henri's mother is looking forward to the coronation. She even surprises Henri with talk of reconnecting with her estranged parents.

## Chapter 1, The Emperor, pg. 16-32 Analysis

The second part of *The Emperor*, coupled with the earlier scene at the brothel, establishes the character of the cook, the man whom Villanelle will later marry. The cook represents the basest sort of passion, one which is slothfully indulged at the expense of others. His insubordination in the kitchen is not merely a deficit, but literally a burden to those who depend upon him. This establishes the cook as a foil to Henri's more selfless, servile persona.

Like the cook, Napoleon Bonaparte has a propensity for self-indulgence, but rather than acting as a drag on achievement, Napoleon is a motivator. He stokes passion in "lukewarm hearts," extending his selfhood to encompass those beneath him. Relieved of their individuality, Napoleon's men can put their faith in the emperor as others might put their faith in God and trust that all will be well.

The men, as a whole, are referred to in numeric terms. They are statistics. Losses are tallied up as a valuation of manpower. A man represent nothing more than a small percentage of Napoleon's "Grande Armee," a fungible commodity equally tradable through mutual substitution. To the emperor, individuals lack distinction—the 2,000 replacements are, for Napoleon's purposes, an equal trade for the 2,000 men who were lost at sea. In this way, the Napoleon's army dehumanizes its men.





# Chapter 1, The Emperor, pg. 33-45

## Chapter 1, The Emperor, pg. 33-45 Summary

It rains for several days of Henri's visit, but he still makes his rounds among his friends and neighbors. On the last day of his leave, Henri promises his mother that she can join him in Paris after the coronation. Henri is reunited with Napoleon in Paris, where extravagant preparations are underway for the crowning. Napoleon's court, Henri included, works at a harried pace to satisfy the eccentric emperor. This includes keeping a scalding hot bath on standby, should his majesty wish to bathe.

In the course of his duties, Henri meets the Lady Josephine. She is taken by Henri, briefly suggesting that he might want to work for her rather than the emperor. Seeing Henri's obvious distress at the idea, Josephine retracts the offer, pointing out Henri's obvious hero-worship of Napoleon. Jealous, Henri wishes he could belong to the emperor as Josephine does. Instead, Henri is enlisted to serve as food taster for the increasingly paranoid emperor.

Suddenly angry with Henri, the emperor sends him back to Boulogne, ostensibly to receive proper training as a soldier. While Paris celebrates the crowning of a new monarch, Henri trains ten hours a day in an army rapidly growing beyond its means. Several prostitutes are assigned to the camp; Henri notes their deplorable treatment and ponders the weight of their suffering. The cold, salty wind makes life difficult for everyone.

Henri takes comfort in Patrick's friendship, listening to far-fetched tales of goblins and fairy circles. As evidence of the supernatural, Patrick shows Henri a pair of worn, miniature boots supposedly shrunk by magic. The former priest also warns Henri against trusting the Virgin Mary, advocating that he instead pray to Jesus. Mary is bitter toward men, suggests Patrick, from God having forced himself upon her.

Patrick convinces Henri to join him for New Year mass. Henri agrees and is moved by the experience, feeling the spiritual warmth of the gathering. As he accepts communion, Henri is overcome with guilt over the 2,000 men lost during the exercise. He exits the church in deep depression, resolving that now is all there is, and that wonder and horror both are to be forgotten.

Outside, Henri marvels at the ardent faith emanating from the church and wonders as to its source. Henri briefly shares a friendly encounter with a passing mother and child. The church doors open and the congregation exits. Henri is filled by their warm cheer and simple good will. Patrick shares with Henri a bottle of wine stolen from behind the altar. Later, Henri lies awake, numb from the biting cold, beside Patrick and a pile of sleeping, drunken soldiers. The sun rises on New Year's Day 1805. Henri is twenty.



## Chapter 1, The Emperor, pg. 33-45 Analysis

Driven from the comforts of Napoleon's court, Henri is shown the disparity between the emperor and those who would serve the emperor. Whereas Napoleon dines in luxury, a hot bath always at ready, his men at Boulogne starve and freeze. While Josephine plays billiards in Paris, other women suffer unimaginable torment and mistreatment at the hands of miserable men.

Here again is a strict parallel between God and emperor. As Henri basks in the love and warmth of the church, feeling nothing of the religious faith that he's been taught to expect, Henri's thoughts turn to the guilt born of his true religion: the emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. Such was Henri's faith in the emperor that he ignored his own misgivings about the dangers involved in the watery exercise that ultimately claimed the lives of 2,000 men. If the emperor is fallible, Henri is culpable for a mislaid faith.

Henri's few fleeting moments of pleasure are decidedly humanist. Religion doesn't transport him, nor does glory or ambition. Henri is driven by the love, compassion and camaraderie of his fellow man. He is moved by the mother and her child, by the ritual of the church, by Patrick's fairy tales. Henri even understands Napoleon Bonaparte as an archetypal figure of French hope and promise. The ideas that plague Henri the most, conversely, are those involving human suffering and despair. Henri finds meaning through his relationships.



## Chapter 2, The Queen of Spades, pg. 46-62

### Chapter 2, The Queen of Spades, pg. 46-62 Summary

The perspective shifts to a new character: Villanelle. She characterizes Venice as a maze of rivers and bridges, where one is either lost or found. In Venice, Villanelle explains, the boatmen have webbed feet, and when their wives are pregnant, the expectant mother is required to undergo a ritual to ensure that daughters are born pure of heart and sons with webbed feet. Boatmen are never permitted to remove their boots.

