

# **War Brides Study Guide**

## **War Brides by Helen Bryan**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

<a href="#">War Brides Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Prologue - Chapter 6.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 7 - 11.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 12 - 25.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 26 - 29.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 30 - Epilogue.....</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">26</a>
<a href="#">Symbols and Symbolism.....</a>	<a href="#">30</a>
<a href="#">Settings.....</a>	<a href="#">31</a>
<a href="#">Themes and Motifs.....</a>	<a href="#">33</a>
<a href="#">Styles.....</a>	<a href="#">36</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">37</a>

## Plot Summary

War Brides is a historical novel by Helen Bryan. Most of the story takes place in England during the early days of World War II. Responsible Alice, partying Frances, resourceful American Evangeline, impoverished Elsie, and Jewish Austrian refugee Tanni are five girls in their teens or early twenties. They all come to live in the town of Crowmarsh Prior in Sussex, England, where they ultimately become friends and fall in love with men against the backdrop of war. As they all pitch in for the war effort, there are suspicions of a traitor among the locals. His name is Hugo de Balfort, and he targets Frances as she works for British Special Operations. As a result of his information, she is killed in France. Fifty years later in 1995, the four women reunite and confront Hugo, having carefully learned about his involvement with the Germans over time. They beat him with their canes, push him into an old smuggler tunnel, and seal him up inside.



# Prologue - Chapter 6

## Summary

### Prologue

It is the spring of 1995. Alice Osbourne Lightfoot has organized a trip to England for the remaining members of the Eighth Air Force Unit, college friends from Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama, who served in Europe during World War II. Her husband Joe is a member of this unit. A native of England herself, Alice looks forward to the trip. She feels it is her duty to go back given Elsie's letter about Frances. At Ben Gurion Airport in Israel, Tanni Zayman, her husband Bruno, and their teenage grandchildren, Chaim and Shifra, are headed to Crowmarsh Priors in England, following Elsie's letter. Tanni is sickened by the thought of going back. Tanni believes she has suffered from postpartum depression following the birth and death of their baby back in the 1940s. She wonders if she was ever as young and carefree as her fifteen year-old granddaughter, Shifra. In England, seventy-one year old Lady Carpenter barrels in her car toward Sussex. Evangeline Fontaine Fairfax is already in Crowmarsh. Evangeline's family had lost its fortune not long after she had eloped and caused a scandal. She speaks to the memories of Laurent, Richard, and Frances. She tells them that, perhaps, they will settle old war business

### Chapter 1

It is Boxing Day 1937 in Crowmarsh Priors. Alice Osbourne is twenty-two. Alice is pretty, but very responsible and very serious. She is friends with Richard Fairfax. Her father, the local vicar for Crowmarsh Priors, also instructs Richard in Greek and Latin. Alice is very close with her father, often going for long walks with him because her mother is often ill. Richard later joins the Navy, and Alice's father grows ill. She becomes a teacher and tends to her father until he passes away. While home on leave for Christmas, Richard proposes marriage to Alice, and Alice readily accepts. She does worry about how often Richard will have to be away because of the navy, but he tells her he will get used to it. She happily accepts his mother, Penelope's, ring for an engagement ring, though Richard has to have it resized smaller. Richard will be leaving soon, headed to Washington to meet with President Roosevelt over the situation with Germany, and then a tour of the United States. Alice wishes her father were alive to marry them. She wants to find an old book full of legends her father kept, full of smugglers and pirates.

### Chapter 2

Celeste Fontaine rearranges the name cards on the luncheon table at her family's New Orleans mansion so that her niece, Evangeline, is seated next to Richard Fairfax. It is March, 1938. Evangeline is eighteen and debutante of the year. She is engaged to Maurice Fitzroy, more than twice her age, but sole heir to his family's fortune, and a



friend of Celeste's husband. Evangeline is in a wild girl, who is more concerned with fun than decorum. The European branch of the Fontaine business is in trouble, so the marriage is a convenient thing. Evangeline, however, has apparently been seeing a Creole named Laurent Baptiste, who is working for the company. A series of threatening notes have been left for her. Evangeline had been sick that morning and had blamed it on champagne from the night before.

At lunch, Evangeline discovers Laurent will be headed to Marseilles. This increases the fear in Evangeline's mind that she is pregnant. She tells Richard in secret that Laurent is her uncle Charles's son. Her mother and her Aunt Celeste pretend that he doesn't exist. Evangeline flirts with Richard, telling him she'll dance with him at the Mardi Gras ball that night. She sends her maid Delphy to see Mama La Bas, an old voodoo practitioner. She wants help in getting Richard to marry her so she can go as well. Evangeline's coming-out ball is held that night. Guests whisper about the precarious position of the Fontaine fortune, and Evangeline's own father's gambling debts. As the party wears on, Evangeline feels that her dress and bodice are too tight. All of the smells and sights are bothering her, and she appears sick. Nevertheless, she entices Richard to meet at the gate, and she feels dizzy with the knowledge she will have a black baby and has just seduced another man by witchcraft. Suddenly, Maurice and his men arrive to beat Laurent up away from the party, for there has apparently been a note found between Laurent and Evangeline. But, Evangeline fires a shotgun to break things up, the recoil of which hits her in the face and shoulder. Andre, and other attendants tell the party guests that there are firecrackers being set off by the black children. They decide they will have to bring the injured Laurent down to a boat at the docks headed for Marseilles that night. Delphy helps change and clean up Evangeline. Evangeline then flees with Richard, and the captain on the ship marries them.

### Chapter 3

It is October 1938 in Crowmarsh Priors. Alice is still heartbroken over Richard's marriage to Evangeline. She refuses to listen to anything Richard has to say. She is lonely and saddened. She tries to distract herself by helping Oliver Hammet, the new vicar, learn his way around. She helps another woman, Nell Hawthorne, keep the vicarage clean. Rumors swirl up in the village that Hammet may propose to Alice. Alice just wants everyone to mind their own business. As Nell cleans up and heads home, Lady Marchmont arrives. She has brought along the last of the daisies she could find for the altar. Lady Marchmont uses it as an excuse to tell Alice she has done wonderfully given the situation with Richard, and explains that young Hugo de Balfort is a very suitable bachelor, as are several of his friends. The Balforts are having a luncheon party the following Saturday, and Lady Marchmont invites Alice, insisting she come. When she leaves, Alice bursts into tears.

### Chapter 4

Sixteen year-old Antoinette "Tanni" Joseph reads fairy tales to her younger twin sisters, Klara and Lili. It is November, 1938, in Austria. Tanni's father is distracted and worried lately, especially with the rise of anti-Semitism. Tanni's father is a doctor. Dr. Joseph's



medical business has suffered tremendously as a result. Her mother now dresses plainly, hoping not to attract attention to herself by others. Frau Anna, who works for the Joseph family, quits because her husband says Austrians should not work for Jews. Dr. Joseph tells his family it will pass, that Chancellor Hitler will bring order to things. Joseph's wife does not agree. Jewish children are no longer allowed in Austrian schools. Tanni longs to be past childhood and to be among young women and young men. She believes she is practically there, now. She is having a dress made by Frau Zayman, whose son Bruno has been offered a teaching post at Oxford. Tanni wants to go to London one day as well.

Bruno shows up unexpectedly at the house, along with an older man and a rabbi. Both say that soldiers are coming. It turns out that Bruno and Tanni are to be married immediately. Tanni is shocked. Her mother explains she will be safe this way, because she is too old for the Kinderstransports, but Bruno may take his wife to England. They are married. Tanni's mother and Frau Zayman give Tanni a bag with some of her things, as well as some prepared things. Tanni is to go to England and await the arrival of her sisters. She is told to be a good wife. Tanni is freezing in her little dress. Bruno puts his coat around her and kisses her head.

## Chapter 5

It is now March, 1939. Albert Hawthorne, husband of Nell, waits for the train from London to Brighton, and reads about the deteriorating situation in Europe. He misses the train as he reads a story about a debutante gone wild, a Miss Falconleigh. Albert believes the upper classes are no better than the lower. But an elegantly dressed girl disembarks. She asks Albert if she is in Crowmarsh, and Albert confirms she is. She explains she is going to see Lady Marchmount at the Glebe House. The girl is Frances Falconleigh, goddaughter of Lady Marchmount. Oliver Hammet, running late, arrives to meet her. Albert tells Hammet he'll have Frances's things sent over by way of Jimmy. Frances takes Oliver's arm, and heads to Lady Marchmount's home.

