

Secrets of a Charmed Life Study Guide

Secrets of a Charmed Life by Susan Meissner

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Plot Summary

There are no secrets to a charmed life, and one must learn to forgive himself for the choices he makes, a 93-year-old survivor of the London Blitz concludes in the novel “Secrets of a Charmed Life” by Susan Meissner. Before the Blitz began, Emmy Downtree was a bright-eyed 15-year-old with a dream to create perfect wedding dresses as a designer. Her dream seemed about to take flight when she made a choice that changed the course of her life and the life of her sister, Julia. The girls were separated during the first night of bombing in London. As Emmy dedicated her life to finding out what had happened to her sister, she dealt with her own grief and guilt, the consequences of the choice she had made.

Even though she and her sister had been evacuated to the country like the rest of London’s children, 15-year-old Emmy planned a trip back to the city to talk to a dressmaker about an apprenticeship. Emmy’s little sister Julia learned about Emmy’s trip and demanded to be taken along. Fearing that Emmy’s bridal sketches would separate her from her sister, Julia removed the brides box from Emmy’s satchel and replaced it with her book of fairy tales. The next day in London, things didn’t go as Emmy planned. On her way home from her appointment, the Luftwaffe began dropping bombs on London. By the time she was finally able to get back to her family’s London flat the following day, Julia was not in the flat where Emmy had left her. Emmy’s mother had not seen Julia either. Even though they searched hospitals and shelters, they found no trace of her. Julia’s mother left Emmy at the flat to wait for Julia while she went to meet with a man who she thought could help them find Julia. Emmy never saw her mother again. She was killed in the bombing that night.

Alone, Emmy took on the identity of Isabel Crofton, the deceased daughter of Eloise Crofton, the owner of a bridal shop where Emmy had worked. Because Isabel would have been nearly 18, her identity allowed Emmy to look for Julia without having to worry about getting sent to a children’s home because she was underage. Unfortunately, Emmy was still unable to find Julia. She returned to her foster mother, Charlotte, after she contracted pneumonia.

Meanwhile, the reader learns through a series of letters that Julia wrote to her sister at the request of a psychiatrist, that Julia had been found the first night of the bombings by her next-door neighbor, Thea. Thea found a letter from Julia’s father’s parents and contacted them. They took Julia in. Even though her grandparents tried to locate Emmy, they had no luck. Years later when Julia was faced with a wedding proposal from a man she loved but was scared she would lose, Julia worked with a psychiatrist who suggested she try to find healing by writing letters to her sister. In the course of her letter writing, Julia decided she needed to find her sister’s brides box and see if she could get a line of dresses based on Emmy’s designs.

During her search, Julia visited Thistle House and talked to Gwen, who was her niece, about the brides box. Julia had no idea she was related to Gwen during their first interactions. Even though the two weren’t able to find the brides box where Julia



remembered putting it, Gwen was so moved by her story that she continued to look for the box and did finally find it. It was not until Gwen saw a picture of Julia in the newspaper wearing a dress based on one of Emmy's designs that she told her mother about the lady who'd come by the house looking for the brides box. It was at this point the sisters were reunited.

The sisters' stories are framed by an interview by Kendra, a history major studying in England for a semester. Although Isabel had never granted an interview up until this point, she agreed to talk to Kendra about her experiences as a survivor of the London Blitz. Following her interview, Isabel tells Kendra she has chosen the girl to share her history. She wants people to read her story and know that her mother mattered. She believes sharing her story will finally make her mother proud of her, a goal she'd hoped to achieve ever since her mother's death.



Part One: Chapters 1-2

Summary

In Chapter 1, Kendra drives up to an English cottage where she is to interview Isabel MacFarland, a survivor of the London Blitz. It is the same day Isabel's family will celebrate her ninety-third birthday. The housekeeper, Beryl Avery, greets Kendra at the door. Beryl tells Kendra she's surprised Isabel had agreed to talk to Kendra about her experiences as she had turned down interviews in the past.

Isabel excuses Beryl from the room and asks her to close the door so she and Kendra can speak in private. Isabel asks about Kendra's background and learns she is a history major. Kendra tells Isabel she doesn't understand why someone couldn't be interested in history, a record not only of what happened, but also how it made a person feel. Isabel asks Kendra her age and senses it irritates the girl. She shares that she once felt the same way when she was young when people assumed she didn't know what she wanted because of her age.

Isabel listens as Kendra tells her the essay will be turned in as a term paper for her class, but that the top five essays would be printed in the London paper the week of May 8, the seventieth anniversary of VE Day. Isabel questions if Kendra's article will be given a fair shot as she got her interview recommendation from a friend of the family. They go on to discuss Isabel's watercolors of *The Umbrella Girls*. When the interview finally begins, Kendra realizes how elementary her preplanned questions seem. She asks Isabel simply what she wants to tell her about the war. Isabel first tells her that her name isn't Isabel and that she isn't ninety-three.

In Chapter 2, Emmy Downtree noticed a help wanted sign amid the broken glass from the front window of the Primrose Bridal shop. Once she had been assured the broken window wasn't the responsibility of the Nazis, Julia, Emmy's younger sister, told Emmy her brides were prettier. Their mother walked toward them. Emmy was ready to be done with her mother who was so young when she had Emmy that the two were more like sisters with her mother asking Emmy for advice on how to handle Neville, Julia's father. Their mum told them she needed to go to the butcher. Emmy asked Julia to go with her mother while Emmy talked to the bridal shop owner, who had just walked outside to begin cleaning up the broken glass. The woman cut her hand on the glass and was headed back inside but Emmy stopped her, asking if she could come back later and talk about the job opening. The woman asked her age. When Emmy lied and said she was 16, the woman, who had introduced herself as Mrs. Crofton, told her to come back at six. Emmy was surprised to find Julia waiting around the corner. Julia asked what Emmy had been talking to Mrs. Crofton about.



Analysis

The first thing of importance the readers should note about this novel is that it is a work of historical fiction. That means the story is about events that really happened, in this case the bombing of London during World War II, but the specific people and circumstances are creations of the writer. As a history major, Kendra makes an interesting point to Isabel when the older lady asks her why she likes history. Kendra tells her basically that history gives each person the bigger picture of the world of which they are a part. She compares someone who doesn't understand his history to a leaf that doesn't know it's part of a tree. Kendra also notes that history is important not only in the facts of what happened, but how what happened made the people feel. It can be surmised that history, particularly Isabel's history, will be a major theme in the novel.

Isabel points out right away to Kendra that she is not who Kendra believes she is. In the beginning, she was Emmeline Downtree, called "Emmy" for short. This section of chapters does not answer why Isabel changed her name, it is assumed that detail will be addressed later on in the novel. However, it can also be assumed that identity, and how a person identifies himself will also be a significant theme in the novel.

As a 15-year-old, Emmy wanted to design wedding dresses and perhaps own a bridal store. She believed it was fate when she found a help wanted sign in the window of her favorite store. She secures an interview. The reader learns from Emmy's conversation with her sister, Julia, that Emmy not only admires wedding dresses, she also draws some of her own. Even though these dresses are Emmy's passion, the reader learns through Emmy's thoughts as well as Emmy's mother's words that her mother is not interested in Emmy's passion.

A good deal can be surmised about Emmy's family situation from Chapter 2. Her mother is beautiful, but is a single mother. She had Emmy at a very young age. Emmy and Julia, who is eight years younger than Emmy, have different fathers. Their mother still has a relationship of sorts with Julia's father, Neville. Emmy's mother works, apparently some sort of maid, in order to take care of herself and her children.

Note also the laid back attitude Emmy has taken toward the war. Even though the city shows signs that war is imminent, Emmy has become so accustomed to the safeguards they are made to take that she really doesn't notice them any longer. She doesn't seem to think that the war will have any effect on her city or her way of life. Just as she described herself to Kendra in the opening chapter of the novel, Emmy was a headstrong girl who believed she knew what she wanted with her life even if no one else was willing to listen to her or show any faith in her.

Notice also that Mrs. Crofton gave a reference to the title of the book "Secrets of a Charmed Life" when she spoke to Emmy in front of the store. She told the girl that the life of a businesswoman wasn't always a charmed life. It was as if she, too, saw Emmy only as a young girl caught up in the fantasy of being part of a romantic career.



Both the point of view and tense in which the novel is written shifts between Chapters 1 and 2. In Chapter 1, the story is told from the first person point of view by Kendra. It is also written in the present tense. Chapter 2, however, takes place nearly sixty-five years earlier. It is written in the past tense. Notice also that beginning with Chapter 2, the novel is written in the third person point of view with an emphasis on Emmy.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think that Isabel agreed to allow Kendra to interview her? What do you think she hopes to achieve from the interview?

Discussion Question 2

How do Isabel and Kendra connect with one another right away?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the relationship between Emmy and her mum as it has been described thus far in the novel.

Vocabulary

kudos, quaintness, thatched, festooned, demonstrative, sabotage, impeccably, feigned, venture, candor, relevant, prominent, superficial, frothed, menacing, imminent, adamant, placard, intermittent, competence, negligible



Part One: Chapters 3-6

Summary

In Chapter 3, Emmy borrowed a dress from her mother's wardrobe. She remembered her mother had worn the dress two years ago when she was hired for a job as a kitchen maid for a rich widow. Emmy remembered the dress because her nana had been teaching her to embroider when mum came out wearing the dress. After her mother left, nana asked Emmy if mum ever said where her clothes came from, something Emmy had never considered. When mum returned an hour later, nana seemed surprised and shocked that mum had been hired for the job. When nana made a snide comment, mum had gone to the door, opened it and demanded her mother leave. Nana had given Emmy her wooden box of embroidery floss before she left. Nana had died four months later. Emmy never understood what her mother and grandmother had argued about.

Back in Emmy's present, Julia begged Emmy to take her to the bridal shop with her. She was scared to be alone at night. Emmy had Julia bring her nana's box of embroidery floss. Emmy put some of her best sketches in the box. She left Julia with the rest with instructions to give the brides bouquets to carry.

In Chapter 4, Emmy told Mrs. Crofton that her grandmother had taught her all the stitches required for hand sewing. Mrs. Crofton pushed Emmy for retail experience but Emmy pointed out the sign asked for someone to do hand sewing and alterations. Mrs. Crofton gave Emmy the project of finishing the hem on a dress to test her skills. The lady was pleased with Emmy's work and hired her on a trial basis. She also promised to teach Emmy how to use her sewing machine. In a moment of passion, Emmy showed Mrs. Crofton her sketches. Mrs. Crofton had a cousin who was a dressmaker and promised to see if he would be interested in giving Emmy a position as an apprentice. At home, Emmy was surprised to see that instead of giving the brides bouquets, her sister has drawn red polka-dot umbrellas in their hands.

In Chapter 5, Emmy put Julia to bed because her mother was not home. Julia asked Emmy where she would stay while Emmy was working at the bridal shop. Emmy thought that should be her mother's problem to work out but had already thought that Thea in the next flat could watch Julia. Emmy was asleep on the couch when her mother finally came home at dawn. Emmy asked where she'd been. She noticed the smell of cigars and men's cologne. Emmy knew she was a burden to her mother even though her nana had told her it wasn't Emmy's fault she'd been born when her mother was only sixteen. Emmy had no father listed on her birth certificate. Her mother had always told her it was someone whom she barely knew.

Emmy suddenly realized that her mother had gotten so mad at her nana because nana had accused her mother of sleeping her way to a better job. She wonders why she'd never noticed before that they had a nice home with plenty of food and clothes on the paycheck of a kitchen maid. She suspected someone was helping her mother to pay for



their living in exchange for sexual favors. Emmy asked her mother how she could do that but her mother tells Emmy she doesn't know what she's talking about. The two continue to argue until Emmy told her mother about her job. Mum warned Emmy she was chasing a dream and that she wouldn't turn out any different than how her mother had turned out.

In Chapter 6, Emmy enjoyed her first month of work at Primrose Bridal. After she suggested to her mum that Thea keep Julia, her mother's attitude toward Emmy's job changed to one of indifference. Emmy believed her mother was indifferent to her because Emmy reminded her of herself. Emmy picked up the art of using the sewing machine quickly. Mrs. Crofton also told Emmy that her cousin was interested in meeting Emmy and seeing her sketches. The cousin, Graham Dabney, would mentor Emmy in exchange for her work in his studio. He wanted Emmy to send two of her best sketches to him in the mail. Emmy agreed after some consideration.

At home, Emmy's mother was still in her work uniform. She told Emmy she'd received a letter telling her Neville had been killed in a car accident. Neville's mother and father, whom Neville had told her were dead, had written to her. Neville had even lied about his last name. Mum told Emmy she didn't want Julia to know about her father's death. Emmy had always seen through Neville's lies and pretense, but Julia and her mother had loved him. Emmy's mother told her that Neville had told his parents about Julia on his deathbed. She planned to keep Julia away from them, she said. Emmy told her mother she should keep Julia away from her grandparents just because it was what she wanted. Her mum told Emmy that her life had never been about what she wanted. Emmy told her mother about her chance to be an apprentice for a dressmaker. Her mother told her she wouldn't get the chance as all the children were being evacuated to the countryside.

Analysis

An unusual statement in this section of the novel comes when Emmy showed Mrs. Crofton her bridal sketches. The reader is prepared for Mrs. Crofton to discourage Emmy or just not show any interest because the author indicates that Emmy did need to have brought up her sketches to Mrs. Crofton. The wording of this sentence foreshadows that in some way it will be the act of Mrs. Crofton seeing these sketches that will put into motion some sort of chain of events that will bring trouble. Thus far, however, it appears only good will come out of Mrs. Crofton seeing the sketches as she believes she can get Emmy a position as a dressmaker's apprentice.

More is learned about Emmy's family, and thus her identity, in this section of the novel. Her birth certificate listed her father as being unknown. Emmy had been told her father's identity wasn't important, but was beginning to realize that her mother might know who he was and just be refusing to name him. An illegitimate, or fatherless, child was still considered a scandal at this time period in Europe. Single mothers were not common in 1940 and those who were never married or had children by multiple men to whom they



were not married were looked down upon. The children often felt the shame of their mother's lack of a husband as well.

To add to her mother's disgrace as a single mother, Emmy was beginning to realize that her mother was doing something besides just working as a kitchen maid, to maintain their lifestyle. Emmy had already realized what it was that made her mother so mad with Emmy's grandmother two years before. Nana had suggested that Annie, Emmy's mother, had been sleeping around in order to get her new job as well as the nice clothes that she wore.

When Anne learned that Neville lied to her not only about his parents being alive but also about his last name, she seemed angry that Emmy had seen through Neville's lies so clearly. A point of contention came when Emmy asked if Neville's parents knew about Julia and if they wanted to meet her. Annie told Emmy she would not allow this meeting to take place because she wanted them to hurt like she hurt. Emmy chided her mother for her immature decision. This leads to another theme in the novel: Choices and the consequence of these choices. Annie had made a choice not to tell Julia that her father was dead and that she had grandparents who wanted to meet her. She warned Emmy not to tell Julia either. This choice turned out to be a bad choice on Anne's choice, it will also backfire later in the novel. It appeared that Emmy's mother had made many not so good choices in her life, but choices that she had to make in order to survive and keep her girls alive. Emmy meanwhile was making her own choices. She was trying to secure a position as an apprentice and didn't care what it took to get it. She lied to the woman who hired her, first telling her she was 16 and that her father was dead, and then confessing and telling that she wasn't quite 16 yet and that she didn't know where her father was.

Although there had seemed no imminent danger from the war up to this point in London, Emmy learned at the very end of this section of chapters that all children were being forced to evacuate to the countryside. It appeared something had changed to make the people in charge believe that London was in danger and that the children would be safer outside the city.

Notice also in this section that Emmy struggled to have an identity different from her mother. She knew she had been a weight on her mother all during her life. She wanted to prove to her mother that she was worth something, that she could work hard and achieve her dreams. In her mother's indifference to her dreams she sensed that her mother resented the chances she had been given.

Discussion Question 1

During the argument between Emmy and her mother in Chapter 5, her mother says: "Everyone is like me" (p. 50). What do you think she meant by this in the context of their argument?



Discussion Question 2

Consider the idea that the children of London were being evacuated to the country. What might this mean for families? How would you feel if you were a parent living in London at this time period and you were asked to send your children away to live with a foster family?

Discussion Question 3

Do you think Emmy was wise to lie about her age to Mrs. Crofton and then later tell the lady her real age? Would it have been best for her to keep her mouth shut?