Villanelle relates that she is the daughter of an impoverished boatman who removed one boot in exchange for a tourist's coin. The next day her father's boat was found unmanned save for one stark raving tourist. Soon after, Villanelle's mother learned she was pregnant and, despite the absence of her husband, sought to undergo the ritual necessary for a boatman's wife. Villanelle's mother, however, only partially completed the ritual.

Villanelle's mother, still pregnant, quickly married a baker. Some months later, during a solar eclipse, Villanelle was born—with webbed feet. Shocked, Villanelle's mother blamed the incomplete ritual. The midwife tried to cut away the webbing, but baby's flesh bent the blade. The midwife concludes that it is God's will. Villanelle's step-father decided that shoes would effectively hide the deformity.

Napoleon Bonaparte has conquered Venice, he and Josephine altering its landscape. The emperor leveled several churches and looted the city of its treasures. The people, no longer free, have succumbed to hedonism. The city has become a tourist destination, where the mad and wealthy are entertained. Villanelle characterizes Venice as a city of secrets, of darkness and of death.

As a woman, Villanelle's job prospects are few. Female boatmen are not permitted, but Villanelle learns the trade through observation. Unable to work as a dancer on account of her feet, and unwilling to develop the unfeminine musculature of a baker, Villanelle opts to become a casino dealer, disguising her sex beneath bilious clothes. She supplements her income by stealing from drunken patrons.

Villanelle enjoys the sexual tension of the casino, but one night her heart is unexpectedly stolen by a beautiful, mysterious gambler, a woman whom Villanelle comes to think of as the Queen of Spades. Unsettled, and having only an earring to remember this woman by, Villanelle doesn't go home after her shift. Instead she takes a boat out on the canals, past the inquisitive looks of the citizens, and into the lagoon. In the days that follow, Villanelle is beset with malaise and heartsick for the Queen of Spades.



## Chapter 2, The Queen of Spades, pg. 46-62 Analysis

With the introduction of Villanelle and Venice, *The Passion* veers into the realm of magical realism. Villanelle casts Venice as a living city, ever-changing and ever-demanding. Magical tropes abound: Breaking tradition has real consequences when Villanelle's mother fails to complete the necessary ritual on the "terrible island." Villanelle's invulnerable webbing demonstrates that mortal destiny will not be denied. Signs and portents predict real events; Venice is not to be trifled with. Of course, this portion of the story seems only as reliable as its narrator.

Villanelle's androgyny is less a matter of gender and more a matter of changeability. She has the webbed feet of a boatman, a male characteristic, but they are easily hidden away in her shoes. Villanelle enjoys dressing as a man, but predictably doesn't want the large, muscular arms of a baker. Muscles, after all, would limit Villanelle's ability to define her own gender aesthetic. Villanelle's bisexuality suits her as a child of Venice, potentially ever changing from night to night. Villanelle's character is defined by impermanence.



## Chapter 2, The Queen of Spades, pg. 63-76

### Chapter 2, The Queen of Spades, pg. 63-76 Summary

A flabby, but wealthy regular at the casino, proposes marriage to Villanelle. Ever the pragmatic Venetian, she considers the offer. As the two share a bottle of expensive wine, Villanelle's thoughts turn to the Queen of Spades. Suddenly aware that the man is groping her, she shakes him off and refuses to ever marry him. The encounter turns violent and Villanelle is raped.

With November comes the fog and drizzle that Venetians call the catarrh. Once blamed for any embarrassing or inexplicable death, the fog now serves to drive away foreigners. Still heartsick, and having no work to do, Villanelle waits around in costume for the unlikely opportunity to deal cards. Unexpectedly, the Queen of Spades reappears with the matching earring. It suddenly occurs to Villanelle that the Queen likely thinks Villanelle is male.

The Queen of Spades takes Villanelle home, where the two eat and enjoy a bottle of wine. The two women talk. The Queen explains that she is married and her husband is away on a trip. She adds that she can't make love to Villanelle, but that she can kiss her. The two women invest each kiss with the passion otherwise denied them. The evening ends on a melancholy note.

Villanelle is in agony, confused and upset. Walking home, she worries she'll never see The Queen again and madly wonders if she can still run off with the flabby man. Stopping beside the canal, Villanelle removes her boots and wonders if the rumors are true. Can she walk on water? Later, in the morning, a beggar would say that he saw a young man walking across the river as if it were stone.

Villanelle again encounters The Queen of Spades, this time in the stolen clothes of a soldier. The two eat, drink and play dice. The Queen asks Villanelle to remove either her boots or her shirt, but Villanelle can remove neither for fear of revealing a secret. The Queen announces that her husband returns tomorrow, adding that she doesn't know when she'll see Villanelle again. About to leave, Villanelle suddenly bares her breasts to The Queen, declaring herself a woman. The Queen already knew. Villanelle stays the night.

The two women continue to meet in secret, snatching moments where they may. When The Queen leaves for Christmas, Villanelle staves off the winter chill by visiting churches, basking in social warmth in lieu of sunshine. In the Queen's absence, Villanelle experiences a kind of ecstasy in knowing that the Queen will return.



Villanelle boards her gondola, leaving her parents to celebrate the New Year without her. She sails down the canal to The Queen of Spade's home. There in the window she spies The Queen with her husband. Seeing them together, she is struck by the peace they share. Heartbroken and feeling foolish, Villanelle sadly sails away, wondering about her own future. It is New Year's Day 1805.