## Chapter 6

It is August, 1939. Tanni has done her best to adjust to life in London with Bruno. Tanni soon becomes pregnant and longs for her mother and Bruno's mother to come. Bruno assures her that their families will soon come. But weeks stretch into months, and Tanni has the baby. They decide to name him John to fit in with English society. A letter arrives from Tanni's mother detailing the horrors they are encountering as they wait desperately to get out of Austria. She has enclosed a photo of the twins, dated from April. Tanni is scared that this letter has taken four months to get to her. Tanni is also worried about raising John, so she goes to see her aunt, Tante Berthe Cohenm, married to a rabbi, and living in Bethnal Green. Along the way, she hears people talking about the dire situation in Europe. Tante is part of a committee seeking to help Jews escape from Europe, but it is becoming increasingly difficult as more and more nations shut their doors to the Jews. Tanni explains she is especially worried about her little sisters. Rumors have been circulating about detainment camps for Jews. A young woman named Rachel, who is also visiting Tante, and also a member of the organization to help



Jews, says the English are as bad as the Jews, but Tante tells her to be quiet. A woman named Penelope Fairfax arrives to arrange for Tanni and John's safe departure to the English countryside, in order to protect them from the coming bombing raids that will surely occur when war breaks out with Germany. She intends to billet Tanni and John with Evangeline. Tanni reluctantly agrees. Berthe and Rachel agree to seek out Klara and Lili in the meantime.

## Analysis

As Helen Bryan's novel *War Brides* begins, each of her five principal characters emerge from very diverse walks of life. Alice comes from a small country village, is very responsible, and very reserved. Tanni finds herself a teenage bride and a refugee all on the same day. Evangeline marries Richard Fairfax simply out of convenience to get out of the United States, and be closer to the man she truly loves. Frances Falconleigh, wealthy and wild, is the talk of the society and gossip pages of the papers. And Elsie Pigeon, who will be introduced in the seventh chapter, lives in a state of utter poverty in London's East End. All of them will ultimately be brought together and kept together –for a certain amount of time –in Crowmarsh Prior, by the war. The diversity of the characters also demonstrates that war affects everyone, regardless as to age, class, religion, race, or sex. Wealthy doctors like Tanni's father are just as susceptible to being killed by the Nazis as are the poor in London's East End.

Tanni, however, has experienced the horrors of the coming war firsthand. A Jew, she is the target of racism and horrific brutality by the Nazis. Only a last-minute marriage to Bruno allows Tanni to be able to leave the country for the safety of England. It is hoped that she will soon see her twin sisters, Clara and Lili, there, once they are put on the Kindertransports and ferried away from the Germans.

Interestingly, the first two characters married in the novel –Tanni and Evangeline –enter into marriages of convenience. Tanni could never in her wildest dreams have imagined she would be married in order to save her life by getting her out of the country. The match seems incredibly impromptu. Tanni is sixteen, and Bruno is ten years older. The Nazis are literally coming down the street during the ceremony. Tanni, however, quickly ends up falling in love with Bruno, meaning that the marriage of convenience is a much deeper and far more intrinsically important thing than Tanni had previously realized. However, there is grave doubt that Evangeline's rushed marriage to Richard could be anything but convenience. She is pregnant by Laurent, and intends to marry Richard only so that she can be in England –and closer to Laurent who will be working in Marseilles. She intends to ditch Richard as soon as Laurent is ready for her. While this is terrible, it must also be remembered that Richard was previously engaged to Alice, and essentially jilts her for Evangeline.



## Discussion Question 1

Why do Tanni and Evangeline get married? What are their marriages like? Were these marriages smart ideas? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Richard break off his engagement by marrying Evangeline?

## Discussion Question 3

What is the great leveling fact about war? How has it already shaped the lives of Alice, Evangeline, Tanni, and Frances?

## Vocabulary

shirk, turmoil, agitated, chronically, effusive, brusque, incredulously, carousing, delegation, antecedent, impassive, inordinately, insubstantial, querulous, garish, fastidious





# Chapters 7 - 11

## Summary

### Chapter 7

It is now late August, 1939, in East London. Mrs. Pigeon on North Street, near the docks, is told by Penelope Fairfax to register her children so they can be evacuated to the countryside when war with Germany comes, and the bombing raids begin. Others have followed her example, and now forty children on the block are unregistered. It is believed the docks and the East End will be the first target of the Germans. Mrs. Pigeon has several children, including fifteen year-old Elsie, who will be sent to work at the glue factory the following week to support the family. But the evacuation plan calls for children up to the age of fifteen to be evacuated. They are given information for the evacuation, which Elsie reads to her mother, but believes she or any of her siblings cannot go because they do not have all of the required items, such as spare shoes.

Penelope has been spending time away from Crowmarsh to avoid her lazy daughter-in-law. Mrs. Pigeon catches up with Penelope, and tells her that it isn't right that children be removed from their homes. Penelope explains it is best for the children, to assemble at their schools and be accompanied by their teachers. Mrs. Pigeon reluctantly agrees to send them off. Elsi will serve as an under-housemaid at Lady Muriel Marchmont's home, which delights Mrs. Pigeon.

### Chapter 8

It is now November, 1939. Bernie Carpenter despises having to live in the middle of nowhere. He misses living with Uncle, and being a part of Uncle's power in organized crime. He misses everything from robbery to counterfeiting money. In Crowmarsh, sixteen year-old Bernie recognizes Elsie Pigeon while she works on cleaning the doors of the Marchmont house. He is warned by Constable Barrows, with whom he is staying, to never bother with anyone at Glebe House. Bernie then must bide his time. He finds Elsie in the churchyard one day, working among the weeds, and crying. He goes to talk to her. Bernie explains to her that Uncle, who is not really his uncle, took him in after his mother died. His father is in the navy. He reveals the Barrows treat him well. Elsie reveals that Frances, Marchmont's goddaughter, sneaks out at night and runs around with boys. Elsie is very lonely without her family. Bernie tells her they have to stick together. They agree to meet up again the following day.

### Chapter 9

It is late November, 1939. Lady Marchmont is annoyed with things. She is looking after three girls, essentially. She worries for Alice, whose mother orders her around all day. Frances runs around with Hugo de Balfort and his buddies, and will not listen to anything Lady Marchmont has to say. But Elsie she cannot stand. Elsie has no idea how



to be a maid, and her keeping company with Bernie is unacceptable. She is determined to end the arrangement with Elsie immediately. Frances is appalled by this. She and Elsie have become friends in a way, each watching the back of the other against Lady Marchmont. Frances contends the things that have been found in Elsie's room, such as chocolates and silk stockings, are not really from Bernie. They are from her. They are gifts for running errands and tending to things like laundry. Marchmont is not convinced, but she throws her hands up. Frances explains she is headed to the Balfort estate of Gracecourt to play bridge, though most of the men have volunteered or been conscripted. Marchmont considers her half-French goddaughter, believing her to have too much sparkle, while Alice does not have enough. She encourages Frances to befriend Alice, but Frances says she's already tried, and failed. Marchmont hopes Huge will propose to Frances, and Frances will settle down. Marchmont hopes that Alice will marry Oliver Hammet, and they will take over Glebe house. She decides to make alterations in her will.

#### Chapter 10

It is now August, 1940. Evangeline has nightmares about Louisiana, which often wake her up. She has stopped caring about her appearance. She maintains contact with Laurent whenever she can, vowing to go to him in Marseilles when he is ready for her. Five months into her pregnancy, Evangeline suffers a miscarriage which leaves her ill for weeks. Time stretches out, and Laurent keeps telling her it is not time. Word then comes that the Fairfax house will be hosting Tanni and her baby, Johnny. Evangeline is happy for Tanni's company, and helps her to settle in. It helps distract Evangeline from waiting for Laurent. She feels bad for Richard, but isn't afraid to leave him for Laurent. War comes, and Laurent moves to Paris, where he stays with a musician friend. He tells her he is looking for a place for both him and Evangeline, but time continues to stretch on. Laurent finally comes to stay in London, and Evangeline sneaks away to see him. Laurent reveals the situation in Europe is dire. The Germans seem unstoppable. Laurent reveals he can travel back and forth freely because he is with the Free French as a courier, and is an American. The time comes for Laurent to have to leave, but he gives her gifts of peppers and rice. He also gives her some of his records to play. Evangeline wants to come with him, but Laurent tells her he is safer in England.

#### Chapter 11

It is October, 1940. The Germans have secured nearly all of France, and have forced the British to evacuate at Dunkirk. Every day, hundreds of German planes fly above Sussex on their way north to bomb the cities, including London. When this occurs, all of the villages scramble for cover or for shelters. Albert Hawthorne, who is a member of the Home Guard, and Alice rush through the village to make sure no children are out and about. The Home Guard consists of Oliver, Albert, Hugo, Hugo's elderly father and uncle, Ted, and George Smith, and some farmers' sons in their teens, all armed with old hunting weapons. At home, Alice brings her mother down into the shelter. Alice reveals to her mother that Penelope Fairfax is looking after three more children from London, now. Alice's mother complains about their circumstances, and Alice prays that God will



either allow a bomb to be dropped on them to put them out of their misery, or the all clear call to come.