Vocabulary

scandalous, conspiratorially, exuberant, brothel, daft, intrigue, rused, fabrication, apprentice, embellishments, derisively, ambivalence, consternation



Part One: Chapters 7-9

Summary

In Chapter 7, when an evacuation order had come out a year earlier, Julia and Emmy's mother had refused to send them away. Within a month, there were no air raids and the children returned home. Emmy argued with her mother begging her not to make her go away, but her mother was adamant. She insisted that Emmy go because she wanted her to look after Julia. On Emmy's last day of work at the shop, Thea seemed irritated she was needed to watch Julia that day. She was packing supplies into the Anderson shelter she'd built in her backyard because her cats couldn't stay in the public bomb shelter. When Emmy indicated she hoped they'd be back soon, Thea asked Emmy if she knew that the Germans had occupied France, meaning they could get more easily to England.

When Emmy finally told Mrs. Crofton she was being evacuated to the country Mrs. Crofton told Emmy she had hoped she could ignore the war if she just went about her business. Emmy asked Mrs. Crofton to go ahead and send the sketches to her cousin because Emmy would be returning to London as soon as she could. Mrs. Crofton tried to impress upon Emmy the seriousness of the war with military leaders unsure when the fighting would be finished. Additionally, Mrs. Crofton was no longer able to get wedding dresses or even sewing materials. Mrs. Crofton told Emmy evacuation was best for Emmy and that if her daughter were still alive, she would send her away. Mrs. Crofton told her only that her daughter died of a fever when she was six.

In Chapter 8, among the things that Emmy took with her was the back door key to Primrose Bridal. She and Julia were put on a train to Moreton-in-Marsh. Before they were parted from their Mum, Emmy's mother begged her not to allow them to separate her from Julia. Emmy and her mother argue about Emmy's job and her lack of independence.

In Chapter 9, Julia remembered having traveled out of London only once on a train. Neville had taken them for a weekend at the sea. Once the girls arrived with their group in Moreton-in-Marsh, they got refreshments in a large reception room. Afterward, the children stood at the front of the room while the adults looked them over. The first couple wanted Julia but not Emmy. Emmy refused to let them be separated and thought perhaps they'd be sent back to London. As Emmy mouthed at the people choosing the children, the woman in charge of them begged her to be polite. Despite the woman's threat that no one would want the two because of Emmy's behavior, a woman stepped up and told Emmy she was right. Charlotte Havelock offered to let the girls stay with her. After Julia whispered she liked Charlotte, Emmy agreed to take her offer.



Analysis

It becomes more and more obvious that Emmy doesn't take the threat of war seriously. Her life had been so full of false alarms that she didn't believe anything really bad would ever happen. As she mentioned to the adults around her that she planned to be back from the evacuation quickly, two of them tried to impress upon her how bad the war had gotten and how close it was to England. Thea was the first who tried to explain to Emmy why the threat of war was more serious than it had been when the children had been evacuated a year before. The difference was that the Germans had invaded France and could now get their aircraft over England more easily. Despite Thea's tutorial, Emmy didn't comprehend the immediate danger the Nazis now pose to England. Mrs. Crofton also tried to help Emmy to understand how the war was making her business more and more of a challenge. Brides were getting married so quickly, they were buying very little in the way of wedding gowns and accessories. She was having trouble getting gowns delivered. Even if Emmy could make dresses, Mrs. Crofton couldn't even get raw materials for these hand made dresses. Emmy chose to ignore these warnings and pushed on with her plans.

Notice the interaction between Charlotte and Emmy. Emmy believed she would be sent back to London if no one chose her, so she set about to make herself as undesirable as possible. Charlotte, however, outsmarted Emmy's tirade, asking Emmy to forgive them for looking at the children and choosing among them as if they were cattle. With Charlotte's quick thinking it appeared that she would be a good match for Emmy.

Even though she was still a child by legal standards, Emmy desperately wanted to be treated as an adult. She didn't understand why she was being sent to the country with the rest of the children when she really didn't consider herself a child. With her role as the much older sister of Julia, Emmy had spent much of her life taking care of her sister. In fact, it was she who came up with the idea that Julia could stay with Thea so that Emmy could take her part time job at Primrose Bridal. Emmy identified herself as an adult even though she wasn't seen that way by the others around her.

Remember this is one of the aspects of their lives upon which Kendra and Isabel/Emmy connect right away in the interview. It was from this experience and others like it that Isabel came to resent people who judged her abilities based on her age.

Discussion Question 1

Consider the interaction between Emmy and her mother just before Emmy and Julia boarded the train. What happened in this discussion? How did Emmy realize she and her mother were alike?



Discussion Question 2

Why did Emmy not want to hear and understand how badly the war could be in London? Why did she turn such a blind eye to the war?

Discussion Question 3

Do you think Emmy and Charlotte will be a good match for each other? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

precedent, billeting, miniscule, abysmally, roiled, chortle, lassitude, queues, cynicism, barrage, bawdy, debasing, patronizing



Part One: Chapters 10-12

Summary

In Chapter 10, on the ride to Thistle House Charlotte told Emmy and Julia that she was a 66-year-old retired schoolteacher. She lived with her younger sister, Rose, who was disabled. Thistle House was a century old and had been in her husband's family since it was built. Charlotte quizzed the girls on what they liked to do in their spare time. Julia told her about Emmy's brides. When Emmy explained she'd had a job at a bridal shop that she had to leave, Charlotte's sympathy was sincere. Charlotte offered to show Emmy her wedding dress and how the styles had changed since that time. Sensing that Emmy needed a change of subject, Charlotte talked about her younger sister and how she thought like a 5 year old. She explained Rose had an accident when she was 13 that caused her disability.

At Thistle House Charlotte showed the girls the room that would be theirs. She pointed out a drawer stocked with writing paper and envelopes so they could write to their mother. When Charlotte asked Julia what she'd like to do first, she told Charlotte she'd like to see the chickens. As they headed for the backyard, Emmy realized the situation was perfect for Julia. She would have no problem leaving her sister there when it came time for her to go back to London.

In Chapter 11, as Emmy and Charlotte sipped tea and watched Julia and Rose, Charlotte asked Emmy how long she'd felt responsible for her sister. Emmy explained her mother had gotten pregnant with her when she was very young. Charlotte asked if either Emmy or Julia's father had helped with expenses. Emmy told her about Neville, his off and on relationship and his recent death. She also told what little she knew of her own father. It was when Charlotte asked Emmy if no one had held her father responsible for getting her mother pregnant, that Emmy realized it was probably because her mother refused to name her father that there was so much animosity between her mother and nana. Before supper, the girls unpacked. Charlotte told them they would be assigned chores, on the following day. That night, they were allowed to rest or write to their mother. Julia wrote to her mother but Emmy wrote to Mrs. Crofton.

In Chapter 12, Emmy had trouble getting Julia to sleep as the girl had realized that her mother was in danger in London. After Julia was finally asleep, Emmy thought about her new knowledge that her mother had probably refused to name the man who got her pregnant because she didn't want him to be charged with statutory rape. In exchange for her silence, her mother had probably received some monetary reimbursement. When she got pregnant with Julia, however, her mother must have thought that Neville would marry her. Emmy reasons that when Neville left for good, her mother must have began having sex with men for money. To comfort herself, Emmy looked at the wedding dresses she'd drawn. These dresses symbolized the perfection Emmy wanted in her life.



The next morning the chores were assigned. Emmy learned that in the country, the people could determine what they had available to eat by what they could grow in their gardens. Meals there aren't determined by ration books. Paper, however, was one thing that was rationed. Charlotte wanted the girls to write to their mother twice monthly until their stock of writing paper ran out. Emmy frowned because this interfered with her plans to sketch a dress each week. Later that day they walked to town to get library books and a newspaper. Emmy asked to be allowed to get the paper as that would give her a chance to go to town and mail letters to Mrs. Crofton unnoticed. During the trip Charlotte bought ten sheets of stock paper and sketching pencils for Emmy. At the house, Charlotte found the tea set and dolls she had promised Julia. She also showed Emmy her wedding dress. Emmy couldn't believe the woman's generosity when she offered to let Emmy take it apart to study its construction. In response to the gesture, Emmy showed Charlotte her sketches. Later, in the afternoon when it was time for Julia to take care of the chickens, Charlotte let her borrow an umbrella, one with red polka dots and a curly black handle.

Analysis

As Emmy talked to Charlotte about the status of her family she came to several conclusions about the decisions that her mother had made. These conclusions address the theme of choices and consequences. Because Emmy's mother was not even 16 when she got pregnant, the man who got her pregnant could have been charged with statutory rape. Emmy has come to realize the only way her mother could have afforded to live in the type of flat they did would be if someone was paying for her lifestyle. Emmy still doesn't know exactly who was helping to pay for their lifestyle or what her mother was doing to earn her keep. Emmy has come to the conclusion that her mother had really loved Neville and though he would marry her. That dream was shattered permanently when Neville was killed. Emmy thought the only way that her mother could continue to maintain the lifestyle that she was did was to sell herself for sex, an idea that disgusted Emmy.

The umbrella, a feature in Isabel's paintings, presented itself as a symbol in this section of the novel. This red polka dot umbrella with the curly black handle, like Julia had drawn on Emmy's brides and said she wanted one herself, seemed to be a sign that the girls were intended to live with Charlotte at Thistle House. Even before she saw the umbrella, however, Emmy had already decided that she would feel comfortable leaving Julia in the care of Charlotte at Thistle House when she had to go back to London.

In the theme of the war, Emmy made the ironic conclusion that she would never had come to a place as peaceful as Thistle House if it hadn't been for the war going on. She also learned a new side of life during the war when she toured the grounds of Thistle House with her sister and Charlotte. While meals in town had been limited to what little produce people could grow in their tiny gardens, and the supplies their ration cards allowed them, the people in the country were not as limited. Charlotte and Rose not only had chickens and eggs but also a variety of fruit trees and garden vegetables. They planned on increasing their output so they could share with their neighbors.



The fact that there was such a shortage of food and supplies puts a new spin on the idea that people across England were willing to take in the children of strangers during the war. While some families struggled to feed their own, they still opened their homes and offered what little they did have to help the children. It is not discussed if the families who took in evacuees were compensated in some way, but it can be hoped they were at least allowed extra supplies with their ration cards.

Meanwhile, Charlotte and Emmy seem more and more suited to one another. Charlotte understood what it was like for Emmy to feel responsible for her sister, as Charlotte took care of her younger sister, Rose. Later in the novel, Charlotte's reasons for identifying so closely with Emmy will be made even more clear. Charlotte also related to Emmy as an adult, talking to her in a way that was not derogatory about her mother's situation as well as the death of Julia's father. Charlotte also encouraged Emmy's drawing talent, and truly seemed sorry that Emmy had to leave her promising job, something Emmy's mother never did.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Julia only called Neville by his first name? Why might this be significant?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the ways in which Charlotte earned Emmy's respect.

Discussion Question 3

Why would it be important during the war for a family to be able to grow its own food? Why were food and supplies in such a shortage during this time?

Vocabulary

jalopy, privy, timbre, solidary, animosity, reverence, provision, prattle, elusive, statutory, repulsed, translucent, vigilance, inclement, decreed, tyrant, daunting, piqued, enraptured, incredulous

Part One: Chapters 13-15

Summary

In Chapter 13, two weeks after they arrived at Thistle House Emmy and Julia got a letter from their mum. She talked about air raid sirens every night, a statement Emmy didn't think was true as she read the newspapers she bought for Charlotte and knew June had been quiet in London. Emmy got one letter from Mrs. Crofton. Her cousin had liked the sketches and had an idea he wanted to run by Mrs. Crofton but wouldn't be back in London until August. As August got closer, Emmy dreaded the idea of having to leave Charlotte and Thistle House even though it would be to follow her dream. If she was offered an apprenticeship she planned to take it and ask if she could sleep on the floor of the studio as she did not want to go back to her mother's house. She was afraid, however, she would hurt Charlotte's feelings.

On Aug. 24, several bombs were dropped on London killing some civilians and damaging homes. The Royal Air Force retaliated the attacks, and then all was quiet. On Sept. 2 Emmy got the letter she'd been waiting for from Mrs. Crofton. Emmy was to meet Mr. Dabney in his house in London at 4 p.m. Sept. 7. They asked her to bring both her sketches and her mother as her permission would be needed since the Dabneys wanted to foster Emmy during the time of the evacuation.

In Chapter 14, in bed that night, Emmy came up with a plan to sneak away from Thistle House without being noticed. She wrote letters to Charlotte and Julia explaining why she had left and where she was going. She hid the letters in her brides box. That evening, Emmy returned to her room to see Julia with the brides box reading the letter Emmy had written to her. Julia threw a fit, knowing that Emmy intended to leave her. Emmy realized that Julia hated the brides box because she knew it was going to part her and her sister. Julia demanded to be taken along. Emmy agreed, hoping she could find some way to leave her sister behind. She carefully packed a bag, wrapping her brides box in a shawl. Before bed, Julia begged for a glass of water. Emmy got it for her on the agreement that Julia would go to sleep. Although she hadn't intended to, Emmy went to sleep as well. She woke at 2 a.m. Julia was still asleep. Emmy had almost made it out of the room when a hoot owl woke her sister. Emmy tried to get her to go back to sleep but she refused. Although Emmy sensed there was a decision to be made, she pushed the feeling down, choosing the only path she could see clearly.

In Chapter 15, Beryl interrupts the interview to ask if Kendra and Isabel need more tea. Kendra notices the Umbrella Girl painting behind Isabel and recognizes the umbrella. Isabel starts talking again and tells Kendra that as a history major she knows what Emmy and Julia were headed to in London on Sept. 7. Kendra answers that the Blitz began that day. Isabel describes how proud Emmy was when she got herself and her sister to London without being caught. Isabel says that even as Emmy was walking to her appointment the hundreds of Luftwaffe planes were being picked up on radar. A woman watching the radar had called her superior officer because she didn't recognize



what she was seeing on her screen. Emmy was done with her appointment when the sirens began to go off, like the end of the world. Isabel adds that for a long time, Emmy had wished it was the end of the world.

Analysis

In this section Emmy made a decision to return to London for an appointment with the Dabneys even though she'd told neither her mother nor Charlotte about what she had planned. There are two strong incidents of foreshadowing that her decision was a bad one. The first one comes in Chapter 14 when the hoot owl woke up Julia as Emmy was preparing to leave Thistle House alone. Emmy thought briefly that she needed to think about the decision she was making as she snuck out of the house for her appointment and took her sister with her, but did not do so. The author also notes that in Emmy's mind, she was so determined about her future that she could not see there was another choice that she could have made. Emmy believed the only option was to go and take Julia with her; so she never considered both should stay. Another instance of foreshadowing that the girls are in for trouble when they reach London comes when Isabel is describing the beginning of the bombing as seeming like the end of the world. Isabel also made a point to remind Kendra that the day the sisters arrived in London was the same day that the Blitz started. She tells Kendra that Emmy had wished for a long time that it had been the end of the world. This statement from Isabel ends Part 1 of the book with a tone of dread as the sisters are alone in the city as the bombing began.

Note that in Chapter 15 the point of view and tense of the novel makes another shift. The reader is pulled out of the past tense story of Emmy and Julia to the present tense where Isabel is telling Kendra about her experiences. The point of view switches to Kendra's point of view as she briefly considers where Isabel fit into the story of Emmy and Julia. She does, however, recognize the inspiration for Isabel's Umbrella Girls as the umbrella in the painting is the same one that Julia described as being the type she wanted. Kendra also recognizes that she is talking with Isabel in Thistle House, the house where Emmy and Julia took refuge for several months. Notice that the switch in tense and tone not only briefly pulls the reader out of the story but also allows the author to include some details about the London Blitz, given by Isabel, so the reader can have a better grasp on just how bad the bombing of the town really was. Isabel gives details on the number of planes involved, what the approaching planes looked like on the radar and the military scrambled to warn people of the coming danger.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Emmy was irresponsible for not telling anyone about her planned trip to London? Why or why not? How might she have better handled the situation?



Discussion Question 2

Why was Emmy so set on going to meet with the Dabneys? Why was it so important that she take Julia with her instead of risking the danger that Julia might tell Charlotte?

Discussion Question 3

How does the final chapter help to wrap up Part 1 of the novel? What is the tone that is developed during this chapter?

Vocabulary

eloquent, strafe, retaliated, morph, pensive, fraught



Part Two: Chapters 16-18

Summary

In Chapter 16, the girls arrived at their flat. Emmy had time to fix Julia some lunch before she had to leave for her appointment. When she talked to Julia about what she would be doing, Emmy was surprised to see so much uncertainty in her sister's eyes. Emmy rode a train then walked to Knightsbridge. She found the Dabney home and was welcomed inside. While she was waiting, she took the brides box from her satchel and unwrapped it. She was surprised to see it was not the box but was instead Julia's book of fairy tales.