## **Chapter 2, The Queen of Spades, pg. 63-76 Analysis**

The reader does not yet know that Henri's nemesis, the cook, is the same man as Villanelle's flabby suitor. There are, however, indicative clues. The man is still fat, for one, and his treatment of women hasn't improved since his encounter at the brothel. The cook's new found wealth, however, serves as misdirection. Henri's antagonistic cook never presented himself as a man of means.

Villanelle shares two bottles of wine with two would be lovers. In the first encounter, sex is forced upon her. In the second, it is denied her. As with Henri's mother, circumstances frustrate Villanelle's wishes. There is a bitter sense here that it is men, not women, who have the power of choice. The Queen belongs to her husband, just as Villanelle will belong to the cook.

A romantic desperation is evident in the pairing of Villanelle and the Queen. It exists in a perpetual state of "becoming" which, much like Villanelle herself, defies definition. While this proves adequate for a time, it is soon apparent to Villanelle that this liminal state is one of stasis. The Queen cannot, will not choose her, and so their relationship can never become more than it has been. It is frozen, dead.



## Chapter 3, The Zero Winter, pg. 77-93

### Chapter 3, The Zero Winter, pg. 77-93 Summary

The war has gone badly for Henri. The French never had a chance to invade England. Instead, Napoleon's forces were tied up on the continent fighting the Third Coalition. French soldiers have died by the thousands, fighting for days on end with little food or sleep. Henri has lost an eye. Domino is wounded. Patrick has taken to heavy drinking.

Henri, who seems to be in a high, sea-side holding cell, recalls the Russian campaign. The Russian army didn't try to fight the French. Instead, they retreated into the snow, burning villages, leaving nothing to eat and nowhere to sleep. Russian peasants, so similar to people of Henri's village, helped to burn down their own homes, only to then die in the cold. Numb, half-frozen and exhausted, the French army was rendered impotent.

Henri counts death as the least of war's horrors. He recalls starving men eating their own limbs. Henri blames suffering on the human heart, deciding that it should be the first body part to go. No warrior, decides Henri, can survive with a heart intact, not and stay sane. Henri notes the way that the war polarized the soldier's views. Russia was evil. Home was everything. War was inevitable.

The perspective switches to the war. Sustained by the hope of reaching Moscow, the French soldiers arrive to find the city in flames. Camped near the burning city, Henri realizes at last he cannot stay, that he bears for Napoleon a growing hatred born of a one-time love.

Henri tries to convince the drunken, depressed Patrick to desert with him, but Patrick refuses citing it would be suicide. Domino, too, who is so badly injured he cannot speak, refuses to join Henri. Instead he gives Henri an icicle with a golden necklace frozen within, encouraging him—by writing in the snow—to desert on his own. Henri recalls that Domino lives only for the present and so would never leave his horses.

After stealing food from Napoleon's kitchen, and leaving some food with Domino, Henri deserts with a reconsidered Patrick and lovely camp prostitute who, as it happens, is Villanelle. She tells them a story of Venice, about a bored, but wealthy gambler who enters into a life or death game of chance. In the story, the wealthy man at last learns the excitement of risk, but ultimately loses his life in the bargain.

### Chapter 3, The Zero Winter, pg. 77-93 Analysis

Again, the perspective is muddled in place and time. There is a sense once more that Henri, from some point in the future, is relating events from memory. This time the narrative alludes more explicitly to Henri's cell at "the rock," which looks down over the



Venetian lagoon. Henri's story doesn't pick up where it left off, instead jumping several years into the future, only briefly mentioning events of the intervening years.

Henri's depiction of war is an inversion of human nature. Peasants burn their own homes, dooming themselves to freeze to death. French soldiers, similarly, devour their own bodies. Humanity, rather than cooperating, instead competes, kills and consumes. Henri's empathy, which elsewhere would be a virtue, is ill-suited to wartime, amounting to self-inflicted torture. The only alternative is to shut off emotion and become callous, a choice which Henri, by deserting, does not make.

As Villanelle saw there was no future with the Queen of Spades, Henri sees the futility of his love for Napoleon. The emperor's promises are empty, offering no hope and no prospects. Henri turns, as always, to friendship, but finds that his friends have suffered in the climate of war. Only Villanelle is unscathed. The implication is that her missing heart has protected her against the horrors she has undoubtedly seen.





## Chapter 3, The Zero Winter, pg. 94-110

### Chapter 3, The Zero Winter, pg. 94-110 Summary

Villanelle tells the story of her own lost wager; the one involving her heart and the Queen of Spades. She thought herself aloof, and love easily controlled, only to find herself a prisoner to her own passion. After nine nights of secret, passionate meetings, knowing all the while that their time is finite, Villanelle is exhausted by her own desire. Unable to face the thought of losing The Queen, Villanelle simply doesn't pursue a tenth night.

In a fit of self-denial, Villanelle marries the man who earlier raped her. True to his word, he takes her on a trip around the world. All the while, Villanelle thoughts return to the Queen of Spades. After once losing her nerve, Villanelle robs her husband and leaves him. For years she works odd jobs on ships and in grand houses, during which time she learns five languages. Two years later Villanelle returns to Vienna to reclaim her heart.

No sooner does Villanelle return to Vienna than she is caught by her husband. To decide her fate, she plays cards against her husband. Unfortunately the game is fixed. Villanelle loses. Her husband sells her into slavery to serve the generals of the French army. Villanelle isn't given the opportunity to gather her heart. Considering the horrors that she would see, she is thankful.