## Analysis

As the summer ends, Germany's militancy ultimately leads to all-out war against Poland on September 1. Europe is plunged into combat once more as Germany begins invading one nation after another. Great Britain charges headfirst into the war to stand against Germany in Europe, but is eventually forced off the continent by way of evacuation at Dunkirk. There is not nothing standing between Germany and an invasion of England, except the British people and their own air force. By now, all five girls have been introduced to the reader, including fifteen year-old Elsie Pigeon, who as an impoverished resident of East End, London, will be among the prime bombing target areas for the Germans. Her mother reluctantly agrees to have Elsie sent over to Crowmarsh Priors.

Quickly, friendships begin to develop between some of the girls. For Frances and Elsie, the two conspire against Lady Marchmont, and this puts them –one a socialite, the other a Cockney-accented poor girl –on equal footing. Their watching one another's backs ultimately blossoms into genuine friendship. Meanwhile, Evangeline and Tanni, who are living with one another at the Fairfax place, get along well because they must live together, but this, too, develops into a genuine friendship. Only Alice, still heartbroken over Richard, and very duty-bound, seems to defy falling into a friendship with the other girls at first. Evangeline, meanwhile, begins seeing Laurent regularly as he comes to and from London doing work for the French as a courier.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do Evangeline and Tanni become friends so quickly? Describe their friendship.

## Discussion Question 2

Frances and Elsie, despite their stations in life, become friends quickly. Why? What is their friendship like at first? How does it develop over time?

## Discussion Question 3

Why do the girls find it hard to get along with Alice? Is Alice justified in how she conducts herself? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

laboriously, lethargy, posh, genial, preposterous, bewitched, tedious, parvenu, incumbent, ostensibly, lurid



# Chapters 12 - 25

## Summary

### Chapter 12

It is February, 1941. Admiral Tudor Falconleigh, father of Frances, goes over intelligence reports about German bombing raids. Falconleigh hopes that Prime Minister Winston Churchill will reorganize and reform the Regular Army for the invasion that everyone believes is coming, but Churchill has devoted time and resources to special operations, instead. Falconleigh wishes he could handle his daughter as easily as he could handle the war effort. He hopes she will marry into the de Balforts. Frances comes to speak to her father about her working for an organization at home or behind enemy lines, to disrupt the German war effort. She has received a letter from a man named Colin Gubbins, a friend of Falconleigh's, asking about her interest in such a matter. Falconleigh forbids it; Frances wants very much to participate. She says she is twenty, and old enough for it. He encourages Frances to consider marriage, instead. Frances is shocked. There is nothing romantic between her and Hugo. Furthermore, she will be twenty-one soon, and will no longer need her father's permission to join. Frances admires Evangeline, who can hunt, cook, can, and prepare all sorts of meats, fruits, and vegetables. But Falconleigh still hopes his daughter will marry and stop wasting his time.

### Chapter 13

Tanni has made herself a dressing gown out of old rags, which Evangeline finds beautiful. Tanni makes her one as well, out of an old bed sheet. Tanni is filled with pride at her skills. She becomes the go-to seamstress for town, making clothes out of old materials, and repairing clothes as well. Evangeline struggles to look after the three children taken in by the Fairfaxes, Tommy, Maude, and Kipper, who always seem to be hungry. While Evangeline and Tanni have become friends, Evangeline and Alice seem not to like one another. Tanni and Alice become friends, though. Tanni is adjusting to life, and she is happy. Tanni also becomes friends with Frances, who gives her some silk lingerie to wear when Bruno visits. Evangeline even gives Tanni a French perfume to wear. Bruno arrives to pick up Tanni and Johnny to bring her them London for Seder with the Cohens. Bruno has been working for the military in an unknown fashion. Tante Cohen and Rachel reveal to Bruno that they believe Tanni's twin sisters are in a displaced persons camp in Vichy France. It is possible that Bruno's mother and Tanni's parents are in Auschwitz. Bruno decides he will wait to tell Tanni the news.

### Chapter 14

It is now August, 1941. Albert watches what appears to be RAF fighters chasing a German plane over the village. The German plane is downed and crashes somewhere on Sussex Downs. The Home Guard heads out to see what has transpired. It is their job



to verify the occupants are dead, or take prisoners and wait for the military to take custody. If the Germans refuse to surrender or attempt to escape, they are to be shot. Hugo leads the group. Rejected as unfit for active service, he doubles his efforts to do good with the Home Guard. But Hugo slows down, and Oliver takes the lead. Oliver wonders if he, a man of God, could kill another man. He finds two Germans. One is dead; the other is severely wounded. Oliver pulls a photograph of the man's wife out of his pocket for him to look at, and Oliver then prays over him. The German then dies. Oliver is unhappy by death and war, and wonders what God expects of him. Albert and Hugo catch up to Oliver as a storm comes in. Oliver knows now he could never shoot another man if he tried to escape; his duty is to God and to preserve human life.

## Chapter 15

It is September, 1941. Many of Lady Marchmont's housekeepers have gone off to work for the war effort. She finds Oliver has been much too independent for her own good, especially when he buries the two Germans in the churchyard. Oliver has become a man about town, filling in and helping where needed, as well as tending to his duties on the Home Guard and in the church. Oliver, rather than condemning the behavior of babies being born to unmarried mothers, baptizes the infants. Frances finds him to be admirable. Alice and Oliver discuss the Harvest Fayre that is coming. Word comes for Oliver that Lady Marchmont, after gardening all morning in the hot sun, has died of a massive heart attack. Her will is read. Mrs. Gifford is allowed to stay on working at Glebe House for life if she wants. Instead, Mrs. Gifford decides to go to work in a munitions factory in Reading. Glebe House and Marchmont's money are left to Oliver, but the house is being requisitioned for recovering soldiers. Frances comes to believe Oliver is lonely, because he is always helping others, but he is always alone himself. Oliver will not kick out Frances or Elsie. Frances is delighted to learn that Oliver does not romantically like Alice. Frances decides she will be nice to Alice, since Alice seems to have no one.

## Chapter 16

As Frances nears her twenty-first birthday, she looks forward to being able to serve her country more than her current roles to which she is relegated. She has a bad couple of days, including accidentally letting a bull loose and refusing to sing with the other Land Girls over lunch. Instead, she goes to eat at the pub with Elsie, who reveals Bernie is trading in black market goods. Elsie explains that when you live poorly, you must do everything you can to get by. When they return, their unit leader orders them to dig potatoes in the rain. Frances decides she will have a party on Saturday for her birthday. She finds old bottles of drink in the cellar and decides to serve these for her party. Frances discovers a box of jewelry the solicitors had missed and her godmother had misplaced. She decides she will ask Oliver what to do about it after the party, given that she may have to pay taxes on it. Frances invites all of the girls close to her, including Alice, which cheers her up. Tanni and Elsie help with preparations.

## Chapter 17



After work on Saturday, Frances rushes home to get last-minute things ready, and to make herself look presentable for the party. She hopes that Oliver will think she looks pretty. The first guest to arrive is Hugo. He asks her to marry him. It catches Frances by surprise, and he tells her she can take her time in answering. Hugo leaves but says he will be back later. Frances is very confused now. Tanni, Johnny, and Evangeline show up with food, and Frances lets them in. Evangeline also brings a gramophone and swing records. Even Alice shows up, happy to be a part of things. The girls eat and get drunk as the night stretches on. Suddenly, Tanni starts crying.

#### Chapter 18

The other girls are confused as to why Tanni would be crying. Tanni explains the situation about her family being missing, including her younger twin sisters, who are believed to be in Gurs, France. The American Quakers have reported that they can find no record of Klara or Lili. People from Gurs, Tanni explains, are taken by the Vichy French to Drancy, outside of Paris, and from there they are shipped to Auschwitz. The girls are incensed that the government has cut off displaced foreign children from being taken into the country. Evangeline suggests that it is possible the American Quakers got the twins out before they were shipped to Auschwitz. They have done it before, smuggling children to safety in Switzerland or Spain. Alice then tells the girls about smuggler's tunnels used back in the day, known about by her father and his love of history. She and her father actually found the tunnels. An idea is had to contact the French Resistance to see if they could help the children escape, since they constantly help downed pilots escape. They could entice the Resistance with money or valuables, and Frances suggests her godmother's lost jewelry. Tanni believes her sisters could hide among the Jewish neighborhoods in London. Elsie says that Bernie could help get the girls ration books and identity papers, as well as get them to London, based on his black market work. The girls agree to tell no one about their plan, except Oliver, and only if they have to. Then, Tanni's water breaks, and the girls send for Sister Tucker.