In Chapter 17, Emmy was at first angry with Julia for switching out the box but then realized that Julia thought it was the only way to keep Emmy from leaving her. When the Dabneys and Mrs. Crofton entered the room, Emmy explained her mother was working and that Emmy would tell her mother about the Dabneys' proposal when she was off. After the Dabneys said they wanted to take her to Scotland with them for her apprenticeship, Emmy explained why she did not have her sketches with her. They stressed to her that she must come back with her mother and with the sketches in order for them to go through with their plans. A new appointment was made for Monday at 4 p.m. the latest possible time and date. The Dabneys planned to leave for Scotland on Tuesday.

In Chapter 18, Emmy hurried to try to catch her mother before she left work. She hoped to talk her mother into agreement with her plan and also warn her that Julia was at home. At Mrs. Billingsley's house, however, Emmy learned her mother had left work early. While she was still talking with the lady who opened the door, the conversation was interrupted by the sound of the sirens. The women were at first stunned because they'd never heard the sirens before during the day but then Emmy heard the sound of bombs being dropped. Gladys told her to come inside and get into their cellar but Emmy ran back the way she had come. She was happy that her mother had left work early and that Julia was not at home alone.

Emmy crammed into the train station with other people trying to get home but the trains had stopped running. After an hour, the sound of the bombs stopped. She left the train station and headed toward her flat, in the direction from which the smoke and fire was coming. Emmy had finally caught sight of the dome of Saint Paul's and realized where she was when the sirens started again. She heard the sound of the planes and bombs before a shattering whack sent her air born. She hit her head and the world went dark.

Analysis

The theme of the choices one makes as well as living with the consequences of one's choices are addressed in this section of the novel. There were two different choices that



were made that influenced Emmy and Julia's lives that day in September. The first decision was Emmy's decision to go to London without telling anyone she was going. The second decision was Julia's decision to switch out the brides box for her book of fairy tales. Although both these choices were made by only one person, they had the power to effect a good many people. That is the powerful thing about the choices a person makes. They never affect just that one person. There is always a ripple effect. Because Emmy decided to go to London believing it was her one chance to see her dream come true, she has put both herself and her sister in mortal danger. Similarly, Julia had no idea how many people besides just her sister she would inconvenience because Emmy didn't have her sketches. Emmy was now forced to try to go back to Thistle House to get her brides so she could show them to the Dabneys on Monday. She was also embarrassed because she had put this couple out.

The war has now become real to the people of London and to Emmy. The first sign that something unusual was going on that struck even the common people on the street was the sounding of the air raid sirens during the days. Even Emmy noticed the sounds were strange because the sirens had never sounded during the day before. Imagine her fear as she ran toward her flat, knowing that there was smoke and fires in that direction.

Discussion Question 1

Might things have turned out differently if Emmy had gone directly back to the flat instead of trying to catch her mother at work? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why did the Dabneys insist that Emmy have her mother's permission to go with them? Why does Emmy not want to have to get her mother's permission?

Discussion Question 3

How did Julia's act of switching out the brides box affect more people than just Emmy? Do you think Julia considered the consequences of her actions before she switched out the box for her book of fairy tales?

Vocabulary

disheveled, punctuality, escritoire, deduced, vigilant, innate, imperative, ogres, malice, degrading, cacophony, perturbed, disembark, demeanor



Part Two: Chapters 19-21

Summary

In Chapter 19, Emmy woke in a bomb shelter. A woman showed Emmy her satchel and told her she was safe but another man in the shelter contradicted her saying no one was safe. Emmy went back to sleep. It was quiet when she woke. She followed the others leaving the shelter, thinking of nothing but getting back to Julia and her mother. As she headed toward her flat, Emmy saw the destruction all around her. She saw dead people lying in the street as well as dazed ones looking for family members. The row of flats in which she lived was standing but the windows were broken out. Those across the street, however, had been flattened. She called for her mother and Julia but the flat was empty. Believing they were at a shelter, Emmy sat down to wait for them. She heard her mother's voice and ran for her. She quickly realized her mother was completely surprised to see her. Mum had not come to the house after she'd gotten off work the day before. She hadn't seen the note and didn't know Julia was at home. Mum asked her where Julia was. Thinking Julia might have been with Thea, Emmy went to Thea's apartment and called for Julia. Inside that apartment, Emmy saw that Thea's furniture was covered with white sheets, a sign Thea had not been there recently. A man asked them who they were looking for and Emmy begged for details about Julia as her Mum asked Emmy what she had done.

In Chapter 20, because of all the tragedy associated with the war, the police didn't pay much attention to Annie and Emmy when they reported Julia missing. Annie and Emmy checked the hospital but found no one fitting Julia's description. They checked with social services, children's homes and with all the nearby shelters. Mum would not talk to Emmy after she learned why she'd returned to London and brought Julia with her. At home, Emmy apologized to her mother, telling her she'd wanted her to be proud of her. Annie, however, believed Emmy instead wanted to prove she was better than her mother and wanted to get away as soon as possible.

The two were silent for a minute. When her mum faced Emmy again, Emmy knew she'd made a decision. Upstairs, she changed into a dress, telling Emmy she was going to talk to someone who had connections. She told Emmy to stay at the flat in case the sirens went off. Emmy begged her mother to tell her where she was going and then offered to go and do whatever it was her mother planned to do to get help since the situation was her fault. Her mother's face softened as she told Emmy the situation was not her fault. Before she left, she asked Emmy to find something to cover the windows and to stay inside after dark as it wasn't safe outside.

In Chapter 21, Geraldine, Emmy's neighbor let her borrow a hammer and have her leftover plywood to cover the broken windows in her flat. Because Emmy would be alone that night, Geraldine told Emmy to keep the hammer. Emmy arranged herself on the sofa to sleep but as soon as it was dark the sirens began sounding again. She went to Thea's Anderson Shelter, stepping over her neighbor's dead cats arranged on the



back doorstep of her flat. Emmy would learn later the second night of bombing was worse than the first.

In the morning, her flat was still standing but there was no sign of Julia or her mother. A man came and called for Annie but Emmy hid from him because she was afraid he was a warden and would make her leave. She waited the rest of the day before she finally realizing it was Monday. It was the day she was supposed to have met with the Dabneys again. That night, the sirens sounded again and Emmy spent a second night in Thea's shelter. In the morning she scouted Thea's house for food and took all she could find back to her flat. Her mother and Julia were not back when it started to rain in the late afternoon. Bombs pounded the city again that night and Emmy spent another night in Thea's shelter.

The following morning, Emmy went out to look for her mum and Julia. The police wouldn't even talk to her because her mother was not with her. She checked in all the same places she and her mother had checked for Julia on Sunday. A woman suggested to Emmy that she check at an Incident Inquiry Point to see if her mother or sister had been reported dead. At the IPP Emmy found the name Downtree on the list, but it was not Julia that was listed, it was her mother, Anne.

Analysis

Emmy and her mother continued to deal with the consequences of Emmy's choice to come to London to meet with the Dabneys. Although Emmy's mother was furious with her, there was a moment when Emmy begged her mother to allow her to do whatever it was her mother was going to do in order to find Julia. Emmy took responsibility for her choice. In turn, her mother also let Emmy know that as Julia's mother, she shouldn't have made Julia Emmy's responsibility. Mum touched Emmy's chin in a way that Emmy couldn't remember being touched since Neville was living with them and Mum was happy. She told Emmy that the problem they were facing was her doing. Additionally, Mum told Emmy how different the two of them were, a point Emmy was always trying to prove.

The hammer that Geraldine gave Emmy in order to nail up the plywood to cover the windows of her flat will become an important object in Emmy's life. It became a symbol of what she lost in the war and the devastating consequences one's actions can have. Along with the hammer, there are several other incidents of note in this section of the novel. The reader should remember the man who came to Annie's flat looking for her as well as the way that Thea's cats were lined up on her back doorstep.

Notice also what a devastating affect the Blitz has on the people of London. Homes and businesses are damaged and obliterated. The information in the novel lists stats only for nights two and three of the bombing but on these nights more than 800 were killed and 1,700 were injured. Emmy learned that her mother was among those who were killed. It was in the midst of all this tragedy and continued bombing and devastation that Emmy was trying to find her sister. She allowed several days to pass before she ventured out



to look for either of them, keeping her promise to her mother that she would stay at the flat in case Julia returned.

Even though Emmy must feel that she alone was responsible for Julia's disappearance, there were other forces at work. First, she had no idea the bombing would start that particular day, at the particular time that Julia was alone. Although Emmy tried to get home as quickly as she could, she could not have anticipated being knocked out by a bomb and spending that night in a bomb shelter. Additionally, Emmy could not have known that her mother did not always go to her home after work. She had assumed that her mother would go home because that was generally her practice when the girls were there. Apparently, Anne had been enjoying her freedom without her daughters and chose not to stay alone in her flat.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Emmy should have talked to the man who came to her flat looking for her mother? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Consider how Emmy must have felt as she spent several nights alone in Thea's bomb shelter. How was this misery made worse by her thoughts that her sister had been alone when the bombs started falling?

Discussion Question 3

What does it mean for Emmy when she learned that her mother was dead? How do you think this discovery will change her life?

Vocabulary

paltry, pensioner, fathomed, calamity, cavalier



Part Two: Chapters 22-24

Summary

In Chapter 22, Emmy lied to the woman at the IIP office, telling her she was 18 and that her father was recovering in a hospital. She felt she had to lie to keep from being sent to a children's home. If that happened she wouldn't be able to continue to look for her sister. Emmy realized as she walked to the makeshift morgue that she was no longer allowed to be a child, the war had forced her to grow up. At the morgue, Emmy was told her mother had been buried that morning in Tower Hamlets. The man at the morgue told her that her mother had been in the basement of the Sharrington Crescent Hotel when it was hit by a bomb and the upper floors collapsed into the basement. He offered to get the handbag found with Anne for her but when he spoke with a woman to get the bag, she seemed to know Emmy was only 15 and asked about her foster mother. Emmy pretended to go outside to get her foster mother and then never returned.

After she left the morgue, Emmy knew she needed to make other living arrangements as she could be easily picked up at the flat. She couldn't stand the odors she smelled coming out of the homeless shelters and didn't want to stay there. She decided her best bet was to try to stay with Mrs. Crofton, but didn't know where that lady lived. She packed a bag from her flat, and then went to Primrose Bridal hoping to find something with Mrs. Crofton's home address on it. She was relieved to find that building still standing among the ruins.

In Chapter 23, luckily, the bridal shop still had electricity so Emmy was able to brew herself a cup of tea and wash up. She began to brush her hair using her mother's hairbrush and noticed some strands of her mother's hair were still caught in the brush. For the first time since she learned of her mother's death, Emmy allowed herself to cry. She lay curled up on the floor hugging the hairbrush and forcing herself to think about the beach weekend with Neville when her mother had been happy. She remembered Julia calling for Emmy to come rescue her as Neville played with her in the waves. Her Mum had told Emmy she'd better go rescue Julia as it was Emmy she wanted. Back in the shop, Emmy repeated her promise to her mother that she would rescue Julia just as the sirens began to sound again. She knew she couldn't go to a bomb shelter because her false age might be discovered so she stayed in the bridal shop. She padded the underside of the sewing machine table with wedding dresses and settled in there as the bombs fell.

The next morning, Emmy noticed Mrs. Crofton's suitcase on the consultation desk. There was also a pile of documents including Mrs. Crofton's passport, marriage license, her husband's death certificate, and the birth and death certificates of her daughter, Isabel. Emmy noticed that Isabel would have been eighteen on that coming Sunday if she had lived. Emmy also noticed a letter addressed to the woman in charge of cleaning the shop. The letter indicated Mrs. Crofton was going out of town with her cousin and would be closing the shop for a while. Emmy noted Mrs. Crofton said she was leaving



on Tuesday, but it was Thursday. She wondered why the woman had not taken her suitcase or her important papers. Emmy felt a wave of hope as she thought she'd see Mrs. Crofton when she came for her suitcase and that maybe she could still go with the Dabneys. This quick hope faded when she realized the letter she held had been written on Sunday. She realized that either Mrs. Crofton had already left London or she had been killed by a bomb.

She considered her new circumstances and wondered how long she would be able to survive as she was doing. She decided she needed to get involved in the war effort, with a group like the Women's Volunteer Service, so she could continue to look for Julia. Then she glanced at the stack of papers including Isabel Crofton's birth certificate.

In Chapter 24, Emmy assumed the identity of Isabel Crofton, sleeping at Primrose Bridal during the night and working with the WVS during the day. She made friends with the press and journalists, letting them know of her desire to find and help lost children. Even as the wedding dresses in Mrs. Crofton's shop protected her each night as she slept, Emmy's dream of being a dressmaker began to fade. Her one dream was to find her sister. Although she'd put it off, Emmy finally worked up the courage to look at a list of dead at an IIP office and saw that Mrs. Crofton had been killed the same night as her mother. She was grateful to Mrs. Crofton for having given her a way to stay in London and look for Julia but at the same time sad her mentor was dead.

One of her routines became to visit the Savoy where members of the foreign press stayed. She would talk to these reporters about street children they might have seen. One day she met a handsome American during her visit. He offered her a cup of coffee and the rest of his apple Danish. She commented she didn't understand how the hotel could still get sugar and butter when the rest of the citizens were so restricted by the rations. They exchanged names and Mac told Isabel he would let her know if he happened to see any street children. Mac told her about his job, and then asked about her past. Isabel created one for him in which she and her mother had owned Primrose Bridal together. She explained her mother had been killed and that she was living at the shop. She was unnerved because Mac seemed interested in her. He soon made sure to be in the dining room of the Savoy for Isabel's visits. He would always offer her coffee and part of his Danish or sweet roll.

On one day that Emmy was particularly upset, Mac asked what he could do for her. She opened up to him that her half sister, Julia, was missing. Mac questioned Isabel, asking if there were any other relatives that could have come for Julia. It was not until he asked that Emmy considered that Charlotte might have come looking for the child. She broke off their conversation quickly as she ran off into the rain to find out if Julia was with Charlotte.

Analysis

Emmy made a goal for herself that will be important later in the novel. She wanted to make her mother proud of her. At first, she thought she could make her mother proud by



rising above her situation and becoming a successful dressmaker. After her mother's death, Emmy remembered a promise she had made to her mother back when they went to the beach for a weekend with Neville. She'd promised her mother she would save Julia. Of course at that time, Emmy was "saving" Julia from Neville who was playing with her in the waves. Now, Julia could be in a position where she really needed to be saved. Her first night in the bridal shop Emmy revisited this promise to her mother that she would take care of Julia and hoped that in this way she could make her mother proud.

There are three instances in which Emmy voiced her desire for her now dead mother to be proud of her. On page 207 the author writes "Perhaps after the war, Mr. Dabney would give Emmy another chance. Emmy could still find a way to make Mum proud of her. Surely God allowed a dead mother glances from heaven at the children she had been torn from. . ."

Two of these quotes come on page 215. In one the author writes "perhaps in heaven, a mother was allowed to feel pride in a child's accomplishments after her death" and also "perhaps in heaven, you could see that your existence on earth hadn't been wasted." These quotes are significant because they are so similar and voice the same idea that Emmy hoped to make her mother proud of her. The repetition of the idea enforces how important it was for Emmy to make amends to her mother after her death.

Notice that even as Emmy's life was falling apart around her, she still held onto the belief that everything could work out all right for her longtime dream of being a dressmaker. Her mother was dead and her sister was missing but Emmy still considered that she might be able to work out a deal with the Dabneys to go to Scotland with them. As Emmy looked around her and took stock, this idea seemed to face, almost as if she was too stunned at first to really realize the severity of her situation.

It is in this section of the novel that the reader learns for certain that Isabel was Emmy although this fact had probably be deduced before Kendra confirmed through her narration that Isabel and Emmy were the same person. The woman to whom Kendra is talking is Emmeline Downtree who took on the identity of Isabel Crofton because she knew it would allow her the freedom she needed to search for her sister. Even though Emmy had doubted the war would ever affect London, she now stung from how drastically the war has hurt her. She had lost her sister, her mother was dead, she'd lost three years of her life when she took on Isabel's identity, she had to assume the role of the grown up and she was losing sight of her dream of being a dressmaker.

Even though Emmy was losing sight of her dream of being a dressmaker, notice there are still instances where her old dream gave her the protection she needed. Because she'd gotten a job at Primrose Bridal and had a key to the back door, she was able to use that building as a place to shelter after she could no longer stay in her flat. She used the wedding dresses she'd always loved so much as a way to protect herself from the nightly bombings. Her experience with Mrs. Crofton also gave Emmy a reasonable background story to tell Mac when he asked what she had done before the war. She



made up a story that included details of what Isabel Crofton would probably have been doing if she had survived past her sixth year.