Hearing Villanelle's story, Henri is disappointed to learn that she doesn't have the heart to return his growing love for her. The group pushes on, escaping through the snow and ice. Villanelle serves as the group's mouthpiece, speaking in the language of whatever people they happen to encounter, pretending to be anything other than the hated French. Instead, they claim to be refugees from French oppression.

Henri is struck by how, despite their differing languages, commoners are the same across the continent, with similar hopes and fears, all of them equally wronged by Napoleon. Posing as husband and wife, Villanelle and Henri become intimate. Henri considers how the French are culpable for Napoleon's atrocities, even as they, too, were victims. Once more on the road, Patrick begins behaving oddly, falls ill, and dies. Unable to bury him in the frozen soil and fearing disease, Henri and Villanelle grudgingly abandon the corpse.

Henri contemplates all the people he has seen die, all the friends he's lost, in the name of Napoleon Bonaparte. He worries that violence is bred in human nature. Villanelle thinks it is a quality inherent in men. Arriving at last in Venice, Henri vows to help Villanelle recover her heart. Henri is surprised to discover that Venetian homes open directly to the canals.



## Chapter 3, The Zero Winter, pg. 94-110 Analysis

The problem of the Queen of Spades is nearly graven in stone. It is apparent to Villanelle that one day will be much as the next; nothing will change. The Queen will not leave her husband. The two women will never truly be a couple. Villanelle, instead, chooses a lover whom she does not love in return, one who has no power to contain her. When Villanelle grows restless, she moves on.

Villanelle enters into a game of chance never suspecting that the outcome might be rigged. Considering that she herself is a gambler, and no stranger to cheating, this seems unusual. Villanelle, however, has never been one to focus on outcomes—rather she is creature of risk. Her passion is tied to uncertainty. The romance of wagering something so precious as her very life, likely took priority over considerations of cheating.

Already the reader can recognize that Henri has an active internal life. Whereas Villanelle seems to navigate social situations almost instinctively, it is Henri's nature to regard matters thoughtfully. He isn't content to take people at face value. Instead, he always looks beneath the surface, trying to understand the social mechanism by which people operate. In this way, Henri sees the similarity between himself and others.



## Chapter 3, The Zero Winter, pg. 110-129

### Chapter 3, The Zero Winter, pg. 110-129 Summary

Villanelle, with Henri as guest, receives a warm homecoming. Exhausted, Henri sleeps for two days, waking on the third day to shave his beard. On his first day alone in Venice, Henri becomes horribly lost. Embarrassed by his French tongue, Henri wanders for days rather than stop to ask for directions. On the fifth day of seeming endless churches, canals and bridges Henri turns a corner to find Villanelle in a nearby boat.

Villanelle, surprised to learn that Henri is still in Venice, takes Henri on a tour. She explains that Venice is a living city and ever changing; only a boatmen can travel its many secret waters. Villanelle takes Henri to visit a mad crone who warns Henri to beware of old enemies in new disguises. Later, Villanelle explains that the crone, once known as the Lady of Means, has lived in exile since Venice's conquest by Napoleon Bonaparte.

Villanelle takes Henri to the residence of the Queen of Spades, explaining that Henri must sneak in and recover her lost heart. Though skeptical, Henri detects no heartbeat from Villanelle's chest. In exchange for Henri's service, she offers to return to him the miraculously still-frozen icicle that Domino gave Henri the day they escaped the French army. Henri declares his love for Villanelle. She affirms that Henri is her brother, nothing more.

Over dinner with Villanelle's family, Henri talks of the French village to which he plans to return. The family argues that Henri would find better opportunities in Venice. With Villanelle gone from the room, her mother wishes aloud for daughter to find a new husband, hoping that some ill fate might befall Villanelle's current spouse. Later, Villanelle takes Henri to home of the Queen of Spades' house, giving him the key to break and enter.

Henri makes his way through an affluent home of maps, curiosities and art-objects. Among them, he sees an unfinished tapestry of Villanelle. After stealing some perfume, Henri follows the steady drum of a heartbeat to a hidden indigo jar. This proves to be Villanelle's heart. With her heart now reclaimed, Villanelle returns to Henri his ice-encased gold chain.

Villanelle's mother pushes Henri to ask for her daughter's hand. Henri proposes, but Villanelle refuses, saying that she can't surrender her heart to someone she thinks of as a brother. Villanelle's mother later explains that her daughter prefers the love of madmen. Henri is heartbroken, torn between his love for Villanelle and his own best interest.

Henri and Villanelle spend much time together. One day, he sees Villanelle struggling with a large man. After a quick chase on the canal, Henri comes face to face with the



cook from Boulogne - Villanelle's husband. After a short fight, Henri eviscerates the cook with a knife. Villanelle refuses the cook's extracted heart, crying. Villanelle removes her boots and, walking on water, drags the boat home.

### **Chapter 3, The Zero Winter, pg. 110-129 Analysis**

Until now, the existence of the supernatural could be dismissed as an unreliable narrative, a flight of creative fancy. Patrick could be a teller of tall tales, his telescopic eye a mere legend, his miniaturized shoes nothing more than a gag. Henri's recognition of the unmelting icicle, however, provides the third-party perspective, which defines the really real. This puts the entire story in a new light, as the miraculous is proven possible.

The home of the Queen of Spades is a place of stasis, a museum of hidden art and stuffed trophies. The Queen herself is an exhibit, stored away by her antiquarian husband. By recovering Villanelle's heart, Henri literally saves Villanelle from becoming part of the Queen's museum. Stasis is diametrically opposed to Villanelle's wandering, ever-changing demeanor. Stasis is certainty. Stasis precludes risk as well as reward.