#### Chapter 19

It is now November, 1941. In London, Penelope Fairfax does her best to keep the children she watches, calm during the bombing raids. Much of London is nothing more than piles of rubble, but still the people strive on defiantly. Diggers and rescuers scramble through the streets to rescue the wounded and those trapped by collapsing buildings. Among the dead are Mrs. Pigeon and two of her children.

#### Chapter 20

December of 1941 comes around. Japan has bombed the US Naval base at Pearl Harbor, and the United States has been thrust into the war. Germany declares war on the United States, and the United States returns the favor. Elsie has been inconsolable since the deaths of her mother and siblings. At church, Oliver tells everyone to pray, and to keep faith. Frances vows to God she will fight the Nazis if He gives her the chance to do so. She then tells Hugo that she cannot marry him. Nevertheless, she agrees to have lunch with Sir Leander, Hugo's father, who attempts to convince her to reconsider





her refusal. She will not. She goes to use the restroom, and hears movement up on the second floor. As she leaves, Sir Leander is listening to German music, and he tells her that marriage is a very serious business.

## Chapter 21

The year 1942 dawns. Bruno visits Tanni and his new baby daughter with a week of leave for Christmas. The girl is named Anna. Bruno tends to Tanni and cares for her and the children while he visits. People from all over the village come to visit and bring Anna gifts. Bruno then heads back to London when his leave is up, and is part of a mission near Sweden to exchange spies with the Germans. The German spy they are escorting insults Bruno for being Jewish. They land on a small island, but rather than exchange the German spy, the pilots and the military guard execute him.

## Chapter 22

Frances is engaged by the British Special Forces to keep an eye out for a potential German spy, or cell, called Manfred, in or near Crowmarsh. She is to carry on as normal, but keep her eyes and ear open for anything suspicious. After that, she may be inserted into France.

## Chapter 23

Dr. Joseph is at Auschwitz. He comforts himself with knowledge that his daughters must all be in England. Frau Zayman has died of illness. Frau Joseph is still alive and over on the women's block. Meanwhile, the fanatical doctors experimenting on children, order the Joseph twins to be sent over. The Joseph family will be reunited for a while and will be given better rations because they will be the subjects of experiments.

## Chapter 24

While Frances is away for training, Oliver misses her. When she returns, he is happy to see her. Frances does not relish the idea of having to keep an eye on the Balforts. Evangeline, Elsie, Alice, and Frances commit to carrying through with their plan for Tanni, and they tell Oliver they want to clean up and tend to the churchyard through the spring, which he consents to. The intent is to find one of the tunnels. Evangeline's contacts through Laurent agree to seek out the twins, for a price. Richard writes to Evangeline to tell her he will have leave, and they should have a proper holiday on the coast. The girls are thrilled for her, but Evangeline is not happy. Nevertheless, she dutifully goes away with Richard. They make love constantly, which Evangeline comes to enjoy, and thoughts of Laurent drift out of her mind. When Richard suggests children, Evangeline happily consents to trying and seeing what happens. Richard is called back to his post early, and Evangeline cries over it. It is later learned that Richard is nearly killed in a German torpedo attack, and though he manages to survive, he is very badly burned.

## Chapter 25





It is May, 1942. Both Penelope and Evangeline keep a vigil beside Richard. He is expected never to see again, and he will be wheelchair bound if he recovers to that point. Evangeline, especially, cares for Richard, stroking his face where there are no bandages. She gives him water as he asks for it. Eventually, both she and Penelope must return to their work. Back in Crowmarsh, the girls all worry and care for Evangeline. Elsie and Evangeline are the first ones to explore the tunnel. It smells old and musty. Among the things they find in the tunnels are skeletons. As they go through the tunnels, Elsie explains she wants to marry Bernie. Evangeline starts thinking about herself and her missed period. If she is pregnant, she prays it will be Richard's baby, not Laurent's. Finally, they come near the end of the tunnel. They hear the ocean and smell fresh, salty air.

## Analysis

War changes everything. Frances, who begins the novel as a wild debutante, ends up fully committed to the war effort to the point of wanting to join the British Special Operations. At the same time, she begins to see Alice in a different light. Rather than cold and distant, she sees Alice as lonely and hurt. She tries to bring Alice into the fold, and she succeeds. Alice is quite graceful for this. As a result, she warms up quickly to the other girls, who warm up to her just as quickly. Alice is even able to become friends with Evangeline, who married Richard. At the same time, Frances begins to fall for Oliver Hammet. She sees how Oliver always helps everyone else and how everyone always depends on Oliver. Oliver –though he has God –has no one there for him the way he is for everyone else. She determines that she will be that one to be there for him. Ultimately, she falls in love with him.

The girls are also brought together in another very important way. They learn from Tanni that her family, persecuted by the Nazis, may be in camps –or already dead. The girls all decide they are going to do whatever they can do to help Tanni's twin sisters, Klara and Lili. Each of them –Alice, Evangeline, Frances, and Elsie –have something they can do in order to help out. Each one of them fully commits to helping out Tanni. All of them despise the Nazis and want to do something in order to fight back. Saving the lives of two young girls will be an opportunity for them to do so. Alice turns out to have a key part of the plan. Her father and she had discovered old smuggler tunnels beneath the churchyard, and these tunnels will be perfect to get the girls ashore when they arrive. Evangeline's decision to bring Alice into the fold as friends now proves to have an extra value as well because of this.

## Discussion Question 1

Of the five girls, which do you believe undergoes the most radical transformation? Why? Use evidence from the novel to support your claim.



## Discussion Question 2

What plan do the five girls hatch in order to get Lili and Klara safely to England? What part in this plan will each girl play?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Frances ultimately decide that Alice needs to be befriended? What comes as a result of this?

## Vocabulary

fixated, guerrillas, flagrantly, disingenuous, flabbergasted, tenuous, unequivocal, adamantly, remonstrated



# Chapters 26 - 29

## Summary

### Chapter 26

It is late spring, 1942. The doctor at Auschwitz is furious, for the Joseph twins have been unable to be located. He knows that Frau Joseph is not in good health. Locating the twin seven year-old girls is imperative.

### Chapter 27

It is June, 1942. Evangeline and Frances are in London, looking for Laurent to establish contact with the French resistance. They also go to see Tante Cohen. Evangeline reveals that Richard is healing, and is going to be sent to a convalescent home. Cohen reveals that a priest had hidden some children with local families, including the Joseph sisters. The Nazis have doubled their efforts to round up Jews in France, so time is of the essence. American Quakers, pacifists, are tolerated by the Germans for propaganda, and do what they can to help Jews, and are helping to keep the Joseph girls hidden. Frances and Evangeline later reveal their plan to Rachel, so that Tante Berthe will not be subject to getting into trouble. Rachel is impressed by the plan, and decides to ask her sister Judith and Judith's husband David to watch the Joseph sisters, as they have ten children of their own. Frances and Evangeline reveal to Rachel that Tanni is pregnant again. Meanwhile, Evangeline visits Richard frequently. He is still not able to see. She cares for him and tends to him, but he is still in shock. She still worries over her missed period. Laurent has been growing more and more distant. She decides she no longer wants Laurent. She wants Richard.

### Chapter 28

It is now July, 1942. Oliver officiates the marriage of Bernie and Elsie. The entire village turns out at Saint Gabriel's, happy with such an event. Albert Hawthorne stands in for Elsie's father. All the girls pitch in to help Elsie. Evangeline, Tanni, Alice, and Frances are bridesmaids. Frances manages to catch the bouquet, surprising her. A reception is held. Then, Bernie and Elsie head off by train for a honeymoon.

### Chapter 29

It is now August, 1942. Glebe House is transformed into a convalescent home, and Frances looks forward to having her husband come back so she can care for him. Evangeline, Elsie, and Bernie will live in the attic. They use Lady Marchmont's old possessions to cordon off rooms and private areas. Evangeline is happy that on her last visit Richard could feel the baby kicking inside her. She happily laughs about it. Yet, she still worries about who the baby's father is. Alice reveals that Rachel has at last confirmed that the twins are indeed on their way. Tanni is in poor health, and Frances returns from parachute training at Manchester. She has her own worries. Her area of



surveillance has been increased, and she is in love with Oliver. But she worries that her superiors may actually order her to marry Hugo, to keep an eye on him and other aristocrats. She then decides to propose marriage to Oliver. He readily accepts and elopes with her. Frances's father is furious at first.