Even as she searches for her sister, Emmy continued to be affected by the war raging in London. London was not a fortified city. It did not contain a military base, just businesses and homes but the Luftwaffe, the German air force, was bombing the city relentlessly. More and more people are killed and injured, and more and more infrastructure was destroyed as bombs were dropped on the city night after night. It was surprising, but fortunate, that Primrose Bridal still had electricity and running water even though many of the buildings on that same street were completely destroyed. Note also the continued shortage of rations. Emmy felt guilty for eating the apple Danish that the American journalist offered her because so many of her fellow Londoners hadn't had luxuries like sugar and butter in so long. She wondered aloud why the hotel was able to get those items when they were denied to the common people.

Discussion Question 1

Emmy has struggled with her identity since the beginning of the novel. How will her act of taking on Isabel's identity complicate her life? Why was it necessary?

Discussion Question 2

Consider Emmy's brief idea that she could still get in touch with the Dabneys and accept their offer for an apprenticeship. Do you think she really thought this would happen or was it a thought that came out of her need for things to be normal again?

Discussion Question 3

Why had Emmy not thought about checking to see if Julia had been returned to Charlotte until Mac mentioned it? Are there any other options that Emmy might have needed to consider that she hadn't thought of yet?

Vocabulary

condolences, fetid, sultry, detonations, ebullient, idyllic, bereft, vestige, fanaticism, bated, feigning, stimulating, alluring, sordid



Part Two: Chapters 25-27

Summary

In Chapter 25, despite her hope, Isabel learned Julia had not been returned to Charlotte. She was filled with dread and despair. She walked in the cold rain back to Primrose Bridal where she lay down on the wedding dresses and went to sleep. A few hours later she awoke cold. When the sirens began to sound again, Emmy begged to be given what she deserved. The building in which she took shelter was not hit, however, and she went to sleep only to be awoken by a knocking on the door. She was hot and hallucinating as someone picked her up and carried her outside.

Isabel woke from her fever and slowly realized she was not in hell, but in a hospital. Mac was there and told her she couldn't go back to the bridal shop as it had been hit by a bomb just a few hours after he and the warden had found her. She worried all her things were gone including Julia's book of fairy tales but Mac pointed out to her that he'd brought her bag. Mac asked if there was anyone he could take Isabel to who could take care of her. Even as she shook her head she thought about Thistle House and Charlotte. She mentioned Charlotte and Mac offered to take her there.

In Chapter 26, two days later, Mac drove Emmy to Thistle House. Isabel asked for a minute with her "aunt" explaining that she didn't leave on the best of terms. Charlotte welcomed Emmy but looked for Julia in the car. Emmy told Charlotte that it was just her. She briefly told Charlotte she didn't know what had happened to Julia and that Mac, her friend in the car, thought her name was Isabel. Mac stayed for tea, but the atmosphere was uncomfortable. He didn't seem to notice, however, as Isabel had told him that she and her aunt had not parted on good terms.

After Mac left, Emmy told Charlotte what had happened the day she and Julia were separated. She hoped Charlotte would berate her for her childishness but instead held her while both of them cried. When Charlotte called Emmy by her given name, Emmy asked not to be called that. Charlotte tried to explain to the girl that she could not just decide to be another person but Emmy insisted upon her name change. Even when Charlotte told Emmy that what happened to Julia was not her fault, Emmy still insisted on using the name of 18-year-old Isabel. Charlotte agreed to call her Isabel but told her that the billeting officer must be advised that Emmy had returned but Julia was still missing. She also told Isabel she would be required to finish her school but that she could do her studies at the house. She also insisted that Isabel never leave without telling her first.

In Chapter 27, Emmy stayed at Thistle House even after she was well enough to go out. She didn't want to be recognized as the runaway who lost her sister. When she was well enough to use the bedroom upstairs she had shared with Julia Charlotte suggested they instead take in two more refugees which would mean Emmy would need to share Charlotte's room. Although Charlotte offered to move Emmy's things from the room,



Emmy said she would take care of it. She hoped she'd have the courage to destroy the sketches she'd made once she found them. After completely cleaning the room, Emmy checked the crawl space for the brides box. It was not there. She was relieved the box was gone and she didn't have to destroy it. She thought she had gotten an easy way to pay the fine for what she had stolen.

Analysis

It is in this section of the novel that Emmy lost hope. When Mac had suggested to her that Julia might have been returned to her foster mother, Emmy was quick to jump on this possibility. She was devastated when she learned Charlotte had not been reunited with Julia. Notice that in several different places in these chapters Emmy wanted to be given what she felt she deserved for losing Julia. The night after she learned there was no information available from the billeting office on Julia, Emmy begged to be given what she deserved. It was almost as if she were hoping she would be killed. Instead of being killed, however, Mac found her and took her from the bridal shop shortly before it was bombed. She was suffering from pneumonia and woke in a hospital. Notice that when Mac first found Emmy that her fever was so bad that she thought the devil had gotten her. In her distorted view of reality, she believed she was getting the punishment she thought she deserved.

Again when Emmy told Charlotte how Julia had come to be separated from her, she wanted Charlotte to chide her for her irresponsibility and immaturity. Instead, Charlotte showed Emmy she was loved and accepted despite her faults. Another point at which Emmy felt she would feel the pain of a punishment came when she cleaned the room that she and Julia stayed in at Thistle House and looked for the brides box. Even though she believed that Julia had perhaps stowed it in the crawl space of the room, Emmy couldn't find it when she looked. Finding the box would have been significant because it was what Julia had believed would separate her from Emmy. The box did wind up separating the two but in a completely different way than Julia had imagined. Because she cannot find the box, she has no physical reminder of her separation from her sister. Emmy had wished that the box had gotten blown up in the bombings. She'd thought that might be the best ending for it. When she realized the box wasn't where she thought it was, the author compared Emmy to a thief who had been given "a merciful way to compensate for what she stole" (p. 255).

One aspect of the Emmy that returned to Thistle House that Charlotte could not understand was Emmy's desire to continue to use Isabel's identity. She wanted Emmy to be able to forgive herself and understand that she was not to blame for losing Julia. Emmy did not want to be called by her given name because she believed that girl was bad and undesirable. She felt that by reinventing herself as Isabel she could somehow get rid of her feelings of guilt. As Charlotte pointed out, however, it didn't matter what Emmy called herself, she was still the same person.



Discussion Question 1

Discuss the circumstances that caused Emmy to return to Thistle House. Did Charlotte respond to Emmy as you expected? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Emmy's desire for punishment for what she felt she'd done to Julia. Do you think she would have felt any better if she'd gotten the punishment she felt she deserved?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think happened to the brides box?

Vocabulary

implored, stalwart, peripheral, incendiaries, transgressions, stoic, palpable, amicable, apropos, flummoxed, chastisement, berated, vehemence, convalesced



Part Two: Chapters 28-30

Summary

In Chapter 28, Hugh and Phillip Goodsell, the two boys that Charlotte took in as refugees took to Isabel quickly. She even earned the affection of Rose and took care of her when Charlotte was away. As the holidays grew closer, Isabel thought her life was full of purpose. They agreed to give only presents they had made to one another. Emmy tried her hand at painting. Her first painting was of Charlotte's red polka dot umbrella in the laundry room. The second painting she did was her first Umbrella Girl, her gift to Charlotte. Mac joined them for Christmas dinner. He invited her for a New Year's party but neither of them went because of an intense bombing in London two days before New Year's. It was five days before Emmy heard that Mac was not injured.

In Chapter 29, the next year Charlotte and Emmy doubled the size of the vegetable garden so they could produce and send to the people who needed it the most. They gave away eggs from the chickens and fruit from their orchard. As 1942 began Mac told Emmy he wanted more from her than just friendship. She told him she just wanted to be friends. Four months passed before he said he would take the offer of friendship and hoped she'd feel differently when the war ended. Mac didn't come for Christmas in 1942 because the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor bringing the United States into the war.

Even though Emmy hoped the war would end, she didn't know what she would do if it did. She'd given up hope of finding Julia and there was nothing left for her in London. Mac came for Christmas in 1944 but it seemed their friendship was waning. Her life had settled into a comfortable rut when she received a thick envelope in the mail in February of 1945. She hoped it was news about Julia but instead she was informed from a law firm that her father, Henry Thorne, had died and left her 30,000 pounds.

In Chapter 30, Emmy went back to London though she'd thought she never would. She wanted to know what her father was like, she wasn't interested in the money. Charlotte almost insisted that she be allowed to come along but Emmy would not let her. At the lawyer's office Emmy sensed she was supposed to only take the money and leave. The lawyer even stopped her from sitting down. When she told him she had a few questions, he told her he wasn't authorized to answer any questions. As Emmy was leaving the office, the lawyer received a phone call and Emmy heard him tell the person that "she's already left" (p. 276) and knew they were talking about her. The lawyer called after her to wait, that she was wanted at the house. Her father's wife was sending a car. After Emmy told him she'd done nothing wrong, the lawyer seemed to soften. She asked when her father died and did not expect to learn that it was the same night as her mother's death, in the Sharrington Crescent Hotel with his arms wrapped around her mother.



Analysis

Emmy got shocking news about her identity during this section of the novel. For years she had wondered who her father was and why her mother didn't name him on Emmy's birth certificate. Through a lawyer, she learned that her father was married to another woman who knew nothing of Emmy or her mother until her father died. Emmy also learned that her mother and father were still seeing each other as they died together in the basement of the Sharington Crescent Hotel. This man, Henry Thorne, must have been the person to whom Anne went for help in finding Julia. Just as she thought her life was falling into a safe routine, Emmy was forced to take back on the identity of Emmeline. Note that she went to the lawyer not because she wanted the money, but because she wanted more information about her father.

Even though Emmy was away from the bombing of London and relatively safe at Thistle House, the war was still raging. Children whose parents had not sent them out of London were now looking for places for their children to live after their homes were destroyed in the bombings. Charlotte was good enough to take on two new refugees, a pair of brothers, who comforted Emmy after they learned her home had also been destroyed in the bombing and her mother killed. Food was still rationed and shortages kept those who could grow their own food busy. Working together, Emmy and Charlotte doubled the output of vegetables from the gardens at Thistle House not only for themselves but also to help their neighbors and those in the cities where food was in such short supply, especially fresh fruits and vegetables.

Meanwhile, Emmy and Mac continued their friendship. Because she was continuing to reel from grief and guilt because she couldn't find her sister, Emmy punished herself by not allowing herself to have a relationship with Mac. When he asked for more than friendship from her she told him that she wanted to remain friends. Although she wanted a deeper relationship with Mac, she was afraid of this relationship. She also didn't feel right agreeing to date him when he didn't really know who she was.

It was also in this section of the novel that Emmy began to channel her creative abilities into painting. For one Christmas, she painted her first Umbrella Girl painting as a gift for Charlotte. The painting of the blonde girl with the polka dot umbrella with the curly handle was unmistakably a salute to Julia.

Discussion Question 1

Why was it significant that Emmy wanted to continue to be called Isabel even after it was no longer necessary for her to use her alias?

Discussion Question 2

Why would it be important to Emmy that her mother and father were still having a relationship? Why do you think Emmy's mother never introduced Emmy to her father?



Discussion Question 3

How did painting replace Emmy's former hobby of sketching bridal dresses? How were her new paintings a salute to Julia?

Vocabulary

incessantly, reticence, wane, sublime, decimated, mulling, perpetual, dictated, triage, camaraderie, gossamer, contemplate, inundate, befuddled, illicit, pariah, vacillated



Part Two: Chapters 31-33

Summary

In Chapter 31, the lawyer told Emmy that her mother and Henry had been having an off and on affair since she was born. Emmy's mother had been a maid in Henry's house. He was unhappily married and twice her age. Henry had paid for Emmy's birth and the things she needed. He'd also gotten her mother jobs when she needed them and had gotten her out of jams. The lawyer said he'd done it because he thought he loved Anne.

At the Thorne house, Emmy is shown into the library. After offering tea, Agnes told Emmy bluntly that after the check she had received that day, there would be no more money from where that came. She added that Emmy would also have no connection to that family. Although Agnes threatened her, Emmy pushed for an answer about why it had taken so long to learn her father was dead. She suddenly realized Agnes did not know about the affair until she learned of Henry's death, just like Emmy didn't know her mother was still seeing her father. Agnes accused Emmy of being a liar when she said she got a letter telling her that she had money coming to her. Suddenly a voice broke through telling Agnes that Emmy was telling the truth. It was Colin, the son of Agnes and Henry. He said he'd told his mother when he turned 18 that he was going to have the lawyer find Emmy and give her the money her father had wanted her to have. Emmy pulled the envelope holding the check out of her purse and laid it on the table before walking out. Colin followed her, trying to give her the check because it was what his father wanted. She told him only it was not what she wanted before she left.

In Chapter 32, the car took her to the Savoy as she requested. She waited in a chair in the lobby until Mac came in. She told him she had an awful day. He took her to dinner and they danced afterward. As they walked around London and Emmy saw the clean up work that was beginning, she felt as if she were ready to feel something again. Back at the hotel, they found there were no more empty rooms. She stayed in Mac's room. He promised to sleep on the floor, which he did until she had a nightmare. It was Emmy who encouraged Mac to sleep with her and she understood why her mother had kept going back to Henry Thorne.

In the morning, Mac asked Isabel to marry him. She warned him she wasn't the woman he thought she was. He asked if she loved him but Emmy felt that if she were to leave England, she'd be walking out on the promise she made to her mother. A few weeks after she returned to Thistle House, Emmy realized she was pregnant. She wanted her mother, who had been in that same situation, desperately. Charlotte advised her to tell Mac about the baby as she believed he loved her. She thought Emmy had more to do in life than just sit in Thistle House as time went by. Emmy decided if she were going to marry Mac, Emmeline Downtree would have to disappear just as Julia and her mother had. The two were married on VE day. They went to America in July. She took the hammer to remind her of the exchange she had made to become Isabel.



In Chapter 33, Kendra realizes that Isabel and Emmy are the same person. She also realizes that she returned to England at some point and asks what brought her back. Isabel indicates it was the hand of God that brought her back. She went on to say that she and Mac had been happy at first in their marriage. She painted the Umbrella Girls and this activity helped her deal with the guilt she felt about Julia though she was overly protective of Gwen. She missed Charlotte, Rose and Thistle House but never visited, even when she could have. She got a letter in 1958 from Charlotte telling her that she had died, but had left Thistle House to her in her will.

Charlotte indicated she understood if Emmy did not want to return to Thistle House, but that there was a letter for her in the drawer of her bedside table. Charlotte tells Emmy in the letter that she has prayed that Emmy would forgive herself because Charlotte knew how she felt. Charlotte described Rose's accident, saying that Rose had asked her to go swimming with her but Charlotte had refused because she was mad at Rose. She felt if she had been there, Rose would never have been hurt. Charlotte explains she came to realize it was a series of events that caused her sister's injury, not just her actions alone.

Mac had seen the letter and wanted to know what was going on. Emmy finally told him the truth but he was not happy that she had kept it from him for so long. They barely spoke to one another for several weeks. In May Emmy had gone to Thistle House with Gwen to check out the house and for some time apart. Kendra asks if it was the letter in Charlotte's bedside table that made her stay. Isabel tells her that was not the primary reason as she handed her a leather bound notebook.

Analysis

Choices and the consequences of those choices continue to be a major theme in this section of the novel. A letter from Charlotte, sent to Emmy after Charlotte's death, gave Emmy a missing piece of the puzzle to help Emmy and the reader understand how Charlotte could be so understanding of Emmy's belief that she had to take care of Julia and her deep grief when a decision she made allowed Julia to be lost. In her letter Charlotte told Emmy she hoped she'd learn to forgive herself and realize that it was not just Emmy's decision that changed Julia's life. Charlotte stressed to Emmy that because the world in which they lived wasn't perfect, there was no way to keep the people they loved safe, even if they had made different choices.

While Charlotte intended her letter to be healing for Emmy, it actually had the opposite effect at first. Although they'd been married many years, Emmy had chosen not to tell Mac her real identity. It was as he read the letter over her shoulder that he learned that she had kept secrets from him. Even though she came clean about why she had lied to him, Mac felt that she had betrayed him. She and Mac stopped speaking and Isabel finally took her daughter, Gwen, with her to England to stay at Thistle House for the summer. Note at this time that Isabel has still not shared with her daughter her real identity.



Ironically, it was the circumstances from which Emmy was created that drew her and Mac together. Emmy was feeling particularly vulnerable after the way she was treated by Agnes Thorne, the wife of Emmy's father. Even though Emmy had wanted information about her father and the way in which her mother was connected to him, information she wanted to piece together her own identity, Agnes treated Emmy as if all she wanted from the family was money. When Henry's will was first read, Agnes made a choice to instruct the lawyer not to locate Emmy. She was surprised that Emmy had found out about the money owed her and believed Emmy just wanted a payoff. Her son Colin, however, believed what his mother had done was not right and hired a lawyer to locate Emmy and see that she was given the inheritance due her when Colin came of age. Although it seemed that Colin's intents were amicable, Emmy took them as being hostile in nature and left the inheritance check behind when she left the Thorne's home.