Henri spent his entire time with Napoleon Bonaparte, eight years of wartime service in the Grande Armee, never having taken a human life. Rather than fighting, Henri instead risked his life to pull wounded men from the field. Now, for Villanelle, Henri kills without hesitation, and for the first time. This is a terrible and costly gift for Henri, made all the worse by Villanelle's continued refusal of him.



## Chapter 4, The Rock, pg. 130-145

### Chapter 4, The Rock, pg. 130-145 Summary

From Henri's cramped cell atop "the rock," overlooking the lagoon of Venice, Henri is haunted by memories of Bonaparte. The emperor has since divorced Josephine, was defeated and subsequently imprisoned. Henri often imagines visits from Napoleon's ghost, who forever seeks an affirmation of Henri's one-time affection for him. Henri occasionally trades a friendly wave with Villanelle, who sails by in the lagoon far below his unbarred window.

Henri recalls the night that he and Villanelle killed the cook. After hiding the body in a passage choked with garbage, they retreat to the home of Villanelle's family. For five days Henri and Villanelle live it up and enjoy each other's company. On the sixth day, the authorities catch up with them. Refusing to betray Villanelle, Henri confesses to murder. Though flush with a widow's inheritance, Villanelle is unable to bribe Piero, the lawyer prosecuting Henri.

Henri is found guilty, but judged insane. Refusing more lush accommodations, Henri opts for a common cell. Villanelle, working in the background for Henri's release, often makes conjugal visits. Henri begins hearing voices, reporting visitations from departed souls.

### Chapter 4, The Rock, pg. 130-145 Analysis

With punishment imminent, the paradigms of *The Passion* are at last in sync. Villanelle's dice are in the air, the outcome uncertain, everything at risk. Here, Henri loves and is loved, in the company of his heart's desire. Neither looks to the future, instead living in Domino's present. The time is special because it is fleeting.

From his high prison, Henri is visited by images of his life's two loves: Napoleon and Villanelle. Henri's love for Napoleon, like the emperor himself, is dead. He imagines Napoleon's hands as still covered with chicken grease, suggesting that Henri hasn't forgotten his emperor's excesses. Villanelle, however, still loves as does Henri's love of her. As she sails in the lagoon below, there is a sense that Henri's heart is free as well.



## Chapter 4, The Rock, pg. 145-160

### Chapter 4, The Rock, pg. 145-160 Summary

Villanelle uses her newfound fortune to buy a house next door to the Queen of Spades. The two women visit, but Villanelle soon realizes that, despite her love for the Queen, she can't share her with a husband who might one day return. Villanelle shuts up her house and never returns.

Now pregnant with Henri's child, Villanelle orchestrates Henri's escape, but hearing that Villanelle still refuses to marry him, Henri refuses to cooperate. Instead, Henri cuts off all communication with Villanelle and is content to love her from afar. Villanelle gives birth to a redheaded daughter. Henri occasionally sees mother and daughter sailing past in the lagoon below; he exchanges with them a friendly wave.

Henri lives a life of lucid madness, talking with friends long departed. The magical icicle melts, and soon after a shade of Domino joins Henri in his cell. Henri tends a garden, real or imagined, even procuring seeds from the Lady Josephine. He mentally deconstructs his life, examining the articulation of love and passion. Henri begins to understand that he is free, that his imprisonment is a choice.

### Chapter 4, The Rock, pg. 145-160 Analysis

Henri can't help hoping. He knows Villanelle will never accept him and yet still he hopes otherwise. To spare his heart, Henri cuts off all contact, choosing to remain imprisoned. As a prisoner, Henri surrenders the burden of hope. He is free of imagining what might be. In this way, Henri embodies Domino's ideal of "no future," living only in the now, even as he drifts in yesterday.

With Henri's madness comes liberation. Here, in Henri's mind, the world is self-contained. There is no death, no imprisonment. Henri has discovered a love that doesn't require reciprocation and so he can subsist on shadows. Were it not for the potential existence of the supernatural, Henri's retreat within might seem like a journey toward nihilism. As it is, his spectral companions might indeed be real.



# Characters

## Henri

Originally from a small, simple village, Henri receives a traditional catholic upbringing. Henri's mother, who once had intended to become a nun, had hoped her son would become a priest. Henri, however, doesn't share his mother's all-consuming belief in God. As the story unfolds, Henri struggles with the spiritual void of his "lukewarm heart" as he desperately searches for someone, or something, to ignite his soul. His quest leads him down a path of tragedy and disappointment.

Swept up in the national passion for Napoleon Bonaparte, Henri ties his fate to the Grande Armee, serving as the emperor's cook. Under Napoleon's command, Henri witnesses a succession of atrocities which he cannot reconcile with his conscience. Though Henri's love for the emperor is great, it is eroded daily by reckless plans that squander human life.

Henri is a thoughtful man, considerate and empathetic—a temperament ill-suited to a soldier. When Henri looks upon the face of the enemy, he sees men and women very much like those of his own village. Though he goes to war, Henri never takes a life. Instead, he risks his own life to drag wounded soldiers from the field. Ultimately disgusted by the emperor's wasteful, useless aggression, Henri deserts the grande armee.

After falling for, and ultimately being rejected by, Villanelle, Henri retreats into his own mind, creating a world part real, part memory. In this reverie Henri is able to divest himself of hope, and instead live in a now of his own choosing. Though perhaps mad, Henri is conscious of his condition, seeing it as a product of free will. In a universe of one, Henri at last cannot be betrayed.