## Analysis

The war continues on, and the girls do their best to handle the storms they each face. Evangeline, totally dedicated to Richard, visits him constantly and tends to him. After giving birth again, Tanni is in poor health due to stress and worry over her family. She is frequently visited and tended to by Bruno. Frances, head over heels in love with Oliver, proposes to him –and he happily accepts. Elsie's marriage to Bruno begins very well, and she begins to tame him and turn him away from his black work. Only Alice now is alone, but her friendship with the other girls helps to sustain her. Although Alice does not have romantic love, she has the love of friends, which is far better than she could have otherwise. The fact that she is an active part of the plan to bring Lily and Klara to safety also helps to give her a special purpose that transcends the regular war work that she does.

At the same time, Frances has been inducted into special operations for the British, and her area of surveillance is expanded. She is put on the trail of a German agent known as Manfred, who is signaling to German bombers on their way to bomb London, Birmingham, and various other targets. She disappears regularly for intelligence meetings and briefings. She must keep her work and her marriage a secret, for Hugo de Balfort is under suspicion. This allows her to continue to flirt with Hugo, but not to have to marry him. It enrages Hugo that she consistently turns down his marriage proposals, but he allows her to spy on him.

Interestingly, Evangeline who is married to Richard in name only, falls in love with him. She is horrified when he is nearly killed by a German torpedo. She falls out of love with Laurent and gladly leaves him in the past. She devotes herself entirely to Richard and relishes the day that he is able to convalesce in Glebe House.

## Discussion Question 1

What changes between Evangeline and Richard? What changes between Evangeline and Laurent? Why does Evangeline decide to commit to Richard rather than Laurent?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Frances decide to marry Oliver? How does Oliver respond?



## Discussion Question 3

Why do the British government and intelligence suspect the de Balforts of either being Nazi sympathizers, or working directly for the Germans?

## Vocabulary

obfuscation, demarcation, humanitarians, dubiously, mollified, reverently, reconnoiter, expletives, placate



# Chapter 30 - Epilogue

## Summary

### Chapter 30

In September, 1942, Agnes, now fifteen, comes to live with her sister Elsie. Elsie is surprised to see her. Agnes says she will only be staying for a while, and then she will go on to London to get a factory job. Agnes is put up in town with the Barrows. Frances, meanwhile, hides her marriage to Oliver in order to keep spying on Hugo. Frances takes over hunting for Evangeline, who is now too pregnant to do it. She uses these hunting expeditions to search for Manfred, whose radio signals are tracked to the area. Frances promises Oliver that one day they will have a normal marriage, but Oliver is enjoying being able to sneak around with her. As Frances spies on the Balforts, she hears them speaking about having to deal with Oliver Hammet and something that can be paid for.

The night of the arrival of the twins arrives. Agnes is given sleeping pills. Elsie, Bernie, Evangeline, Frances, and Alice all gather in the churchyard. Just as they are about to descend into the tunnel, German planes roar in over Sussex Downs and begin dropping bombs. Evangeline rushes back to the Fairfax house to help Tanni and her children get to safety. Alice tells Bernie and Elsie to go home to watch over Agnes. Frances rushes to Oliver at his house and he pulls her inside to safety. Across from them, the church is bombed and is on fire. Once he is sure Frances is alright, Oliver heads into the village to tend to anyone who needs help. Frances rushes to the tunnel to discover it has been caved in, and hopes that the twins were not actually due in that night, but that, like in the past, it was a false alarm. She then calls her superiors, to tell them she believes the bombing may have something to do with Manfred.

### Chapter 31

It is now November, 1942. Alice's mother dies of fright in the bombing. The bomb that hits the church is later realized to have only very barely missed the vicarage where Oliver was. Tanni goes into shock labor, and the baby girl dies shortly after being born. The girls and some of the village people gather for a burial service for the baby, whom is named Rebecca. Oliver officiates, and manages to contact Bruno, who arrives within hours to tend to Tanni. Tanni, still in shock, will have to be taken to a sanatorium to recover. Richard comes to Glebe House. He has regained sight in one eye, and is very encouraged over Evangeline and the baby. Soon after, she goes into labor, and the baby is born, blue-eyed and brown-haired. It may or may not be Laurent's. She names the baby Andrew. There is still no word on the twins, Klara or Lili. Elsie asks Bernie to have a word with Agnes and the man she is dating, Ted, who is a Socialist and is preaching free love. Bernie, Elsie, and Agnes later find a house to buy in Eastbourne. It once belonged to Uncle, who operated it as a brothel. Bernie does not tell Elsie this. Ted comes to stay with them, unfortunately. Hugo, meanwhile, continues throwing angry proposals of marriage at Frances, who keeps turning them down. Alice is given new



responsibilities in London. Frances later asks Evangeline to look after Oliver if something happens to her. Oliver has a heart condition, though he doesn't let it show.

### Chapter 32

It is now August, 1944. Alice is in West London for the Women's Volunteer Service. During a bombing raid while at church, an American airman puts his arms around Alice in the dark to protect her. She ends up with a bloody nose, and he tends to her. He is Joe Lightfoot. Joe is from Goshen, Georgia, about a hundred miles from Atlanta. He asks to call on Alice, and she agrees. Joe and Alice have dinner before Joe brings her home. He proposes to her, and she accepts. She calls Evangeline to tell her. She is thrilled to begin a new life in America after getting married. She also learns from Evangeline that a cooking fire has burned down the Balfort mansion, and that Leander is dead, while Hugo is gravely injured.

### Chapter 33

It is May 8, 1995. Katie Hamilton-Jones of Albion Television kicks off coverage of the Fiftieth Anniversary of VE Day by doing a live report from Crowmarsh Priors. She will be specifically covering women on the home front. Saint Gabriel's Church has been restored, thanks to Lady Carpenter, wife of the late Lord Bernard Carpenter, the youngest of the four war brides that Katie will be interviewing. Their fortune has been made in advising the treasury, and later real estate. She speaks about the de Balfort family, and how they traveled extensively in Europe as part of their upbringing throughout the generations. Tanni and her two grandchildren then arrive. She and Elsie embrace. Evangeline Fairfax then arrives, and embraces Elsie and Tanni. Alice Lightfoot then arrives, and the others embrace her. Hugo de Balfort limps past, still suffering from attempting to save his father in the fire that claimed his father's life. His face is disfigured. Hugo is interviewed, and he says that he believes the war was lost. There are no German sympathizers, despite what historians say.

### Chapter 34

Alice, Elsie, Tanni, and Evangeline are amazed to see Saint Gabriel's once more. The new vicar asks about Oliver Hammet, who passed away in 1947 of a weak heart. The four women, when they have a moment to themselves, all come together to talk about what happened to Frances: She went missing during the war, and was never heard from again. Not even her father knew what had happened to her. Tanni's sisters ultimately die in France. Elsie reveals that she and Bernie carried on the search for Frances, discovering a photo of her with the French Resistance in a newspaper article about wartime France. She is pregnant in the photo. They learn that Frances was indeed with special operations, and that some people reported hearing an explosion before the Balfort fire, not long before Frances disappeared. The de Balfort financial situation is dire, and marriage to a rich woman like Frances would save the estate. The Balforts are also one of the families monitored by the government, for they hosted Germans and Nazis before the war at the estate. Leander was paid money by these friends to help pave the way for a German takeover. Leander, who followed Nazi medical research,



wanted his son and Frances to have many sets of perfect twins to carry on the Balfort name. The ladies must then assemble for a church service with the Bishop.

### Chapter 35

After the service where the Bishop blesses the new buildings of Saint Gabriel's, Alice, Elsie, Tanni, and Evangeline all speak with Katie, while a party goes on around them. They then bring Hugo over to the church where they show him an old knight's tomb. They confront him with the work he and his father did by signaling to the Germans during the war. He denies it, but they confront him with the facts of his family's ruined finances. They know Hugo knew about the tunnel from the old knight's tomb. As such, he ordered it bombed. They know that Frances must have confronted father and son, and tried to destroy them with a bomb. Hugo survives, and in revenge, sends word to his Nazi friends in France that Frances is a special operations agent. Hugo says Frances should have married him when she had the chance. He says they found Frances in a maternity hospital in 1945, and the Germans killed her immediately. The four women then beat Hugo with their canes until he stumbles, falls, hits his head, and lays stunned. They begin calling out the names of the dead, and beating Hugo once more. They then push him into the tunnel, and seal it up. The ladies then return to the party, having waited fifty years for revenge.

### Epilogue

A call is placed to the missing person's helpline four days later. The woman who takes the call is Lily, whose grandmother had a twin sister, the two being raised in Manchester during the war. Her grandmother and her sister were delivered to Manchester by a returning British pilot, shot down in France.