It was with this experience fresh on her mind that Emmy went looking for Mac. He took her to dinner and dancing, helping to restore her feelings of self worth. The instance that seemed to change Emmy's attitude toward Mac came when he comforted her when she woke screaming from a nightmare. Note that Emmy realized after their sexual encounter that she realized why her mother kept going back to Henry even though nothing could ever come of their relationship. She recognized that in her mother's life as a single, working parent, her mum had no outlet in which she felt like the beautiful woman she was. Her visits with Henry had given her this outlet.

Although it appeared that Emmy had taken on the identity of Isabel for good when she had first come back to Thistle House from London, she decided upon a permanent parting from Emmy when she married Mac. A hammer, the same one that Geraldine gave her after the first night of bombings in London, went with her to America to remind her of this promise.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think that Charlotte never talked to Emmy about what happened to Rose and Charlotte's role in Rose's accident in person? Do you think it might have made a difference in the way Emmy viewed her own role in Julia's disappearance? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

What do you think that Isabel means when she tells Kendra: "When you make a choice, even if it's a bad one, you've played your hand. You cannot live your life as though you still held all your cards" (p. 298)? How does this illusion to poker compare to the way she tried to live her life?



Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Emmy never told Mac about her real past? Do you think he would have understood and taken the information better if she'd told him the truth about herself before they were married? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

indignation, pivoted, topiaries, luminescent, enunciating, retaliation, denounce, compensated, recriminations, assuaged, irrevocably, precariously, divested, detest



Part Three: Chapters 34-36

Summary

In Chapter 34, in June of 1958 Julia began writing letters to Emmy at the suggestion of her therapist, Dr. Diamant. Julia writes her therapist tells her she is haunted by the things she left undone between herself and Emmy. Her boyfriend, Simon, found Dr. Diamant for her. She had moved back to London and was doing well but when she met Simon and fell in love with him, the idea of being happy almost drove her crazy again. She shares that Dr. Diamant is her favorite therapist. Her first, Dr. Nielsen didn't help her as he wanted her to talk only about that day when she and Emmy had gotten separated. After the war ended, Julia wrote that she didn't want to go back to England even though her Granny did. At the end of her letter she shares that she never called Neville "Daddy" because she was afraid if she did that Emmy would as well. At that time, Julia hadn't wanted to share her daddy with Emmy.

In a letter dated June 11 Julia noted she and Simon had been unable to find the street on which they had once lived. They did, however, find her mum's grave. It had only a date of death, no date of birth. Julia writes that she didn't understand why mum didn't tell her that Neville had died or that she had grandparents who had offered to take her when London was evacuated.

Julia recounts in her letter how Neville had been badly injured in a car wreck but had told his parents about Julia before he died. It was after she and her grandmother had been in Connecticut for several months that Julia was told her mother was dead. At that time she asked about Emmy, her sister from another father. Granny had told Julia she would look for Emmy but never found anything. Julia has done her own searching as well, looking in telephone directories, cemeteries and fatality reports. She wishes she'd never switched out the brides box on the night they left Charlotte's house. She's tried to find where Charlotte's house was but the evacuation records were kept was destroyed by a bomb.

In Chapter 35, on June 12, Julia writes that even though Dr. Diamant had encouraged her to tell Emmy in her letters what happened to her since she saw her last, Julia is scared she will go back to being the silent strange girl she was just after that day happened. She remembered being woken to the sound of sirens. She was crouched behind the sofa pillows in the corner when the flat across the street was hit and the front window broke and glass blown over her. She ran to the front door and screamed for Emmy. As she stood there, a pair of arms grabbed her. It was Thea. She had come home to gas her cats with ether so they wouldn't starve to death alone in the city. Thea took Julia to the Anderson shelter where they stayed that night. Thea tried to comfort her by singing Christmas carols. After the bombing stopped, Julia was only able to tell Thea that her foster mother's name was Charlotte. Thea looked through the flat and found the letter from Neville's parents. That was how she wound up with Neville's parents.



In Chapter 36, in a letter dated June 18, Julia writes that she remembered her Granny had contacted Mrs. Billingsley and learned Anne had not shown up for work. She sent the butler to the flat where Julia had lived but it was empty. Julia's grandparents were worried because she didn't speak. Granny begged her husband to let herself and Julia go to America. On the passenger manifest, Granny listed Julia as Julia Waverly. Julia was not able to argue the point even though she didn't want a new name.

She doesn't remember much of her first weeks in America. She does remember Christmas and feeling peaceful for the first time in weeks until she heard the carolers. Then she was back hiding under the bed. She wishes that day at Charlotte's, she would have told Charlotte when she found the letters.

Julia also writes that she remembered going to a cabin by the lake each summer. Frannie, another girl her age, stayed in a cabin next door. Even though Julia didn't talk, the two were friends. One summer, Frannie and her family came to the lake late. She was different. She asked Julia about her experience in the war. Frannie's brother was missing in action. Frannie asked Julia if she thought her brother was okay. Julia said only one word "maybe." It was enough to give the girl hope. She wonders if the purpose of the journal is for her to learn to hold onto hope but still move on with her life.

Analysis

In a plot twist that is not entirely unexpected, the reader learns in this section of the novel that Julia had survived the bombing of London. This part of the novel takes on a different voice and tense. The majority of this part of the book is written in the form of letters to Emmy from Julia. Each includes a date on which Julia wrote the letters. As is generally the case for letters, these are written in the first person point of view with Julia as the narrator. They are also written in the present tense in reference to the dates on the letters. The letters were written about eighteen years after Julia and Emmy were separated when the London Blitz began. They are also written about 40 years before the time of Kendra's interview with Isabel. Julia's memories of the war are much different from Emmy's. She focused on the fear of being alone when the bombing began the loss of her family, Thea's cats, and everything else that was important to her. For years after the experience Julia apparently refused to talk to anyone. She remembered her grandfather crying when she and her granny returned to England from America and she had answered his question about their return trip. She realized he was crying because he'd never heard her voice.

As Julia details her experience when the bombs began falling, the reader is struck by the coincidences that figuratively and literally brought the girls within inches of finding each other. One of these coincidences was the visit by Mrs. Billingsley's butler to the flat in which Emmy, Julia and their mum had lived. Emmy had hidden from the man because she believed he was a warden who would put her in a children's home if he discovered she was underage. Through Julia's letter, it is learned that this man was looking for Julia's mother to tell her where Julia was. Had Emmy talked to the man she would have learned that Julia was going with Neville's parents.



Although she didn't embrace her new identity as Emmy embraced hers, Julia was given a new name when she and her granny boarded a boat to go to America. Her granny listed her on the passenger manifold as Julia Waverly, giving her the same last name as her father. Before this time, she had been Julia Downtree, because she was not speaking at the time, Julia had no way, and perhaps no energy, to argue that she wanted to keep her old name.

Of the things that bothered Julia about the time leading up to her separation from Emmy, one of those was her mother's decision not to tell her that Neville had been killed or that his parents had offered to take her in. Recall the reason that their mum had given Emmy when she asked about letting Neville's parents meet Julia was that mum had wanted Neville's parents to hurt just like mum had. Of course, her plan ultimately backfired as Neville's parents were the ones who were called by Thea and took on responsibility for Julia.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss how closely Emmy and Julia passed as some points in the days following the beginning of the London Blitz. How might things have been different for the two of them if they had found one another during one of these close passings?

Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast the way Emmy and Julia reacted to the war and the bombings.

Discussion Question 3

Why is Julia so bothered that her mother did not tell her that her father had been killed?

Vocabulary

perpetual, verbally, susceptible, immersed, paupers, inflicted, unrelenting, euthanized, demolished, dredging, manifest, tranquil, apprised



Part Three: Chapters 37-38

Summary

In Chapter 37, in Julia's June 22 entry she tells Emmy that she is going to a ballet with Simon and will meet his family. She changes the subject telling Emmy that she was good with details so she worked at a mapping company. It was there that she met Simon. She feels it was because she had to reinvent herself under her new name that she kept up with the details in her life. She also counted to keep herself calm. Her teenaged years were rough, then they returned to England. It was her psychologist at the time who suggested she visit London. For her first trip, she and Granny went for tea at Harrods. Julia learned her fear was not only heavy, but also that it was a liar as her visit to London was not as scary as she had thought it would be. The worst moment was when they walked past a bridal shop and Julia thought of the brides box that she hid on the ledge of the crawl space so it could only be seen if the person looking for it was inside the space.

In her June 24 letter, Julia writes Simon was also a refugee from the war. She loves him and wants to marry him but it is hard for her to say that she loves him because she knows how easy one can lose those that they love. Julia admits she doesn't feel as if she deserves happiness because she stole Emmy's. As she realizes the physical buildings broken during the war are being fixed, she also must fix what she broke.

In Chapter 38, in a June 27 letter, Julia writes that Dr. Diamant had suggested to her that she could perhaps feel better if she could locate Charlotte's house and find the brides box. Simon has offered to help her. She thinks that if she can find the box, she can right the wrong she did to her sister when she hid the box in the first place.

In her July 2 letter, Julia writes about how she has decided to try to find Charlotte's house. As they look at a map, Julia recognizes the name "Cotswolds." None of the towns in that area, however, sounded familiar to her. She has decided not to tell her Granny about her search because she doesn't want her to know if she fails.

In a July 5 letter, Julia writes that her and Simon's first trip to look for Charlotte's house was not successful. Her next letter, on July 12, tells Emmy that they went to Chipping Camden but nothing looked familiar. During the trip she had gotten the feeling that Simon wanted to find the house because he thought it would fix Julia. Julia doesn't think finding the brides box will fix her, but instead will fix what she broke. She explained to him that she needed to look for the box by herself. She convinced him it was something she needed to do for herself.

Analysis

Although her granny didn't intend any harm, Julia reacted badly to being given a new last name. Realize that Julia has already lost so much because of the war. No one knew



where her sister was, her mother was killed in the bombings, Julia had learned her father was dead and her mother didn't tell her, and her home has been destroyed. Even the cats that Julia had played with are dead because Thea did not want to leave them to fend for themselves in the war-ravaged city. When Julia was given a new last name, it must have felt to her as if who she had been, her core identity, was being taken away and destroyed. Julia compensates for this loss of control and the loss of the details of her life that had once been familiar to her by counting. Julia indicates in her letter that this counting became an asset as it taught her to be detail oriented.

The reader learns why Emmy was not able to find the brides box when she checked the crawl space in the room in which the two girls stayed at Charlotte's house. Instead of just putting it into the space haphazardly, Julia had taken the trouble to balance it on the ledge above the opening. In order to see the box, Emmy would have had to have gone all the way inside the space and looked back at the opening.

With the help of her psychologist, Julia decided that she had to fix what she had broken the day she swapped out the brides box. She'd made the swap because she didn't want to lose her sister but lost her anyway. Now, Julia feels the need to fix what she broke, the same way the city of London is being "fixed" after the war.

Notice that just as Emmy had trouble allowing herself to be loved, Julia also has fought with the same feelings. Her worry is not that she is unworthy of love but that what she loves will be taken from her. Because he was a refuge from war as well Julia felt that Simon understood her pain, but at the same time she realized that finding Emmy's brides box was something that she had to do by herself.

Discussion Question 1

With what regret does Julia struggle? What choices does she wish that she had made differently?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Julia's reasons for wanting to find Emmy's brides box by herself. Do you understand her reasoning? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Compare and contrast the way Emmy and Julia respond to and use their new identities.

Vocabulary

pathetic, tangible, wanes, don, resolve, studious, ruminating, demonic, askance, ardent



Part Three: Chapters 39-40

Summary

In Chapter 39, in her July 19 letter, Julia writes to Emmy that she found the town where they got off the train after leaving London. She didn't find the house, however, and plans to go alone again the following week. In her July 26 letter, Julia writes she is sick and unable to search that Saturday.

It is in her Aug. 2 letter that Julia writes she found Charlotte's house but not the brides box. She'd learned from the city librarian that Rose and Charlotte were both dead. Charlotte had died just a few months earlier. She gave her directions to Charlotte's house, Thistle House, and told her an American and her daughter were living there for the summer. A teenaged girl opened the door. Julia told the girl her story. The girl, who was named Gwen, allowed her into the house to look for the box. As they moved a bookcase from in front of the crawl space, Gwen told Julia she would like England if her mother would let her visit places and do things but that her mother was overly protective. Julia notes that the girl reminded her of Emmy. She felt numb when she searched the space and found no box. She gave the girl her name and phone number to pass along to her mother, but got the feeling that the girl would not give them to her. In the conclusion of her letter, Julia apologizes to Emmy for losing her brides.

In Chapter 40, in her August 5 letter, Julia writes that Dr. Diamant has told her the truth will become a comfort to her because it is not deceitful. In her August 7 letter, Julia writes that Simon has suggested it is time to lay Emmy to rest. He believes destroying the journal will do that for Julia. She wants to check with Dr. Diamant. In her August 11 letter Julia thinks she's done writing letters, but can't bring herself to destroy the letters. Dr. Diamant has told Julia that from what she has told him about Emmy, that she has forgiven her. Julia knows it is time to release her sister.

In her August 15 letter, Julia writes that Gwen found the brides box. It was in Rose's old room. They will meet each other in Stow. That evening, with the box at her elbow, Julia writes to Emmy again. Julia believes that Rose had found it and put it in the crawl space of her room. Rose's name was written at the top of each sketch. Gwen didn't tell her mother about the box because she was afraid her mom would be angry for her at letting someone strange into the house. Julia didn't want to spoil the girl's feelings of being part of something important that her mother didn't know about so she didn't push the issue of seeing Gwen's mother. She does learn from the girl that her mother was in Oxford meeting with a lost half-brother who had suddenly contacted her.

In her Oct. 22 letter, Julia writes that she's had no luck finding a designer to take any interest in her sketches because they are old and out of fashion. She has accepted Simon's proposal. They are to be married April 7, Emmy's birthday. In her November 1 letter, Julia writes that she has found a designer who has agreed to make one of Emmy's dresses for Julia's wedding. She's decided she needs a good deal of money to



create a line of dresses with Emmy's name on them. To do so, she thinks she needs to ask her grandparents for money. In order to do that, she will have to tell them what she did. In her November 9 letter, Julia reports that her grandfather said no to her request for money. She said he told her that she was not responsible to fix what the war had broken. Simon suggested she choose one of the dresses to be made for her own. She did choose one, the one she had always called the button dress.

In her Nov. 19 letter Julia writes that the dressmaker had wanted to make some changes in the dress but Julia had refused the alterations. Julia writes in her Dec. 2 letter that she nearly cried when she had her first dress fitting. Her granny did come to the fitting and did cry. Julia bragged about how talented her sister was. Later that evening as she realized she would need only one of the sketches, she burned the remainder of them, her way of symbolically putting her sister to rest.

Analysis

The closeness to which the sisters come to a reunion without even realizing how close they have come to being reunited with each other adds to the theme of coincidences. At some points, it is almost as if the great hand of fate is keeping the two away from one another. Julia made a trip to the very house in which her sister lived and spoke to her niece, Gwen, about wanting to locate the brides box. Of course, Gwen doesn't know anything about the brides box. Her mother had been so ashamed of herself and what she did that she hasn't told Gwen anything about her life as Emmy. Had she shared that story with her daughter, it is possible Gwen would have recognized the story Julia was telling her and realized Julia was her aunt. As it was, however, Gwen sympathized with Julia because she understood her desire to make things right with her sister.

Note that several times in her letter Julia noted that Gwen reminded her of Emmy. It makes sense that Gwen would have reminded Julia of her sister since Gwen was, in reality, Emmy's daughter. Emmy had been headstrong because she wanted to be thought of as an adult, a role she felt she held anyway. After losing Julia, Emmy had overcompensated as a mother and been highly protective of Gwen. Gwen explained to Julia she didn't want her mother to know about finding the brides box because she was afraid her mother would freak out because Gwen had let a stranger into the house. If at any point Gwen had mentioned the visit Julia paid to the house and the woman's search for the brides box, Emmy would have known immediately that it was her sister to whom Gwen had been talking.

Notice also in this section of the novel that Julia made a tribute to her sister in which she paid her a high honor. Although she could not find a designer or dress maker willing to take on bringing Emmy's dresses to life without a good deal of money, Simon encouraged Julia to pick one of the dresses as her own wedding dress. With Julia wearing a dress that her sister had imagined into being, it was almost as if Emmy was there with Julia on her wedding day. Julia chose to burn the remainder of the sketches, a tribute that she believed was symbolic of finally laying her sister and her sister's memory to rest.



Discussion Question 1

Do you think that Julia's act of burning the sketches Emmy made of her bridal gowns was an appropriate way to lay her sister's memory to rest?