## Villanelle

The daughter of a Venetian boatman, Villanelle was born with webbed feet of a boatman. Though her father disappeared before she was born, Villanelle inherited both his knack for piloting small boats as well as his uncanny ability to walk on water. Women are not permitted to serve as boatmen, but Villanelle still observes the taboo that forbids a boatman from showing his feet. Save for one exception, Villanelle never removes her shoes.

Though female by sex, Villanelle is also androgynous, moving fluidly between genders. She has the webbed feet of a boatman, a characteristic virtually unknown to female anatomy. Villanelle also frequently dresses as a man, even completing the illusion with a codpiece. Bisexual, she "takes her pleasure" with both men and women, marrying a man even as she falls in love with a woman.



A gambler by trade, Villanelle is fascinated by risk, believing that what you risk reveals what you value. In the course of the story, Villanelle risks both her heart and her freedom, losing both for a time. She shies away from certainty, preferring arrangements with unforeseeable outcomes. Villanelle has an awkward time with love, yearning for passion even as she seeks to avoid the stasis it brings.

Villanelle surrenders her heart to the Queen of Spades, but receives nothing comparable in trade; the Queen will not leave her husband. After enlisting Henri to recover her heart, Villanelle decides she cannot allow herself to be trapped in such a hopeless gambit. Unlike Henri, who embraces unrequited love as a love complete, Villanelle ultimately decides she cannot again surrender her heart without equal compensation.

## **Napoleon Bonaparte**

The French emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte, is depicted in *The Passion* as a self-centered, self-indulgent, power-obsessed tyrant whom the French nevertheless love due to the passion he incites in them.

## **Cook**

The cook is Henri's superior and nemesis at Boulogne. He is also, it is revealed later, the flabby gambler who Villanelle marries.

## **Domino**

The horse-keeper at Boulogne, Domino is one of Henri's closest friends. He consciously avoids considerations of the future, only living in the now.

## **Patrick**

A defrocked priest and one of Henri's closest friends, Patrick uses his allegedly telescopic eye to monitor enemy ships moving in the English Channel.

## **Queen of Spades**

The Queen of spades is Villanelle's soul-mate and lover. Her true name is never revealed.

## **Henri's Mother**

Henri's mother wanted to be a nun, but circumstances forced her into marriage and motherhood.





## Henri's Father

A simple, but gentle man, Henri's father won over his mother through equal parts patience and persistence.

## The Boatman

Villanelle's biological father, the boatman vanished after breaking the boatman's taboo of showing his feet to another. There is some evidence in the text that Villanelle's father might reside in "the rock" asylum later in the novel.

## Villanelle's Mother

Villanelle's mother subscribes to Venetian superstition. She believes a failed birth ritual led to Villanelle being born with webbed feet.

## Villanelle's Step-Father

A baker by trade, Villanelle's step-father is supportive and matter-of-fact, leaving his step-daughter to be herself.

## Henri's Family Priest

A faithless but well-meaning man, Henri's family priest is his first friend as well as his first contact with worldly affairs.

## Josephine

Napoleon's first wife, Josephine is a fiercely independent woman who excels at billiards. Later she becomes a botanist.

## The Lady of Means

The Lady of Means, formerly an aristocrat, lost her means when Napoleon conquered Venice. Now the lady is a homeless woman, an old crone who serves as a riverside prophet.

## The Queen's Husband

A collector of artifacts, primarily maps, the Queen's husband is absent throughout the novel.



## **Piero**

Piero is the lawyer who prosecutes Henri for murder. His wealth and privilege make it impossible for Villanelle to bribe or seduce him to help Henri.

## **The Daughter**

The daughter of Villanelle and Henri is born with Villanelle's hair and Henri's feet. She soon acquires her mother's fondness for gambling.



## Objects/Places

### Domino's Icicle

Domino's icicle is an ice-encased gold chain which once hung from Domino's tent in the Russian tundra. As if by magic, the icicle remains intact for several years.

### The Kitchen

The kitchen is where Henri prepares the chicken that Napoleon so prefers. As a cook, Henri is better fed than his fellow soldiers.

### Henri's Village

Henri's village is a small farming community. He describes them as a lukewarm people who yearn to feel.

### The Brothel

Henri visits a brothel soon after joining Napoleon's army. He is disillusioned by the experience.

### Tiny Shoes

Patrick shows Henri a pair of tiny, worn shoes. Supposedly they once fit on Patrick's feet but were shrunk by the power of goblin magic.

### Boats

Villanelle pilots several small boats throughout the novel. They vary from a police boat, to a boatman's gondola, to a black funeral skiff.

### Villanelle's Heart

Villanelle's heart is, for a time, separate from her body. It is kept in a small indigo jar.

### Indigo Jar

The indigo jar contains Villanelle's heart. After reclaiming her heart, Villanelle drops the jar into a canal.



## **Queen of Spades**

The Queen of Spades is the winning card for which Villanelle names her lover.

## **Severed Hands**

Villanelle's casino displays a pair of white, well-manicured severed hands once belonging to a wealthy gambler.

## **Venetian Knife**

Villanelle's thin bladed knife is the weapon Henri uses to slay the cook.

## **Boulogne**

Boulogne is the city where Napoleon Bonaparte masses his army to invade England.

## **The Pillar**

The pillar is the watchtower from which Patrick, using his telescopic eye, monitors ships in the channel.

## **Venice**

Venice is a watery city where people use rivers rather than roads. It is characterized as magical, ever changing, and prone to fortune both fair and foul.