## Analysis

The attempt to rescue the twins seemingly ends in failure as the Germans are directed to bomb the very village of Crowmarsh Priors itself. This barbarism leads to the death of Alice's mother, as well as the death of Tanni's newborn baby following premature birth brought on by early labor from shock. What is even more saddening is that Frances goes missing during the war. For the next fifty years, Evangeline, Elsie, Tanni, and Alice attempt to figure out just what happened to her. Eventually, they are able to figure out that she had worked for British Special Forces. She had fought alongside the French Resistance. They also learn, through a confrontation with Hugo de Balfort, that he did indeed back the Germans. He had signaled the Germans to bomb the church in hopes of destroying the tunnels. He had passed along information to the Germans in order to find and kill Frances, which they did after she had given birth at a maternity clinic. The women then beat Hugo with their canes and shove him into the underground tunnel where they lock him in.

While the women have justice, there is an epilogue with information which they do not (yet, at least) know about. One of the workers for a missing persons' hotline is named





Lily, after her Grandmother Lili, a twin who was smuggled into Manchester during the war with her sister Klara –or so the story goes. It is quite clear that both Joseph twins survived the war and went on to live happily in England, having families and grandchildren. In the end, it is true that the efforts of the five girls –the war brides –were not in vain.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why did Hugo de Balfort have the church targeted and bombed during the war?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What is Hugo's confession about Frances's disappearance during the war? Why does Hugo betray her?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Are Alice, Tanni, Elsie, and Evangeline justified in how they handle the situation with Hugo by leaving him to die in the tunnels? Why or why not?

## **Vocabulary**

methodically, harangued, derelict, requisitioned, balked



# Characters

## Alice Osbourne

Alice Osbourne is a pretty twenty-two year-old native of Crowmarsh Priors in Sussex, England. She is the daughter of the local vicar. She has a love of history like her father. She and her father are good friends. Alice's mother is frequently ill and tempestuous, so Alice and her father escape by taking long walks and researching local history. They ultimately come to find old smuggler's tunnels on their adventures. Alice's father later dies, leaving her to care for her mother, who turns her wrath on Alice. Alice is lifelong friends with the wealthy Richard Fairfax, who proposes to her at the outset of the war, but leaves her for Evangeline. Alice is heartbroken and lonely, and so she busies herself with the war effort. She is ultimately befriended by Frances, Tanni, Elsie, and even Evangeline. The friendship helps her to get by. She is still very sad, believing she will never fall in love. She becomes part of the plot to smuggle Tannis' younger twin sisters to England, and later heads to London to work for the war effort for WVS. While at church during a bombing raid in 1944, she meets an American named Joe Lightfoot, who proposes to her. She ultimately marries him and lives in Georgia in the United States for the next fifty years. She later reunites with the other girls in order to confront and dispose of Hugo de Balfort.

## Evangeline Fontaine

Eighteen year-old Evangeline Fontaine is raised in luxury and wealth in the American South, in New Orleans. She is secretly dating and in love with a young man named Laurent, who is part black. She is horrified to learn that Laurent will be shipped overseas to Marseilles, France, to work for the Fontaine's company's overseas location. Evangeline meets Richard Fairfax while he is touring the United States as part of a British delegation. She seduces him, leaves the United States with him, and is married to him by the captain of the ship on which they travel. She does this only to be closer to Laurent in Europe. While Richard is away at war, Evangeline travels to London from the Fairfax home in Crowmarsh Priors to see Laurent regularly, who has become a courier for the French resistance. Over time, the relationship with Laurent sours, and Evangeline truly falls in love with Richard, tending to him after he is wounded. While in Crowmarsh, Evangeline befriends Alice, Frances, Elsie, and Tanni, and becomes part of the plan to rescue Tanni's twin sisters from the clutches of the Nazis. Evangeline Fontaine dedicates her life to caring for the crippled Richard. Fifty years later she reunites with the other girls to confront and kill Hugo de Balfort.

## Tanni Joseph

When the novel begins, Antoinette "Tanni" Joseph is just sixteen years old, caring for her young twin sisters. She is an Austrian Jew, and her father is a successful doctor.



Her mother is good friends with a woman named Frau Zayman, an amazing seamstress, who passes on her skills to Tanni. When the Nazis go after the Austrian Jews, Tanni is forced into a marriage with Bruno Zayman, Frau Zayman's son, who is ten years older. Bruno, who resides in England, will be able to get Tanni to safety. Originally a marriage of convenience, Tanni and Bruno fall deeply in love with one another. Tanni ends up staying in Crowmarsh Prior with Evangeline at the Fairfax house. She gives birth to three children, the third of whom dies shortly after premature birth brought on by a German bombing raid. Tanni becomes close friends with Alice, Evangeline, Elsie, and Frances. She is amazed to learn that her friends are willing to help her reunite with the twins. Fifty years later, she is there to confront and kill Hugo de Balfort for his traitorous activities.

## Elsie Pigeon

Elsie Pigeon is a fifteen year-old girl from the ramshackle poor neighborhoods of London's East End at the docks when the novel begins. Elsie is sent away to Crowmarsh Priors to be a maid for Lady Marchmont, where she runs into her old friend, Bernie, who has also been evacuated to the country. Elsie's mother, and two of her youngest siblings are later killed in German bombing raids in London. Elsie quickly becomes friends with Frances, and later, Alice, Evangeline, and Tanni. Elsie becomes part of the plot to save the lives of the Joseph twins, and marries Bernie. Bernie's black market skills are put to good use by the government after the war, which makes Bernie wealthy. Fifty years later, Elsie reunites with the other women in order to confront and dispose of Hugo de Balfort.

## Frances Falconleigh

Frances Falconleigh is a wild debutante when the novel begins. In frustration, her father, Admiral Falconleigh, sends her to live with her godmother, Lady Marchmont, in Crowmarsh Priors. Frances begins hanging out with Hugo de Balfort and his buddies, and becomes fast friends with Elsie as both rely on each other to sneak off from under the nose of Lady Marchmont. Frances later befriends Alice, Elsie, Evangeline, and Tanni, and becomes part of the plot to save the Joseph twins. Frances later becomes a member of British special operations, and is assigned to spy on the Balforts. Frances later comes to admire Oliver Hammet, the vicar, on whom everyone depends, and ultimately falls in love with him. She proposes marriage to him, which he accepts. Frances continues to spy on the Balforts, confronts them when she learns of their traitorous activities assisting the Nazis, and tries to destroy them using a stick bomb. She fails to kill Hugo. While she is in France with the Resistance, Hugo betrays her. She gives birth to Oliver's son. Shortly thereafter, she is killed by the Germans. Her death is later avenged by her four friends.



## Hugo de Balfort

Hugo de Balfort is the son of Sir Leander de Balfort. Both father and son are Nazi sympathizers. They assist the Nazi bombing raids on England. They are given the assignment of spying on Frances. Hugo is desperate to marry Frances because she is wealthy and his family's fortunes have collapsed thanks to his father's reckless spending. Following Frances' continued rejections, under suspicions that Frances fancies Oliver, and suspecting something going on in the tunnels under the village, Hugo has the village bombed and the tunnels destroyed. He and his father are later confronted by Frances, who attempts to kill them with a bomb. Hugo survives, though he is horribly disfigured. He sells out Frances to the Germans, who execute her in France. When confronted fifty years later by Alice, Evangeline, Elsie, and Tanni, Hugo confesses to everything. He is beaten by the women and left to die in the tunnels.

## Oliver Hammet

Oliver Hammet is the new vicar of the parish of Crowmarsh Priors. He is incredibly kind, intelligent, and faithful. He is appointed and patronized by Lady Marchmont. Oliver serves as a guide to the villagers in their darkest days, though he frequently outdoes himself due to a weak heart. He becomes the object of affection of Frances, and the two ultimately fall in love and marry when Frances proposes to him. The two have a baby, though Oliver will never know about it, believing that Frances has been killed in the war. He dies in 1947 of his weak heart.

## Richard Fairfax

Richard Fairfax, a native of Crowmarsh Priors, is the son of Penelope Fairfax and a childhood friend of Alice. Incredibly wealthy, Richard begins a naval career at the onset of World War II, promising to marry Alice. He jilts her for Evangeline, who cheats on him consistently with Laurent, though she finally devotes herself to Richard following Richard's near-death from a German torpedo. Richard is badly burned but regains sight in one eye. He spends the rest of his life happily and lovingly with Evangeline, who remains dedicated and loyal to him.