Discussion Question 2

How does Julia do Emmy the greatest honor by wearing a dress designed by her as her wedding dress?

Discussion Question 3

How did the sisters' changed names and new identities make it more difficult for them to find one another?

Vocabulary

dubious, lament, threshold, ascended, necessitate, privy, connoisseur, trapeze, egregious

Part Three: Chapter 41

Summary

In Chapter 41, Isabel tells Kendra that Julia did give her the notebook after Gwen brought them together. They had decided to stay at Thistle House after Mac joined them after their first summer there. She had decided it wouldn't be best to tell Gwen the truth about herself because Mac had taken it so badly so she continued to use Isabel's name. They were in Oxford for an art show when Gwen pointed out a wedding picture in the London paper. She finally shared with her mother the story of the brides box. Isabel hears nothing after she sees the dress, one she created and recognizes the bride as Julia.

She asked Mac to get in touch with Julia. Julia and Simon drove to Thistle House the next day. Gwen begged for forgiveness because she didn't tell her mother about Julia visiting the house a year before but Isabel knew it was her fault that Gwen hadn't told her. She wonders about her identity and decides to remain Isabel. She was proud when Kendra told her that Emmy wasn't no one because that was who she had always been, even after she taken Isabel's name. The sisters shared their techniques for handling their grief caused by losing each other. Kendra learns that Julia had died of breast cancer but the sister had twenty years together before that happened.

Kendra remembers the letter inside Charlotte's bedside table and asks Isabel about it. It turns out the letter had been from Colin, Emmy's half-brother. He had gotten in touch with her when his mother died as she was the only family that he had left. Isabel points out an old man smoking a pipe. She says that man is her brother. Half the children on the lawn are his grandchildren. Isabel said she had misunderstood Colin's intention in making sure that she'd gotten the inheritance she was due from her father. He'd wanted a relationship with her and felt that would be a good way to start it.

Colin had invested the money intended for Emmy. It had grown to enough money to make the repairs needed to Thistle House. She and Mac had reconnected and he began to understand why she hadn't told her about Emmy. Mac and Colin became friends. Colin had also introduced Isabel to her father's good qualities.

Kendra's recorder clicks off and she asks Isabel what she is hoping to come from the interview. Isabel wants Kendra's essay to be one of the ones chosen to be printed in the paper. She wants people to know the sacrifices that her mother made for her and her sister. She feels her mother is a lost person of war but she wants people to know how important she actually was. She also wants to pass on what she has learned. It is at that point that Beryl knocks on the door to tell them it is time for the party. Isabel invites Kendra to join her and the girl escorts her to the back yard.



Analysis

The theme of identity is wrapped up in this section of the novel as Isabel explains to Kendra why she decided to continue to use Isabel's name even after Julia was found. Note that Isabel explains to Kendra that when Mac called Julia to find out if she wanted to meet Isabel, he was careful to tell Julia that Isabel wasn't Emmy anymore. Isabel indicates to Kendra that Emmy was no one. Even though many years had passed since Isabel had gone to seek refuge at her foster mother's home and had been told by Charlotte that she couldn't just become someone else, Kendra tells Isabel the same thing that Charlotte did that day about her identity. Just as Charlotte had done, Kendra tells Isabel that she always was and would always be Emmy. Even under her assumed identity, Isabel was still Emmeline Downtree.

Also getting wrapped up in this final section of the novel is the idea that one must live with the consequences of the choices one makes. It is in the words that Emmy wants to share with her mother that she demonstrates that she finally understands what her mother knew for so many years. There are no secrets to a charmed life. Isabel has learned through her life that she had to learn to forgive herself for being able to make her own choices, a statement that indicates Isabel also had to learn to realize she also had only limited control over her life and the lives of those she loved.

Note also that at different points in the novel, particularly happy parts, the author has used descriptions including images of wedding clothes and material. These references seem to be used in order to convey the idea that just as a wedding dress was perfect, dreamy and the prelude to a happy ending, so were these experiences. The happy weekend that Emmy remembered with her mum, Neville and Julia at the beach was one of these instances. The surf is described as being like bridal lace. Emmy's mum belittled Emmy's idea that her dream job of being a dressmaker by telling her that "wishing it won't make it happen and neither will all the white bridal lace in the world" (p. 50). Despite the fact that Emmy has to give up on her dream of being a dressmaker when the bombing began in London, it was still the walls Primrose Bridal that kept her safe from the elements and the fluffy wedding dresses she'd always loved so much that gave her physical comfort. Notice a final bridal image at the conclusion of the novel. As Kendra and Isabel finish their interview and move outside, a lace curtain "lifts on a ribbon of air, caresses the back of Isabel's neck, and then falls away like a discarded bridal veil" (p.386). This image indicates that even though Isabel's life was not the perfect one she'd imagined, her life had turned out better than she could have imagined at the end.

Discussion Question 1

Now that you know the full story of how Isabel and Julia met, do you understand better Isabel's comment that it was the hand of God that brought her and Julia back together?



Discussion Question 2

How does Isabel come to realize that her daughter owed her no explanation for not telling her about Julia coming to the house?

Discussion Question 3

What does Isabel hope that Kendra will be able to convey through her article?

Vocabulary

amenable, anonymous, affirmation, absolving, seduce, compelling, sages, contemplation



Characters

Isabel MacFarland aka Emmeline “Emmy” Downtree

Isabel, most commonly known as Emmy, is the main character of the novel. When the novel opens, Isabel is preparing to be interviewed by Kendra, an American history student studying for a semester in Oxford. Her family is getting ready to celebrate Isabel's ninety-third birthday even though in reality, as Emmy, she is only ninety. Isabel is being interviewed because she is a survivor of the Blitz on London during World War II.

When Emmy's story opens, she was 15 with a dream of becoming a wedding gown designer. She had just gotten a job working at Primrose Bridal when Emmy was told by her mother that Emmy and her younger sister, Julia, had to be evacuated to the country because it was feared the Nazis would begin bombing London. Even though she went to the country, Emmy continued to make plans to get herself an apprenticeship with a dressmaker. Her plans required her to travel back to London for an appointment to show a designer her sketches. Emmy made a plan to go alone but her sister discovered her plan and demanded to be taken along. Fearing the brides box would separate them, Julia swapped the brides box for her book of fairy tales.

Because of Julia's act of swapping the box and her book, Emmy's appointment with the designer did not go well. On her way back to their London flat where Emmy had left Julia, the Nazis began bombing the city. When Emmy finally made it back to the flat her sister was gone. Emmy spent the next several months searching for her sister. She even took on the identity of Isabel Crofton, the deceased daughter of Eloise Crofton, in order to be able to look for her sister and not be sent to a children's home because she was under age. Emmy made a point to interact with the journalists working in London so she could use their influence to put out feelers for Julia. One of these journalists was Jonah “Mac” MacFarland. He not only agreed to help look for Julia, he also fell in love with Isabel. Isabel caught pneumonia and was found by Mac in the Primrose Bridal building. He took her to a hospital and then later to Charlotte's home to recuperate.

Although Mac wanted to marry Isabel, Emmy did not think she was worthy of love and happiness. She turned down Mac's first proposal. Later when Emmy was upset after she'd been back in London about an inheritance her biological father had left her, Emmy looked Mac up. The two slept together and Emmy wound up pregnant. When she told Mac about the baby, she agreed to marry him. She also decided at that point that she had to break ties with Emmy for good. It was not until their daughter, Gwen, was a teenager that Emmy was forced to tell Mac about her real identity. The truth came out when Charlotte willed Thistle House to her. Mac was angry with Emmy but the two eventually repaired their relationship and lived at Thistle House together.



Julia Downtree Waverly Massey

Julia was the half-sister of Emmy and daughter of Neville and Anne. She was seven when the novel began. As a child, Julia had always thought that the bridal sketches that her sister did were a wonderful activity that mattered only to the two of them. When Julia realized that Emmy had plans for those sketches that didn't include Julia, Julia became jealous and possessive, not wanting her sister to leave. Even though she'd been told not to, Julia looked in Emmy's brides box and found the goodbye letter that Emmy had written to her. Julia insisted that Emmy take her to London with her. Not only did Julia insist that Emmy take her to London, she also switched out Emmy's box of bridal sketches that her sister had wrapped in a shawl and placed in her satchel with a book of fairy tales. Once they'd arrived in London, Emmy left Julia alone in their flat believing that their mother would be home soon to take care of her. Their mother did not go home that night and Julia was left alone in the flat. When Emmy and her mother finally made it to the flat, Julia was gone.

It was not until much later in the novel that the reader learns that Julia's screams when the bombing began had gotten the attention of Thea, their next door neighbor who had come back to her flat to euthanize her cats. Thea arranged for Julia to go to Neville's parents because it was the only address she could find that gave her any idea where any of Julia's relatives were.

Years later when Julia returned to London she began seeing a therapist who suggested to write what she wanted to say to Emmy in the form of letters. Through these letters Julia tells her sister that she wished she had never switched out the brides box. As she saw the work going on in London to repair the damage done by the war, Julia decided she needed to fix what she had broken in her sister's life and goes on a journey to hunt down the brides box. Julia finds it, with the help of Gwen, a teenaged girl whom Julia doesn't realize is her niece. It was only later when Gwen saw Julia's wedding photo in the paper wearing one of the dresses that Emmy had designed that Gwen told her mother what had happened.

Charlotte Havelock

Charlotte Havelock was the woman who took in Julia and Emmy when they fled from London. She opened her home and heart to both the girls. After Emmy was released from the hospital when she contracted pneumonia, Mac took Emmy back to Charlotte's house to recuperate. Charlotte welcomed Emmy again and cried with her when she told her the story of how she'd gotten separated from Julia. Charlotte agreed to call Emmy by the name Isabel even though she didn't think it was the best idea for Emmy to hide her guilt behind a different identity. When Emmy discovered she was pregnant with Mac's baby, Charlotte encouraged her to tell Mac about the baby. Emmy did as Charlotte suggested, and Emmy and Mac were married. After Charlotte's death, she had a letter sent to Emmy telling her that she had willed Thistle House to her. She also admitted to Emmy that she had understood Emmy's distress about Julia's



disappearance because she had believed that Rose's accident was her fault. She had prayed for Emmy to be able to have the courage to forgive herself for what happened to Julia, the same way Charlotte was finally able to forgive herself for what happened to Rose.

Anne Louise “Annie” Downtree

Anne Louise Downtree was Emmy and Julia's mother. She was killed when a bomb hit the Sharrington Crescent Hotel during the second night of the London Blitz. She was there trying to get help from Henry Thorne, Emmy's father, in finding Julia. The two died in each other's arms. Although Emmy and her mother were at odds for much of their time together Emmy's ultimate goal for her life became to make her mother proud. She realized that despite her mother's seemingly unimportant role in the world that her mother was of great importance because of what she sacrificed to see to it that her family was provided for. It was a promise that Emmy made to her mother, that she would save Julia, that kept Emmy going in her search for her sister. Although Emmy didn't technically save her sister, the two did get back in touch with one another despite the difficulty. When Isabel granted Kendra the opportunity to interview her, it was with the idea that Kendra could give Anne the credit that she deserved for her life. Isabel wanted her mother to know she'd finally realized there were not secrets to a charmed life.

Eloise Crofton

Eloise Crofton is the woman who owned Primrose Bridal. She gave Emmy a job in her shop shortly before the children were evacuated from London. Eloise worked with her cousin, who was a dressmaker, to arrange an apprenticeship for Emmy. Although she was unaware, Mrs. Crofton saved Emmy's life several times and gave her protection during the first several months after the initial bombing of London. Because she was unable to stay in her own flat, Emmy lived at Primrose Bridal. She took on the identity of Mrs. Crofton's deceased daughter, Isabel. Emmy wore the clothes she found in the suitcase Mrs. Crofton had left behind and even bought food using her ration card. Even though she had suspected it since she found Mrs. Crofton's suitcase in the bridal shop, Emmy looked at an Incident Inquiry Point and learned that Mrs. Crofton had been killed in the bombings that same night the Emmy's mother had been killed.

Rose

Rose was Charlotte Havelock's younger sister. She had awoken with a mental disability after she almost drowned when she was thirteen. In a letter telling Emmy that she had willed Thistle House to her, Charlotte admitted to Emmy that she had always blamed herself for Rose's disability. She'd been angry with Rose because Rose had flirted with the boy she liked. When Rose asked Charlotte to go swimming with her, Charlotte refused. If Rose had not been rescued by some boys who had gone fishing that day,



she would have drowned. As it was, her brain was deprived of oxygen long enough that she had the mental capabilities of only a five year old. It was Rose who removed the brides box from the crawl space of the room in which Julia and Emmy had stayed in at Thistle House and moved it to the crawl space of her own room, keeping Julia and Gwen from being able to find the box when they first looked for it.

Gwen MacFarland

Gwen MacFarland is the daughter of Isabel and Mac MacFarland. Julia met Gwen when she visited Thistle House to look for information about Emmy/Isabel. Isabel was not at home because she was in town taking care of something. Julia had no idea she had just talked to her niece. Gwen did not tell her mother Emmy had visited or given her the phone number that Julia left with her. Later, however, Gwen checked the crawl space in the room that had been Rose's room and found the brides box with the sketches inside. Gwen arranged to get this box to Julia without her mother knowing about it. It was later, when Gwen noticed a picture in the paper of Julia wearing one of the wedding dresses created by her mother, that Isabel realized that her daughter had been in contact with Julia without even knowing who she was.

Nana

Nana was Anne's mother, and Emmy and Julia's maternal grandmother. It was Nana who taught Emmy the basic stitches she needed to know in order to sew wedding dresses. Emmy remembered her Mum throwing Nana out of their flat after Nana made a comment about a new job that Mum had just gotten. Emmy didn't realize until several years later that Nana believed Mum was sleeping around in order to earn favors like her new job as well as the money she used to pay for her flat. Before she left, Nana gave Emmy her box of embroidery floss so she could practice her stitches. This box later became known as the brides box, the box in which Emmy kept her sketches of wedding dresses. Nana died four months after Emmy's Mum asked her to leave and not come back.

Kendra Van Zant

Kendra Van Zant is a history major who is studying at Oxford's Keble College. She managed to get an interview with Isabel MacFarland although the elderly lady never granted interviews about her experience in the London Blitz. Kendra impresses the lady when she explains the purpose of history is not only to tell about what happened, but also how it made the people involved in it feel and how it changed them. Isabel charges Kendra with the duty of writing an essay that will be good enough that it will get printed in the newspaper. Isabel wants her mother to finally be known as a real person and an important person. She has chosen Kendra to convey this message for her.



Jonah “Mac” MacFarland

Jonah “Mac” MacFarland was an American journalist who met Emmy in London after she had taken on Isabel Crofton’s identity. Mac fell in love with Emmy and pursued her for several years. She went to see Mac after her distressing visit with Agnes Thorne. They slept together and Emmy got pregnant with Mac’s baby. Charlotte encouraged Emmy to tell Mac about the baby. The two were married. It was not until Emmy got a letter from Charlotte telling her that she had willed Thistle House to Emmy that Mac was aware of Isabel’s identity as Emmeline. He was angry with her at first but the two reconnected after they moved to England to live in Thistle House.

Colin Thorne

Colin Thorne is Emmy/Isabel’s half brother. After he came of age, he had his father’s lawyer locate Emmy so she could be given the money that her father had left to her in his will. Emmy would not take the money at the time because she thought he was trying to buy her silence with it when all she really wanted was information about her father. After his mother died, Colin got back in touch with Emmy and gave her the money their father had left her. He had invested the money so there was enough of it that she was able to do the work needed to repair Thistle House. Colin was one of the people who attended Emmy/Isabel’s ninety-third birthday party.

Thea

Thea was the single woman who lived in the flat next door to Emmy and Julia. She looked after Julia while Emmy was working in the bridal shop. It was Thea who found Julia alone in the flat the first night of bombing. Even though Thea was preparing to flee with her mother to Wales, she had come home to gas her cats because she did not want them to starve to death while she was gone. Thea sang Christmas carols to Julia in an attempt to comfort her during their time in the shelter. The next morning, Thea found the letter that Neville’s parents had written to Anne and contacted them.

Simon Massey

Simon Massey was Julia’s boyfriend and later her husband. It was for her wedding to Simon that Julia had one of Emmy’s dresses made. Simon tried to help Julia find Emmy’s brides box but Julia felt that Simon was intent on finding the box because he wanted to fix her. Julia wanted him to see her as whole regardless of how broken she was. She also knew that finding the brides box was something that would help her fix what she had broken, and would not necessarily fix her.



Neville Waverly

Neville Waverly was Julia's father. Anne was notified that he died in a car wreck in Dublin the same time that she learned that all of London's children were being evacuated to the country. Anne and Neville had an off and on relationship for years after Julia's birth. Emmy suspected her mother really loved the man and wanted to marry him but Emmy realized he was not good for them. It was only after Neville's death that Anne learned that he'd lied not only about the death of his parents but also about his last name.