# Themes

## Magical Realism

Despite the objectivity often maintained, perhaps even expected, by historical fiction, *The Passion* is often penetrated by events both fantastical and miraculous. This begins with subtlety, as a story told by Patrick to Henri. Patrick tells of his telescopic eye and the goblin magic which shrank his shoes. The dynamic continues with Villanelle, who narrates the mystical origin of Venetian boatmen and the nature of her webbed feet. At this point the stories, however, are just stories. They lack third-party confirmation.

Magic becomes "real" as stories converge. Both narrators confirm the existence of Domino's unmelting icicle. Henri notes Villanelle's missing heartbeat and, eventually, its return. Henri also sees Villanelle's webbed feet and observes as she uses them to walk on water. At this point the fantastic becomes fact, a tale which can be verified by a third-party perspective.

Despite the magical component, the world of *The Passion* is otherwise predictably realistic. Men and women live and die. Children are born. Laws are enforced. The magic of the world remains hidden and plausibly denied. By the end of the novel, Henri is driven mad, and so his entire narrative is now suspect. With Henri's credibility compromised, Villanelle can now be dismissed as a teller of tall tales.

## Value and Risk

Villanelle repeatedly says "You value what you risk." She risks her heart for the love of the Queen of Spades, losing it for a time. Villanelle also risks, and loses, her freedom in a game of cards. As it happens, these two valuations are opposed for Villanelle. If she pursues her love for the Queen, her heart will be sewn into a tapestry, symbolizing a loss of freedom. To remain free, Villanelle must risk love. To pursue love, Villanelle must risk freedom. By the end of the novel, Villanelle is again determined to risk her heart.

For Henri, there seems no wager worth making. His love for Napoleon is not merely unrequited, but illusory. His affection for Villanelle is genuine, but she, like the Queen of Spades, cannot fully reciprocate the gift. Henri, however, makes no attempt to recover his surrendered organ. Instead, he locks himself away, intent on loving Villanelle from afar. While this decision seems selfless on the surface, Henri's act is nevertheless driven by his need to give rather than Villanelle's need to receive.

*The Passion* suggests that risk and value are mutually dependent. Risk provides the drama and suspense of life, the excitement of potential loss. The man who has everything risks nothing, values nothing, and feels nothing. This truth is apparent in Villanelle's characterization of Piero, as well as her story of the well-manicured man who loses his life in a wager. Villanelle and Henri both are happiest when the dice are rolling,



when risk could still yield reward. The secret to happiness, however fleeting, is to begin with something too precious to lose and to risk losing it anyway.

## Feminism

The Passion offers several examples of women who are denied agency. Henri's mother wants to become a nun, but society and circumstances conspire against her, forcing her into marriage and motherhood. Villanelle would like to be a boatman, having both the skill and talent to excel at the task, but women are arbitrarily forbidden to serve. Instead Villanelle is forced into a narrow range of occupations deemed suitable for women, every one of which works to define a woman's function as either sexual or domestic.

In The Passion, women are strong in the face of abuse. In the brothel, Henri sees women band together against mistreatment. Later, at Boulogne, he watches as camp prostitutes endure unimaginable and undeserved suffering, only to still wake and face another day. Villanelle herself is raped and eventually sold into prostitution, but she never wilts in defeat. Instead she uses sex to feed herself, to keep herself safe. Villanelle survives, going on to live and love another day, eventually having a daughter of her own.

The male attitude toward women is mixed. The rules governing the prostitutes of Boulogne are draconian to the extreme and the soldiers regard the prostitutes as little more than objects of desire. Henri sympathizes with their plight, however, comparing the women's suffering to that of Christ. Henri also sees the artifice of paid companionship, realizing that such "affection" is disingenuous. Patrick, in his own strange way, sympathizes with the Virgin Mary, predicting that she is justifiably angry at having been raped by God. At the extreme end of misogyny is the cook, whose sense of entitlement eclipses all else, including a woman's dignity.

# Style

## Point of View

Winterson primarily uses a first person, past tense perspective, with the story often colored, particularly in the case of Henri, by the focal character's hindsight. There are two protagonist narrators: Henri and Villanelle. The reader is privy to the thoughts and feelings of each, but only when they serve as narrator. When Henri narrates, for example, Villanelle is impenetrable.

Since each of the narrators is also a character in the story, there is a sense that the narration may be unreliable, biased by the character's involvement in the story. This is particularly true of Villanelle, who makes frequent allusions to supernatural forces that, for a time, seem to have questionable veracity. A commonly-repeated phrase throughout the novel is "I'm telling you stories. Trust me." Clearly Winterson intends the reader to question the narrator's reliability.

Winterson occasionally delves into nested storytelling, where a narrator purports to share a story told to them by another. In this case, authority is further obfuscated, and narration becomes one more step removed. When Henri tells Patrick's story of how goblin magic shrunk Patrick's shoes, Henri claims that Patrick was able to produce, by way of proof, a pair of miniature shoes. Since Henri doesn't have the shoes himself, the story has much less credibility.

## Setting

The events of *The Passion* take place throughout Napoleonic Europe, but primarily in France, Russia and Italy. Since time shifts with the narrator's recollection, settings shift as well. The earliest stages of the war take place in France, with the front eventually pushing into Russia. The story eventually moves into Italy when Henri and Villanelle desert the army, taking refuge in Venice. There are a few brief instances, such as when Patrick tells a story set in Ireland, where settings outside the main narrative are also explored.