## Penelope Fairfax

Penelope Fairfax is the mother of Richard Fairfax and an active member of the Crowmarsh Community. She becomes heavily engaged in the evacuation of children from London, and is very instrumental in bringing Tanni and Elsie to Crowmarsh Priors. She is nearly killed herself during a bombing raid in London. She later helps Evangeline care for her son after he is wounded.

## Joe Lightfoot

Joe Lightfoot is an American airman serving in Europe during World War II. A native of Georgia, he is deeply religious and kind. He meets Alice during a bombing raid in London. He sees that she is sweet and knows Scripture, so he proposes to her the same day he meets her. She agrees, marries him, and lives with him in Georgia for fifty years. She returns with Joe and his air group to England for VE Day in 1995.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Ration Cards

Ration cards are distributed by the British government to all of its citizens throughout World War II. Ration cards must be used in order to purchase food and supplies, which are heavily controlled. Most of England's imports and exports are used for the war effort. Ration cards are used by each of the characters in the novel. They can be forged by Bernie.

## Alcohol

Alcohol is in short supply during the war. As such, it is rarely consumed. Nevertheless, for her twenty-first birthday party, France serves large amounts of alcohol, having stumbled upon some long kept by Lady Marchmont in the cellar of her house.

## Hunting Rifles

Hunting rifles are used by men and women in the countryside to hunt game for food and for sport. During the war, Evangeline uses a hunting rifle to kill animals for food for herself and the girls. Hunting rifles are also carried by members of the Home Guard in defense against possible German invasion.

## Radio

While she attends lunch with Sir Leander, Frances discovers a radio in the Balfort mansion. It is later learned that this radio is instrumental in being used to contact the Germans. It signals them on their way north to bomb London and Birmingham. Presumably, Hugo contacts the Germans by radio in order to sell out Frances and have her killed.

## Materials

Materials, such as silk, cloth, and cotton are rationed by the British government during the war. Nevertheless, the villagers of Crowmarsh Prior do what they can to get by. Tanni turns old materials into new clothing. She also repairs clothing so that it can continue to be worn.



# Settings

## Saint Gabriel's Church

Saint Gabriel's Church is the local parish of Crowmarsh Priors. It is overseen by Oliver Hammet. Old smugglers' tunnels are underneath the church's graveyard. Saint Gabriel's Church is a beautiful country place of worship, which becomes the gathering place for members of the town throughout the novel. The church is destroyed in a bombing raid during World War II, only to be rebuilt fifty years later, in time for the anniversary of VE Day.

## Crowmarsh Priors

Crowmarsh Priors is a beautiful English village located in the countryside of Sussex, near Sussex Downs. It is the home of the Fairfaxes and the Osbournes. The center of its social and religious life is that of Saint Gabriel's Church. During the war, Crowmarsh welcomes numerous children from London among its families and homes. Crowmarsh is ultimately bombed by the Germans, courtesy of Hugo de Balfort, and Saint Gabriel's is destroyed in the process. Crowmarsh Priors later plays host to VE Day's fiftieth anniversary celebrations, where Alice, Evangeline, Tanni, and Elsie reunite to mete out justice to Hugo.

## De Balfort Estate

Located near the village of Crowmarsh Priors, the de Balfort estate is home to the de Balfort family, including Sir Leander and his son Hugo. The two host Nazis and Germans before the war, and Leander spends incredible amounts of money on having the grounds of the estate designed in German fashion. The mansion of the estate is later ruined in a fire. The fire is the result of a bomb planted by Frances when she discovers that Hugo and Leander are assisting the Nazis.

## Glebe House

Glebe House is a majestic home near Crowmarsh Priors, owned and overseen by Lady Maude Marchmont. It is where Frances is sent to live and where Elsie later comes to work as a maid. Following the death of Lady Marchmont, Glebe House becomes a convalescent home for recovering service members. It is where Richard comes to recover and where Evangeline visits and cares for him regularly.



## London

London is the capital of England. It becomes the primary bombing target for Germans during World War II. Children from London are evacuated to the country, to places like Crowmarsh Priors. Much of the city, especially its East End, is reduced to rubble. Hundreds and hundreds of citizens are killed. Nevertheless, in the end, the city survives the bombing raids. London is also where Alice is transferred to work for the WVS and where she meets Joe Lightfoot. It is where Evangeline carries on her affair with Laurent for a limited time, before committing to Richard and visiting him in the hospital there.

## France

France is a country in Western Europe. It is one of the first countries invaded by Hitler and the Nazis. France is where the European extension of the Fontaine business is located. Laurent travels to France and becomes a courier for the French resistance during the war. France is where Frances ultimately travels in order to assist the French, but she is sold out by Hugo. She is killed after delivering a baby conceived in marriage with Oliver.





# Themes and Motifs

## War

War is a major theme in the novel *War Brides* by Helen Bryan. War relates to open combat between one or more groups or countries. In “*War Brides*”, it is World War II that becomes the backdrop of the entire novel. The war in Europe, begun by Hitler’s invasion of Poland, ultimately leads to the evacuation of Western Europe by British, French, and other Allied forces, before the Allies, spearheaded by the Americans, invade in June, 1944 by way of D-Day, which is the turning point in the European theater.

However, once the Germans have driven the British and their Allies from the Continent, the Germans begin a brutal and incessant bombardment of English cities, including London. This leads to the evacuation of children from those cities, to places like Crowmarsh Prior where they are cared for by the locals. Among those who travel to Crowmarsh are Elsie and Tanni. Alice and Evangeline are already living there, and Frances is sent there for structure to live with Lady Marchmont, courtesy of her father. The war ultimately becomes the common factor that brings together the five different girls as friends, as they not only become used to the lack of things like food, but live under constant threat of all-out German invasion, for which they prepare nonstop. They take comfort and heart in messages from Prime Minister Winston Churchill who declares that the British will fight the Germans every step of the way, and will never, never surrender.

The war also dramatically affects each of the girls as individuals. It places an emphasis on things that truly matter in life, such as love and friendship. Alice, very proper and responsible, learns that friendship truly does matter, and so she opens up to the others. Frances, wild and self-absorbed, comes to care even more for her country, and for Oliver, than for herself. Tanni comes to realize that she can depend on others, and that she does indeed have a home where her friends are. Evangeline understands that the way she has lived her life before the war is wrong and unacceptable, and this is evident in her renewed commitment to Richard. Elsie, raised in poverty and without much self-confidence, gains self-confidence and assurance as she grows older, looking up to all of her friends as role models. It is war that puts all of these things into perspective for the women, and these are memories and lessons that will shape the rest of their lives.

## Marriage

Marriage is a dominant theme in the novel *War Brides* by Helen Bryan. In the novel, marriage includes the religious and legal joining of man and wife by way of holy matrimony. Each character –Alice, Tanni, Frances, Evangeline, and Elsie –all end up married during the war. However, marriage is approached by, and affects each of them in different ways, though ultimately, it is love that bears their marriages through.



When Tanni and Evangeline marry, their marriages are by way of convenience. Evangeline, pregnant and seeing a half-black man named Laurent, seduces Richard Fairfax to marry him at sea with the intent of traveling to England. Once she is in England, she will be able to be closer to Laurent, who is working for her family's company in Marseilles, France. Indeed, while Richard is away at war, Evangeline carries on an affair with Laurent, that eventually wears out, especially once Evangeline realizes she really does love Richard. She commits fully to Richard after he is wounded by a German torpedo. Tanni, at age sixteen, is married to Bruno, who is ten years older and a resident of England. The marriage is originally intended to be the means for Tanni to be able to leave the country as the Nazis begin rounding people up. However, Tanni and Bruno quickly fall in love, and that love only deepens and grows stronger over time.

The marriages of Alice, Frances, and Elsie –all specifically influenced by the war –are all marriages borne from love. Alice, lonely and brokenhearted following being jilted by Richard, believes that she will never find anyone. But while in London, she meets and agrees to marry Joe Lightfoot on the very same day. The two come to love each other quite quickly, and Alice travels with Joe back to the United States after the war to live with him as his wife there. Frances, while working for British Special Operations, falls head over heels in love with Oliver, to whom she proposes marriage, and he accepts. Though their marriage must be a secret given Frances's work, it is quite clear their marriage is full of love and passion as they sneak about to be with one another. Elsie, sent to Crowmarsh Priors to escape the bombing of London, sees old friend Bernie, there, and the two develop an instant attraction to one another, and eventually marry two years later.

Each of the marriages in the novel ends up lasting to the boundaries of the vows the couples make to one another. Alice and Tanni are still married to their husbands in 1995, utterly devoted to them. Frances dies during the war, and Oliver dies not long after from a weak heart, with both committed to the other until the end. Elsie and Evangeline remain committed to their husbands until their husbands die. They remain committed to them even after they have died.