Granny and Gramps

Granny and gramps were the names by which Julia called her grandmother and grandfather, Neville's parents. When Thea found Julia alone in the flat the morning after the bombings, she found the letter that Neville's parents had sent to Anne telling her that Neville was dead. Thea contacted Neville's parents and they took Julia in even though they did not even realize she existed until Neville was on his deathbed.

Henry Thorne

Henry Thorne was Emmy's father. She did not learn his identity until several years after his death. It turned out that it was Henry who was giving Anne money during the years that Emmy was growing up and helped her to have a nicer flat and plenty of food. When Henry died, he was in the basement of the Sharrington Crescent Hotel with his arms around Emmy's mother.

Agnes Thorne

Agnes Thorne was the wife of Emmy's father, Henry Thorne. The two were married even at the time that Henry had his affair with Anne and Emmy was born. After Emmy was called to a lawyer's office to claim money that her father had left her in his will, Agnes requested that Emmy come to her house as well. Agnes belittled Emmy and told her that she would not get any more money from them.

Dr. Diamant

Dr. Diamant is a psychiatrist that Julia saw to help her deal with the guilt she felt because she had replaced the brides box with her book of fairy tales when Emmy went to talk to the designer who wanted to give Emmy an apprenticeship. It was also Dr. Diamant who suggested to Julia that she write letters to Emmy in order to try to deal with her guilt.



Beryl Avery

Beryl Avery is the housekeeper at Thistle House when Kendra visits for her interview with Isabel. Beryl shares with Kendra that she is surprised Isabel agreed to the interview as Isabel had refused others before. Although Beryl calls Isabel “Auntie” it does not appear the two are any blood relation.

Graham Dabney

Graham Dabney was Eloise Crofton’s cousin. He was the one with whom Mrs. Crofton hoped to arrange an apprenticeship for Emmy.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Umbrella Girls

The Umbrella Girls are a series of watercolor paintings that have made Isabel MacFarland famous. Isabel's first painting was made as a Christmas gift to Charlotte. The umbrella in the paintings is the one that Julia described to her sister as being the one that she wanted. Therefore, the Umbrella Girls are symbolic of Julia.

The Brides Box

The brides box is what Emmy and Julia come to call the wooden box that Nana had given to Emmy. The box originally contained the embroidery floss that Nana left for Emmy to practice her stitches. Emmy replaced the floss with her sketches because she believed the box was a better container than her geometry folder. To Julia, this box became a symbol of what was about to separate her from her sister when she realized Emmy had an appointment to talk about being an apprentice to a dressmaker. Because she didn't want Emmy to leave her, Julia swapped the box for her book of fairy tales. She spent several years of her life feeling guilty because she had ruined Emmy's chance for the apprenticeship because she hid the box. Julia eventually found the box and had one of her sister's dress designs made as her wedding dress. To Emmy, the box represented her shortsighted desire and ambition. She believed she traded her sister's life for her own selfish desires. She had hoped the box had been destroyed in the bombing so she wouldn't have to face it again.

The Owl

Looking back on the night she left Charlotte's house and took her sister with her, Emmy wondered if this owl had not been sent to make her reconsider her decision about going to London.

The Key to Primrose's Back Door

When Emmy realized that she still had the back door key to Mrs. Crofton's shop, she believed it was a symbol that she still held the figurative key to her dream of being a dressmaker. After her mother was killed and Emmy realized she couldn't stay in her own flat, the key to Primrose Bridal allowed Emmy a place to stay where there was still electricity and running water.



Julia's Book of Fairy Tales

Julia's book of fairy tales was one of the items that Emmy had with her when she moved to America with her husband. The book was Julia's favorite and was a symbol of the missing child.

Geraldine's Hammer

Emmy's next-door neighbor, Geraldine made Emmy keep this hammer after she let her borrow it to cover the broken windows of the flat. Geraldine indicated Emmy needed it because it was not safe for her to be alone. Emmy kept the hammer with her, even after she moved to America with her husband. The hammer represented to Emmy the exchange that she had made when she took on Isabel's identity.

Mum's Hairbrush

It was when Emmy used her mother's hairbrush and saw her hair intermingled with her mother's hair that she realized that her mother was really gone. The brush with its intermingled hair represented to Emmy that she would need to take over her mother's place in Julia's life whether she felt capable of that role or not.

Isabel Crofton's Birth Certificate

Isabel Crofton's birth certificate represented to Emmy her key to a new life in which she would be free to look for Julia without having to worry about being taken to a children's home. When she took on Isabel's identity, Emmy also took on a new birthdate that made her three years older, old enough that she was considered an adult.

A Leather-Bound Notebook

This leather-bound notebook contains the letters that Julia wrote to Emmy when she moved back to London and began to fight again with the decision that she made so many years ago to switch out Emmy's brides box with her book of fairy tales. This notebook represented Emmy's memory to Julia but to Emmy it represented the years she had missed with Julia and Julia's story of her war experience.

Christmas Carols

When Julia heard Christmas carols sung by carolers her first winter in America, she hid under the bed in her room because they reminded her of the first night of bombing that she spent with Thea in the Anderson shelter. Thea had sung Christmas carols to Julia during that night in an attempt to comfort her.

Julia's Wedding Dress

Because it was created from one of her sister's sketches, Julia felt that her wedding dress represented her sister and the talent that she possessed.



Settings

Thistle House

Thistle House is the house in which Charlotte and her sister, Rose, lived when Emmy and Julia stayed with them during the war. The house had been in Charlotte's late husband's family for more than one hundred years. Emmy returned to this house after she contracted pneumonia while trying to find her sister in London. She lived there until she married Jonah MacFarland and the two moved to America. In Charlotte's will, she left Thistle House to Emmy, who was then known as Isabel. Isabel and her family later moved to Thistle House. It is in this house that Kendra interviews Isabel about her memories of World War II and the Blitz. It is the same house in which Gwen, Isabel's daughter, found Isabel's box of bridal sketches and returned them to Julia without her mother's knowledge.

The Cotswolds, England

The Cotswolds is the area of England in which Charlotte and Rose's house was located. Thistle House was made of a material called Cotswold stone, named for the building material that is plentiful in the area.

London, England

London, England is the city in which Emmy and Julia lived before they were evacuated to live in the country because it was feared the Germans would attack the city. Emmy had the misfortune to arrange a meeting in London on the same day the bombing Blitz started, putting herself and her sister in danger. In fact, she and her sister were separated that day and did not know what had happened to each other for 20 years. After she lost Julia and her mother was killed in the bombings, Emmy stayed in London and looked for her sister until she contracted pneumonia.

Primrose Bridal

Primrose Bridal is the bridal shop in which Emmy had a job for a short while before she was sent to the country. Because she had expected to return to work, Emmy kept her key to the bridal shop even when she left London. After her mother was killed in the bombings, Emmy took shelter in the building that housed Primrose Bridal because she was afraid since she was not yet an adult she would be sent out of the city. It was inside this store that she found the birth certificate for Isabel Crofton, Eloise Crofton's deceased daughter. Emmy took on this girl's identity because the girl was 18. If people thought she was 18, they would not bother her as she looked for her sister.



The Downtree's Flat

When Emmy went to her appointment the day the Blitz on London began, she left Julia alone in their flat. When Emmy was finally able to return the following day, her sister was not there. Emmy stayed in this flat the next three days, waiting for her sister or her mother to come back home but neither ever did.

14 Cadogen Square

This Cadogen Square address is the place to which Emmy had to go in order to meet with the Dabneys.

The Anderson Shelter

Thea, Emmy's next-door neighbor, erected this Anderson shelter in her back yard because she had learned that her cats would not be allowed in the public bomb shelters. On the first night of the bombing, Thea and Julia stayed in this shelter. The following three nights, Emmy stayed in this shelter. She never knew until two decades later that her younger sister had been in the shelter the night before.

Incident Inquiry Points

The Incident Inquiry Points were places that people could go to learn the names of people who had been reported dead. It was at one of these places that Emmy learned that her mother had been killed in the bombings. She later checked at an IIP to learn that Eloise Crofton had been killed the same night as her mother.

Sharlington Crescent Hotel

Emmy's mother's body was found in the basement of this hotel after a bomb hit the building sending debris falling onto the people hiding there. Emmy did not learn until several years later that her mother had been with her father, Henry Thorne, when she died.

The Savoy

It was at the hotel the Savoy that Emmy would go to meet with journalists to see if they could help her with her search for Julia. Emmy met Jonah "Mac" MacFarland at this hotel. He later became her husband.



Royal London Hospital

Royal London Hospital is the hospital to which Isabel was taken when Mac found her in Primrose Bridal suffering from pneumonia.

The Thorne House

Isabel was called to the house where her father, Henry Thorne, had lived with his wife and son after she picked up her inheritance check from the lawyer's office. Henry's wife called Isabel there to threaten her not to contact the family again as she would get no more money from them.



Themes and Motifs

Choices and Consequences

The choices one makes and the way these choices affect his life and the lives of those around him is a major theme in this novel. At the conclusion of the novel, Isabel comes to the realization that one must learn to forgive himself for the mistakes he makes and realize that he is only in charge of his own decisions. Even though one has control only over his own choices, the consequences of these choices are often far reaching.

One of the major choices made in this novel is the one made by Emmy to go to London to meet with a dressmaker about an apprenticeship even though she knew there was the possibility that the city might be bombed. Emmy went ahead with her decision even though her younger sister, Julia, found out about her plan and demanded to be taken along. Even though Emmy could not have known what was about to happen, the Blitz on London began between the time she left Julia alone the family's apartment and before she was able to return. When Emmy finally got back to the flat the next day, Julia was gone.

Emmy's decision to take Julia with her to London and leave her alone at the flat had far reaching consequences for both of the girls. Julia was consumed with guilt because she had swapped out her sister's box filled with bridal designs for a book of fairy tales before they left to go to London. When Julia realized what she had done, she was afraid she had jeopardized her sister's future as a bridal designer. Julia spent several years in therapy because she refused to talk and compulsively counted as ways to help her deal with her experience in the London bombings. She finally found Julia's box with her bridal designs inside but was unable to get a designer to agree to start a line of dresses with her sister's name on them, a gesture Julia believed would undo the damage she had done.

Meanwhile, Emmy dedicated months of her life to trying to find out what happened to Julia. She even took on a new identity so that she could stay in the city and look for her sister even though she was under age. Because of the pain and grief she believed she had caused as Emmy, she did not think Emmy was worthy of love or of good things happening to her. For this reason she kept her identity as that of Isabel Crofton so that she could try to escape from the things Emmy had done. Even as Isabel, Emmy still had not let go of her guilt. This guilt resurfaced in Emmy's relationship with her own daughter, Gwen, because she tried to hold too tightly to the girl. Her overly protective nature almost kept Gwen from ever telling her that Julia had come to the house asking about the brides box.

In conclusion, even though it might have appeared that Isabel would have been angry with Gwen for not telling her about Julia's visit, she has finally learned her lesson about choices. She realized that it was her fault that Gwen did not feel comfortable telling her about the day-to-day events in her life. Besides, Isabel had never shared the story of



Emmy and Julia with her daughter so Gwen had no reason to believe Julia's search for the brides box would be of any importance to her mother. Isabel has come to realize no matter how hard she tried to be in control, she has no ability to control the decisions of others, even those of her own daughter.

Coincidences

Beginning in Part Three of the novel in which Julia's letters are printed, the reader learns how close Julia and Emmy came to each other at different times in their story, but never successfully met up. As Isabel notes in her conversation with Kendra, it seems that God had to go to great lengths to get the two back together. Isabel blames the difficulties the two had in reuniting on her mistakes but it almost seems as if there was some force working against the two getting back together.

First, even though Emmy suspected when she first arrived back at the flat after the bombing that Thea might have taken Julia, she assumed after she saw Thea's flat was empty that Thea had not been there. Emmy took a neighbor's word that Thea and her mother had left days before to flee from the city and doesn't try to look for or contact Thea. Even when Emmy went through Thea's flat to the Anderson shelter and saw the strange way Thea's cats' bodies were lined up on the back step, she didn't consider Thea might still be in town and might have found Julia.

Second, after Emmy learned her mother had been killed, she considered going to Mrs. Billingsley's home. She decided not to because Mrs. Billingsley knew Emmy was only 15 and she was afraid the woman would turn her in. Had Emmy gone to the Billingsley residence, however, she would have learned that Thea had found Julia and had contacted Neville's parents. Thea had left a message with Mrs. Billingsley because it was the only way she knew for sure to get in touch with Annie. Emmy had another chance to learn Julia's whereabouts when Mrs. Billingsley's butler had come to the flat where Emmy was staying looking for her mother. Emmy believed the butler was a warden who would take her to a children's home so she did not come out when he called.

More coincidences occur later in the girls' story as Julia began looking for the brides box. She happened to visit Thistle House on a day when Emmy was not at home. Had Emmy been at home that day, the sisters would have recognized each other there. Because Gwen did not know about her mother's identity as Emmy or that she ever had a sister or that she dreamed of being a designer, the story Julia told Gwen did not strike the girl as anything that would interest her mother. Besides, Gwen figured her mother would just be angry with her for letting a stranger into the house so Gwen never mentioned the visit to her.

Gwen can ignore the coincidences no longer when she comments out loud about Julia's wedding announcement in the paper. When Emmy saw the dress and the face of the woman in the picture, she recognized both her dress design and her sister. It was at his



point that Gwen finally told her mother how close the two had come to meeting just in the past few months.

War

This novel is a work of historical fiction. That means that even though the characters and their situations are a work of fiction, the story is set against the non-fiction backdrop of London during World War II. The author not only tells a heart wrenching story of two sisters whose family is destroyed by war, but also details the horrors of the war itself.

Even though Emmy and others like her had grown accustomed to the nightly air raid sirens and requirements that they carry a gas mask to school, Emmy did not take the threat of war seriously until the Blitz actually began. Just as is recorded in history, the bombings in Emmy's story started on Sept. 7, 1940. London was bombed consecutively for many days, just as Emmy remembered. Even though preparations had been made for possible bombings months in advance there were still many civilian casualties and much destruction because of the air raids. Notice references not only to bomb shelters, blackout curtains and air raid sirens but also to the wardens who patrolled and seemed to know who lived in each section of London. Not only had the people been schooled on what to do if they heard the air raid siren, there was already a plan in place for accounting for the people if a raid did happen.

Another aspect of Emmy's story that was true to history was the evacuation of London's children to the countryside. Because it was believed the Luftwaffe, or German air force, might attack London the children were sent to the country where it was believed the children would be safe. Not only did parents willingly part with their children in the hopes they would be safer elsewhere, those living in the country willingly took these displaced children into the homes despite the tough times all were experiencing because of the war.

Another reality of war that is discussed in this novel was the rationing of food and supplies. Many items were in short supply not only because the majority of men who worked production type jobs were fighting in the war but also because importing food and supplies became dangerous during the war. Note that when Emmy met with Mac in the Savoy that she was upset because that hotel was still able to get sugar and butter while the average citizen had not been able to get these items for months. Another aspect of rationing was that civilians were called upon to grow their own food and share the proceeds of their gardens with their neighbors. It was for this reason that Charlotte took special care of her orchard of fruit trees and tried to expand her vegetable garden as she knew that others needed the food she could grow.

Identity

The importance of one's identity is a theme in the novel as Emmy and Julia's identities are not only destroyed by the war but also as they try to construct new identities for themselves. Through the course of her story, Emmy also sought to discover her identity



as her mother did not list her father on her birth certificate. Emmy's identity as an illegitimate child was one that haunted her through the novel.

Both Julia and Emmy lose their identities in the war. Julia felt she lost her identity when her granny listed the child as Julia Waverly instead of Julia Downtree, the name by which Julia had known herself all of her life. Already Julia had lost her home, her mother and her sister, now she has had her name taken from her. These losses made Julia feel as if she were losing her self as well. In order to hang on to who she believed she was, Julia stopped talking and took on the habit of counting things in order to feel she was in control of something in her life.

Emmy similarly took on a new identity during the war but her decision to take on this identity was voluntary. Emmy began using the identity of Isabel Crofton because she wanted to be allowed the freedom to look for her sister. Because Isabel was nearly 18, her identity would allow Emmy to search for Julia without being in fear of being sent to a children's home. Even after Isabel's identity was of no use to her, Emmy continued to use that name because she felt that as Isabel she could have a good life and perhaps even deserve happiness. To Isabel the name Emmy and the person she was then reminded her only of the mistakes that she made.