The focal areas of France include Boulogne, where Napoleon Bonaparte masses his army to invade England and where Henri is initially stationed, and Paris, where Napoleon is crowned as the monarch of France. There is also brief visit to the French village of Henri's origin. In Italy the focus is primarily on the city of Venice. In Russia, there is little focus on one area in particular, as the Grande Armee is on the move. The story concludes in the "the rock," a prison overlooking Venice's lagoon.

The settings differ in texture. France feels down to earth, solid and predictable. Italy and Russia, however, take on a thematic component. Venice is dark, mysterious, and magical, with the canals ever changing, defying reason and direction. Russia, meanwhile, is freezing and endless, killing by its very nature. Each setting lends its



texture to the narrative. Venice fosters mystery and romance. Russia produces feelings of doom and despair. France is the "real" world, steeped in politics and society.

## Language and Meaning

Winterson makes frequent use of repetition, with Villanelle in particular often repeating the phrase "You value what you risk." or "I'm telling you stories. Trust me." In addition to adding thematic emphasis, this device also instills the prose with a poetic quality, giving the story a kind of cadence and rhythm. The reader soon recognizes the phrase and comes to anticipate seeing it again.

The voice differs between narrators, both in quality and in content. Henri is concerned with people, particularly in how they think and feel. Villanelle is more concerned with abstractions such as love, risk and death. Whereas Henri's thoughts are pensive and introspective, Villanelle tends to be confident and sensual. At the end of the novel, Henri uses one of Villanelle's favorite phrases "I'm telling you stories. Trust me." indicating that he, too, has become an unreliable narrator.

Winterson prefers the use of short, descriptive sentences. This creates a sense of impact and urgency. Villanelle's dealer attire is described in discrete stages, each brief sentence giving another detail. This style occasionally gives way to longer, more elaborate sentences which explain or describe a process. Henri's participation in communion, however, is imparted in long, sweeping sentences that communicate a process. This method is also used as Winterson's narrative covers broad strokes of time.

## Structure

The book is broken into four chapters of unequal length, chapter three being the longest. The first chapter concerns Henri and the beginning of his service to Napoleon. It concludes on New Year's Day, 1805. Chapter two concerns Villanelle and her infatuation with the Queen of Spades. It also concludes on New Year's Day, 1805, indicating that events of chapters one and two take place concurrently. Chapter three chronicles Napoleon's push to Moscow through the Russian tundra. Henri and Villanelle are both present and take turns narrating events. Chapter four concerns Henri's imprisonment in "the rock" and Villanelle's attempts to free him.

Each chapter is primarily tied to a single setting, but there is considerable overlap and transition. The narrative is often penetrated by flashbacks or the telling of tangential stories which occur in another time or place, real or imaginary. Henri, in particular, is prone to suddenly flashing back to an earlier event that will put the "present" in proper context. Similarly, Henri will also obliquely refer to the "future" by alluding to his prison cell, the "end of time" perspective from which he tells much of his tale.

Structurally, both narrators focus their content on events, but there is also much diversion into the inner life of the characters. Henri's narrative reads more like a journal,



and indeed at least some of it represents his attempt to record his feelings for the sake of posterity. Villanelle's feelings, however, are more closely tied to events. She lives more in the now, and her thoughts represent her attempts to articulate the experience of the moment.



## Quotes

"It's hard to remember that this day will never come again. That the time is now and the place is here and there no second chances at a single moment." —Chapter 1, pg. 19

"We were not free men. He made sense out of dullness." —Chapter 1, pg. 20

"They say that each snowflake is different. If that were true, how could the world go on? How could we ever get up off our knees? How could we ever recover from the wonder of it?" —Chapter 1, pg. 43

"You play, you win, you play, you lose. You play. It's the playing that's irresistible. Dicing from one year to the next with the things you love, what you risk reveals what you value." —Chapter 1, pg. 43

"To kiss well one must kiss solely. No groping hands or stammering hearts. The lips and the lips alone are the pleasure. Passion is sweeter split strand by strand. Divided and re-divided like mercury then gathered up only at the last moment." —Chapter 2, pg. 59

"Lovers are not at their best when it matters. Mouths dry up, palms sweat and conversation flags and all the time the heart is threatening to fly from the body once and for all." —Chapter 2, pg. 66

"There is no such thing as a limited victory. Each victory leaves another resentment, another defeated and humiliated people." —Chapter 3, pg. 79

"When the army burned their villages, the people helped to set fires to their own homes, to their years of work and common sense." —Chapter 3, pg. 81

"We are not especially civilized, we wanted what we wanted for a long time. We wanted glory and conquest and slaves and praise." —Chapter 3, pg. 104

"When the wind is up, I hear him weeping and he comes to me, his hands still greasy from his last dinner, and he asks me if I love him." —Chapter 4, pg. 134

"No. If I smell her skin, find the mute curves of her nakedness, she will reach in her hand and withdraw my heart like a bird's egg." —Chapter 4, pg. 146

"The cities of the interior do not lie on any map." —Chapter 4, pg. 114

"I am telling you stories. Trust me." —Chapter 4, pg. 160



## Topics for Discussion

What became of Villanelle's father, the boatman?

How does Henri's idea of love differ from that of Villanelle's understanding of love?

What does it mean that so many characters in *The Passion* do not have names?

Is Henri heroic? What about Villanelle? Why or why not?

Why does Villanelle ultimately refuse the Queen of spades?

By the end of the story, how was Henri changed?

Why does Henri break off all communication with Villanelle?

By the end of the story, is Henri insane? What are the arguments for and against the possibility?

What does *The Passion* have to say about love?