## Friendship

Friendship is an overarching theme in Helen Bryan's novel *War Brides*. Friendship involves platonic love, affection, compassion, camaraderie, loyalty, and spiritual, emotional, and even physical support between one or more people, based often on similarities or common situations between them. In the novel, friendship is a strong and powerful thing that blossoms between Alice, Frances, Evangeline, and Elsie.

The five are brought together from different circumstances by war to Crowmarsh Priors. Each of the girls is also different in terms of personality and ideas. Alice is proper and responsible, while Frances is wealthy and wild. Evangeline has eloped with a man she has only just met in order to be closer to the man she really wants to be with, while Tanni has fled persecution from Jews with her husband from Austria to England. Elsie, utterly poor, comes from the East End of London to avoid the German bombing blitz. In



other circumstances, none of these five –especially Alice and Evangeline, given their situation with Richard –could ever have become friends. But they become friends quite quickly.

Elsie and Frances bond immediately in their mutual dislike for the strictness of Lady Marchmont, whom they scheme against and sneak around. Tanni and Evangeline become close because they are the only residents at the Fairfax house, and they get along together quite well. Frances realizes that Alice is lonely, and so begins to invite her to get together with her and the other girls, including for her twenty-first birthday. The girls share the few things they have with each other, care for one another when they are sick, and provide emotional support for one another consistently throughout the novel.

The greatest measure of their friendship comes from the plot to safely get Tanni's younger twin sisters to England, safe and sound. Each girl is equally committed to the task, and each brings a special skill to the table. Alice is aware of tunnels in which the girls can be smuggled into town. Evangeline's connections through Laurent with the French resistance will be a help. Jewelry inherited from Lady Marchmont by Frances, which are not accounted for, but the location of which are known, will be beneficial. Elsie will have ration cards and identity papers drawn up by way of Bernie's black market connections. Tanni knows of Jewish neighborhoods in other places where the girls can hide. Their friendship stays strong through the effort to save the twins and the war, and the four other women reunite to avenge the death of Frances fifty years later –which they keep secret as a measure of their friendship.

# Styles

## Point of View

Helen Bryan tells her novel *War Brides* from the third-person, limited-omniscient perspective. The third-person narration acts as a uniting voice to each of the subplots in the book. It ties together diverse characters, places, and situations. Helen Bryan presents the reader with five diverse main characters, but with numerous secondary and tertiary characters that fill up the expanse of the story. In addition to handling so many characters, the number of places and situations in the book -from France to London to Crowmarsh- are also expertly drawn together by the third person. Bryan presents her narration from the limited-omniscient perspective, keeping her characters in time as they exist and not allowing them to know anything more than what they are capable of knowing given their circumstances. For example, while Tanni is unaware exactly of what has happened to her parents, the reader knows that her parents are in Auschwitz.

## Language and Meaning

Helen Bryan tells her story in language that is simple and straightforward. This is done for at least two reasons. The first is that the simple, straightforward language allows the reader to easier traverse the sheer number of characters, places, and subplots in the novel. It reinforces the third-person narrative mode of the novel. The second reason Bryan tells her novel in simple and straightforward language is to be able to make her points quite clearly, whether she is translating wisdom, understanding, or beauty in her prose. This also allows contemporary readers far easier access to a time period that is hauntingly similar to the contemporary world, yet very different as well.

## Structure

Helen Bryan divides her novel *War Brides* into thirty-six consecutive, linear, and chronological chapters flanked by a prologue and an epilogue. Except for the prologue, which begins in 1995, the subsequent chapters and epilogue span the times from 1938 to 1995. The reader is able to see how the girls in the story develop, mature, and evolve against the backdrop of World War II. Given the number of characters, places, and subplots, the straightforward structure of the novel allows the reader to easily follow events as they unfold. The prologue provides an introduction of sorts, while the epilogue provides a closing to the novel by revealing that the Joseph twins did indeed survive thanks to the efforts of the five girls.



## Quotes

Even after all this time, the very thought of returning to England, let alone the village, even with her husband, Bruno, by her side, made her feel sick.

-- Narrator (Prologue paragraph 10)

**Importance:** In the prologue, readers are briefly introduced to four women who will ultimately become the main characters of Helen Bryan's novel *War Brides*. Among them is Tanni, whose apprehension about traveling back to the village where she spent several years of her youth and young adulthood is clear and marked. In many ways, Tanni mirrors the other girls as well with her apprehension. This sets the stage for the book.

It's not a question of whether war is coming, but when, possibly a matter of days.

-- Penelope Fairfax (chapter 7 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** Working on behalf of the British government to help identify and evacuate children from the cities to safety in the country, Penelope Fairfax is frustrated by women like Mrs. Pigeon. Mrs. Pigeon has refused to register Elsie and her other children. Many in England are living in denial about the coming war, but Penelope gives them a sobering dose of reality about what is coming.

They heard Churchill's ringing speech that England would "fight them on the beaches but never, never surrender." It made them feel oddly heartened.

-- Narrator/Winston Churchill (chapter 11 paragraph 9)

**Importance:** As the war moves into some of its darkest days, Alice and the others believe that a German invasion is imminent. They all hunker down in Crowmarsh. Their spirits are lifted and their hearts are encouraged to hear the defiance in Winston Churchill's words. It inspires them to take on the Germans in whatever capacity that they can.

Then, little by little she had begun to adjust, so that in the last few months she had felt better, more like her old self, and Johnny was thriving. Evangeline and Alice were her friends, even if they weren't friends with each other. She had found a way to make herself useful.

-- Narrator (chapter 13 paragraph 11)

**Importance:** The war for sixteen year-old Tanni has been especially difficult. She is living in a strange country, learning a new language. As a new wife and mother, she is trying to fit in as best she can. By doing work as a seamstress, she is able to make herself useful and respected. It gives her a renewed sense of purpose in life. Tanni's feelings also echo those of the other girls, who grow to become as used to the war as possible. They have all found new purposes in life.



He wanted to rage at God. What is it You expect me to do in the face of all this killing and human despair?

-- Narrator/Oliver Hammett (chapter 14 paragraph 30)

**Importance:** Following the downing of a German aircraft, Oliver Hammet, a member of the Home Guard, is the first to reach the scene. Even though the dead he finds are enemy dead, he is still sickened and horrified by death. He strives to understand his purpose and what God wants Him to do. Oliver ultimately discovers that his purpose is the preservation of life against the wider array of war. This realization strengthens his resolve.

When you're desperate, you find a way.

-- Frances (chapter 18 paragraph 82)

**Importance:** While Frances is speaking about the plan to rescue the Joseph twins, her quote can be applied to all aspects of the novel. Despite the war and rationing, the girls have managed to find ways to survive, and even thrive in some situations. Each of the girls is able to do something important to help one another and the war effort.

Evangeline puts her Southern American use of firearms to good use by killing game for eating. Tanni becomes a seamstress for the town, making new clothing out of old materials and preserving new clothing by repairing it.

Alice wondered how the world could hold so much sadness.

-- Narrator (chapter 31 paragraph 7)

**Importance:** Ruminating on the death of her mother, the fact that she is alone, and the fact that the war has caused so much destruction and heartache, Alice tries to come to grips with the knowledge that there can be so much sadness in the world. In effect, Alice's observation mirrors the emotions of each of the girls as well as they struggle through hardships and heartache because of the war.

Feels like this war's gone on forever, doesn't it?

-- Frances (chapter 31 paragraph 70)

**Importance:** As the book nears its conclusion, Frances offers up a haunting, but accurate observation about the war. It has cost them so much and has changed their lives in such profound ways. It feels as if the war will go on forever. What is especially haunting is that Frances is about to be launched directly into the war by way of special operations and assisting the French Resistance. For her, the war is about to heat up and get much worse.

Now the reason we're all here is to put our heads together and work out what happened to Frances.

-- Elsie (chapter 34 paragraph 28)

**Importance:** While on the surface it seems that the four women have come back together in order to pay their respects and to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of VE



Day, their true purpose is to figure out just what happened to Frances. These women, bound by war and by friendship, have one more task to complete before they all go their separate ways once more. They will confront Hugo de Balfort and avenge the death of Frances.

They were four young women, girls, really, who became wartime brides. Their lives were shaped by the conflict, and adversity drew them together.

-- Katie-Hamilton Jones (chapter 33 paragraph 12)

**Importance:** Katie-Hamilton Jones, covering the reunion of the four women and the re-dedication of Saint Gabriel's, sums up the book and its plot quite well. Each of the four women -including Frances, though she is not mentioned -becomes a bride during a war. They draw strength and find beauty where they can, despite the war. They draw strength and beauty not just from the men they love, but from their friendship and camaraderie with each other.