Another aspect of Emmy's identity that haunted her was the fact that she didn't know who her father was. It was not until after she had taken on the identity of Isabel Crofton and given up on her search for Julia that Emmy learned that her father was a rich man. He had died the same night as her mother. They were together in the basement of the Sharrington Crescent Hotel when it was bombed. Although her father left her money in his will, his wife had not wanted Emmy to have it. It was Emmy's half-brother, with whom Emmy later struck up a friendship, who saw to it that Emmy got the money her father had left her.

History

Although it is by no means a major theme in the novel, Kendra makes an important statement about history as she is talking to Isabel. Isabel had asked her why she was so interested in history. Kendra tells Isabel that history is important because it tells people who they are and how they fit into the world. Additionally, Kendra also explains to Isabel that she believes history should not only include the hard facts of what happened but also how what happened affected the people who lived through a particular point in history. She believes history should include feelings and emotions as well as details. Isabel likes Kendra's definition of history because she allows the girl the honor of being able to tell her story. Isabel not only wants Kendra to tell the facts of her story, but also to describe her mother as an important character in Isabel's story and her life. She hopes the girl will be able to capture what happened to Isabel during World War II and also what she learned from those experiences.



Styles

Point of View

There are actually three different points of view used in this novel. Each of these points of view is important in the story and has its own purpose. The majority of the book is written in the third person point of view from the viewpoint of an omniscient narrator. The chapters that are written in the third person point of view are Chapters 2-14 and 16-32. It is in these blocks of chapters that Emmy's viewpoint of the story is told through the narrator. The choice of a third person point of view is interesting because Isabel tells her story directly, face to face, to Kendra, yet the story is presented to the reader in the third person.

Chapters 1, 15, 33 and 41 are written in the first person point of view and are narrated by Kendra. Kendra is a college history major who has been granted an interview with Isabel even though Isabel had never agreed to an interview about her experiences during World War II before. Kendra's point of view is important because she is an outsider to the situation. She hears the story for the first time as one emotionally uninvolved. After Isabel is finished telling her story, Kendra and Isabel are like old friends. Kendra's sections of the novel are written in the present tense. Chapters 34-40 are also written in the first person point of view. They are letters written by Julia to Emmy. This first person point of view is important because it allows Julia a chance to tell her own story of her experience during the war and the following years. These letters are written in the present tense as it relates to the dates on the letters.

Language and Meaning

There are two significant features to note in the language of this novel. First, common British terms are used that might be unfamiliar to the American reader. For instance, Julia, Emmy and their mother live in a flat. A flat is the British term for an apartment. The tube stations referred to when Emmy went to her meeting with the Dabneys and again when she tried to return home to Julia are basically like an American subway or underground train system. When Julia visited Thistle House as an adult looking for the brides box, Gwen got a torch so they could look in the crawl space. In England, people use the term "torch" to describe what Americans call a flashlight. Notice also that Emmy often referred to her mother as "mum" a common British short form for mother just as Americans use the short form of mom.

Another significant feature about the use of language in this novel is the use of references to wedding attire. Bridal gowns and material to make them are used as a symbol of perfection, Emmy's ideal for her life. During one of the happiest times in Emmy's life, the family's weekend beach trip with Neville, she thought of things in bridal terms. For instance, a description of the waves on the beach includes a simile comparing the surf to bridal lace. When Emmy's mother tried to convince her daughter



that just wanting to be a dressmaker wouldn't necessarily make it happen, she explained it in terms of bridal materials telling her that all the white bridal lace in the world wouldn't make Emmy's dream come true. Although Emmy's dream of being a bridal designer never really came to fruition, with the exception of the dress her sister had made, these bridal images are still associated with hope and happiness even at the end of Emmy's life. After she and Kendra have completed their interview and are headed outside to greet the party guests, a curtain blows across Isabel/Emmy's neck. The author compares this lace curtain to a discarded bridal veil. The image of the veil can be interpreted as the happiness that has come to Isabel even though her life did not turn out exactly as she hoped it would. Despite what the war took from her, she still has much for which to be grateful.

Structure

This 386-page novel is divided into 42 chapters. The novel is divided into three major parts. Part 1 includes 15 chapters; Part 2, 18 chapters and Part 3, 8 chapters. The story is a frame story because the main portion of the novel is framed within Kendra's interview with Isabel. The "frame" is presented in Chapters 1, 15, 33 and 41 when Kendra talks to Isabel directly. These chapters in the frame are also written in the present tense.

The remainder of Parts 1 and 2 of the novel take the reader back nearly 75 years to the time of World War II. These parts of the novel include Emmy's story beginning with the time that she first talked to Mrs. Crofton about a job at Primrose Bridal until the time she married Mac and moved to America. Part 3 of the novel includes the letters that Julia wrote to Emmy during her time with a psychiatrist in London as Julia worked through the guilt she felt because she had switched out the brides box with her book of fairy tales.



Quotes

She agreed by way of one of my professors to let me interview her about her experience as a survivor of the London Blitz, and only because the first person I had arranged to speak with had died in her sleep at an assisted-living facility in Banbury.
-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 1 paragraph 2)

Importance: Kendra recounts how she happened to get an interview with Isabel MacFarland, who had survived the London Blitz. She is grateful for the opportunity to interview Isabel, as the lady had not ever granted interviews before her request.

But that is precisely why it does bother you. I felt the same way once. People treat you differently when they think you are too young to know what you want.”
-- Isabel (Part 1: Chapter 1 paragraph 70)

Importance: Kendra and Isabel quickly recognize they are kindred spirits in that Kendra feels people judge her abilities based on her age, the same way that Isabel felt she was once judged when she was young, and is again now that she is elderly.

She pauses for another moment and then says, ‘Well, first off, I’m not ninety-three. And my name’s not Isabel.’”
-- Isabel (Part 1: Chapter 1 paragraph 121)

Importance: Isabel begins her story by telling Kendra that her age, 93, and her name, Isabel, don’t reflect her real identity.

Emmy was never more aware of how much her very existence had marooned Mum to this scrabbling life than at that moment, though it wasn’t the first time she had contemplated how her birth changed the trajectory of Mum’s life.
-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 5 paragraph 33)

Importance: Because her mother was a single mother, Emmy had always felt a certain amount of responsibility for the lifestyle to which her mother had to resign herself when she got pregnant at 16.

Someone had arranged for Mum to get the job at Mrs. Billingsley’s house when Neville left. That was why Mum had been so confident the day of her interview. What kind of person would do that for a woman like her mother?
-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 5 paragraph 45)

Importance: Because Emmy’s nana had suggested that mum had not gotten her job on her own qualifications, Emmy began to wonder how her mother might have gotten the job.

She would get out of the flat and out of her way as soon as she could. Emmy would prove herself worthy to Mrs. Crofton and the woman’s cousin. She would move heaven



and earth to make something of herself.

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 5 paragraph 66)

Importance: Continuing to feel as if she was dragging her mother down, Emmy swore to herself that she would make something of herself and relieve her mother of the responsibility of taking care of her as quickly as she could.

You and Julia are being evacuated to the countryside, Emmy,' Mum said. 'They're serious about it this time. You're leaving London next week. All the children are.'"

-- Anne (Part 1: Chapter 6 paragraph 84)

Importance: Even though Anne had not sent her children to the country the first time London was evacuated, she decided to do so when the second evacuation order was issued. Anne probably did this because she had just learned Neville, Julia's father had been killed. It is learned much later by the reader that Neville's parents had offered to take Julia during the evacuation. Anne had indicated to Emmy that she never wanted Neville's parents to meet Julia. For this reason it can be assumed that Anne insisted that the girls go to the country because it would be more difficult for Neville's parents to find Julia.

When Julia was at last asleep and Emmy was finally in bed, she had her own troubles to keep sleep elusive, primarily the loss of her job, the meeting with Mr. Dabney that she did not want to miss, and the notion that Mum had willingly chosen to bear all the responsibility of raising her.

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 12 paragraph 4)

Importance: It was not until after Charlotte mentioned that the boy who got Emmy's mum pregnant should have been charged with statutory rape that Emmy thought that her mother might have chosen to raise Emmy alone in order to protect the man who was her father.

She would look back on that moonlit night and wonder and wonder and wonder what she would have done had she considered that the owl that awakened Julia was divinely sent so that she wouldn't leave Thistle House that night.

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 14 paragraph 113)

Importance: Emmy had thought there was a possibility she could leave without Julia until an owl woke up her younger sister. Since she realized the consequences of her action of taking Julia to London with her, Emmy had often wondered if that owl wasn't supposed to make her stop and consider her actions.

You, being a history major, probably know what these two sisters were headed into, don't you, it being the seventh of September."

-- Isabel (Part 1: Chapter 15 paragraph 14)

Importance: Before she continues with her story, Isabel reminds Kendra that Emmy



and Julia were returning to London on the worst possible day as the bombing of London began that day.

Julia had deduced that if this chance was eliminated, she would never have to worry about the brides box parting them.”

-- Narrator (Part 2: Chapter 17 paragraph 8)

Importance: Julia recognized that Emmy was planning on leaving her because of something to do with the brides box. She reasoned that if she arranged for the brides box to be left behind at Charlotte’s house, she and Emmy would not be separated.

Every step had seemed like the ticking off of the days and weeks and months the war was taking from her. With one word, she allowed her sixteenth and seventeenth years to be swallowed whole by the enemy — taken as swiftly and surely as the war had stolen everything else that was hers.

-- Narrator (Part 2: Chapter 22 paragraph 18)

Importance: As Emmy walked toward the morgue to claim her mother’s body, she thought of what the war was taking away from her: her dreams, her mother, her sister, and even two years of her life. She realized when she learned her mother was dead that finding Julia and making sure she was well was entirely her responsibility.

Because she wasn’t foolish, immature Emmy who had abandoned her sister. / She was Isabel. / And Isabel had done nothing wrong.

-- Narrator (Part 2: Chapter 25 paragraph 110)

Importance: Emmy took on the identity of Isabel Crofton because the new identity made her old enough to look for Julia without having to worry about being sent to a children’s home. She also felt as if she could leave all her guilt over what she had done when she lost Julia with her identity as Emmy. She felt with the identity of Isabel, she was a different person who perhaps was worthy of a loving relationship with Mac.

Thistle House is for people who love and care for one another. We respect one another in this house, Emmeline. We carry one another’s burdens. We weep for one another and we laugh with one another. We hold one another by the hand when the lights go out and when the way seems hopeless. We work together and we share the table together and we pray together. No matter how old we are or what we are called.”

-- Charlotte (Part 2: Chapter 26 paragraph 77)

Importance: Charlotte told Emmy that even though she wanted to be called by a different name, she was welcome in Thistle House.

Emmy realized she wished the box had been lost in the bombings. She wanted it to have been blown to tattered bits. It would’ve been a fitting end to them.

-- Narrator (Part 2: Chapter 27 paragraph 6)

Importance: Emmy hated so much what the box and the aspirations it represented had



done to her family that she hoped that it had been destroyed in the war and she would not have to face it again.

It wasn't just a hammer to her. It was something else entirely: a steeled and weighted reminder of what she had been parted from.

-- Narrator (Part 2: Chapter 27 paragraph 13)

Importance: To Emmy the hammer represents the circumstances that separated her from her sister and destroyed her family.

She did not expect him to say that Henry Thorne had died on September 8, 1940, in the basement of the Sharington Crescent Hotel, his arms wrapped around her mother.

-- Narrator (Part 2: Chapter 30 paragraph 75)

Importance: Emmy was surprised to learn that her father and mother were together at the Sharington Crescent Hotel when they died.

She started to walk away from the man who wanted her compensated and the woman who wished she had never been born. It was several seconds before either one of them realized Emmy was leaving them and their money.

-- Narrator (Part 2: Chapter 31 paragraph 76)

Importance: Emmy left the money that her father willed her because she felt that she was being paid off. She didn't want a pay off, she wanted to know what her father was like.

She exchanged a transparent life of abject poverty for one of secrets and illusion that kept her and her daughters fed and clothed. Julia had likewise exchanged the brides box for the fairy tale book when she didn't want Emmy to leave. Emmy had exchanged Julia for her own aspirations when she didn't want anyone else telling her what she could and couldn't do.

-- Narrator (Part 2: Chapter 32 paragraph 46)

Importance: Emmy went over in her mind the things she and her family members had traded off in the belief these trades would bring them happiness. Note that Emmy seemed to think that her trade had been one prompted by selfishness.

Mum knew how to survive in a world without dreams.

-- Narrator (Part 2: Chapter 32 paragraph 86)

Importance: As Emmy matured and began to experience situations similar to those her mother had experienced, she wished she had her mother to give her advice.

The hammer would remind her, lest she forget, that she had made a transaction when she became Isabel.

-- Narrator (Part 2: Chapter 32 paragraph 111)



Importance: Emmy kept this hammer with her, even when she moved to America with her husband. It was a reminder to her that she had made a bargain and left her old life behind when she took Isabel's identity.

Oh, I suppose the mighty hand of God. That's what it usually takes to move someone who is holding on to what doesn't belong to her.' She laughs lightly, as though the details of her return still surprise her."

-- Isabel (Part 2: Chapter 33 paragraph 6)

Importance: Isabel tells Kendra that it was the hand of God that brought her and Julia back together. She explains she was holding so tightly to her past and her fake identity that she almost missed the chance to know Julia was alive.

I am not such a significant creature in God's universe that it is my decisions alone that can change the destiny of another.

-- Charlotte (Part 2: Chapter 33 paragraph 41)

Importance: In her letter to Emmy, Charlotte wrote about her part in Rose's accident. She had realized that even though her decision affected what happened to Rose, it wasn't her decision alone that caused things to turn out the way they did.

If I could have one wish, it would be that I hadn't switched out the brides box with my fairy tale book that night we left Aunt Charlotte's.

-- Julia (Part 3: Chapter 34 paragraph 82)

Importance: On the other side of the coin, Julia struggled with guilt because she switched out Emmy's brides box possibly jeopardizing Emmy's hopes of being a dressmaker.

Dr. Diamant says the war is to blame for what came between you and me. / I look around London and I see all the new buildings. It's obvious that what the war did has been fixed. / What I did is what I must fix. / I want to fix what I broke.

-- Julia (Part 3: Chapter 37 paragraph 51)

Importance: As Julia watched the new buildings being erected in London and the debris of the war cleared away, she knew she needed to fix what she had broken. In order to do that she had to find the brides box and see if she could get her designs made into real dresses.

A righted wrong only matters if you can unhurt the person you hurt, I told her.

-- Julia (Part 3: Chapter 38 paragraph 23)

Importance: Julia believed the only way to really make up the wrong she had done to her sister was to find some way to undo the hurt she had done.

The journal I will keep to remind me, should I ever need to be reminded, that you and I did indeed find each other again, within the seams of my wedding dress.



-- Julia (Part 3: Chapter 40 paragraph 124)

Importance: After Julia had found the brides box, she decided she would burn all of the sketches with the exception of the one she used for her wedding dress. She planned to keep the journal as a reminder of her sister and would also have the memory of her in her wedding dress.

Of course you are. None of this would've mattered if underneath that name you stole, you weren't who you've always been."

-- Kendra (Part 4: Chapter 41 paragraph 38)

Importance: Kendra tells Isabel that she doesn't believe Emmy never amounted to anything because Isabel would not have become who she was without the influence of Emmy.

Colin had done nothing that required my forgiveness. I'm the one who chose to believe he wanted me to be paid off so that I would leave the Thornes alone."

-- Isabel (Part 4: Chapter 41 paragraph 66)

Importance: Isabel tells Kendra that she had accepted Colin's request for a relationship because she finally realized that Colin did not just want to see that she was paid off when she had been contacted by the lawyer earlier about the inheritance.

That money allowed me to make the needed repairs to Thistle House and, strangely enough, gave Mac and me a haven in which to reconnect with each other.

-- Isabel (Part 3: Chapter 41 paragraph 71)

Importance: Colin had invested the money that their father had willed to Emmy. By the time she contacted him and accepted it, there was enough that she could make the needed repairs to Thistle House.

You can give Mum the honor of having flesh and blood and a name again. I want people to know the sacrifices she made for me and Julia. Anne Louise Downtree is a forgotten soul, Kendra. She is nothing but a three-word entry in the record of the war's dead, remembered by no one except me, her daughter, Emmeline.

-- Isabel (Part 3: Chapter 41 paragraph 93)

Importance: Isabel tells Kendra that she hopes through her essay she will give her mother the identity that she never had when she died. Through her life, Emmy had hoped to be able to make her mother proud of her. She hopes this essay will do that for her.

I want her to see that I understand there are no secrets to a charmed life. There is just the simple truth that you must forgive yourself for only being able to make your own choices, and no one else's."

-- Isabel (Part 3: Chapter 41 paragraph 93)



Importance: Isabel hopes that through Kendra's essay she will be able to share what she has learned through her life and from her mother. She has learned that there are no secrets to a perfect life, something she felt her mother tried to teach her. She's also realized she has to forgive herself for making her own choices.