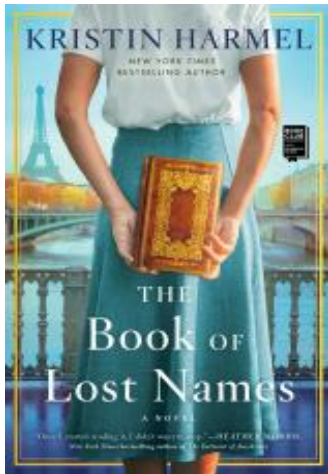


# The Book of Lost Names

by Kristin Harmel

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## About the Book

**Inspired by an astonishing true story from World War II, a young woman with a talent for forgery helps hundreds of Jewish children flee the Nazis in this unforgettable historical novel from the international bestselling author of *THE WINEMAKER'S WIFE*.**

Eva Traube Abrams, a semi-retired librarian in Florida, is shelving books one morning when her eyes lock on a photograph in a magazine lying open nearby. She freezes; it's an image of a book she hasn't seen in 65 years --- a book she recognizes as *The Book of Lost Names*.

The accompanying article discusses the looting of libraries by the Nazis across Europe during World War II --- an experience Eva remembers well --- and the search to reunite people with the texts taken from them so long ago. The book in the photograph, an 18th-century religious text thought to have been taken from France in the waning days of the war, is one of the most fascinating cases. Now housed in Berlin's Zentral- und Landesbibliothek library, it appears to contain some sort of code, but researchers don't know where it came from --- or what the code means. Only Eva holds the answer. But will she have the strength to revisit old memories and help reunite those lost during the war?

As a graduate student in 1942, Eva was forced to flee Paris after the arrest of her father, a Polish Jew. Finding refuge in a small mountain town in the Free Zone, she begins forging identity documents for Jewish children fleeing to neutral Switzerland. But erasing people comes with a price, and along with a mysterious, handsome forger named Rémy, Eva decides she must find a way to preserve the real names of the children who are too young to remember who they really are. The records they keep in *The Book of Lost Names* will become even more vital when the resistance cell they work for is betrayed and Rémy disappears.

An engaging and evocative novel reminiscent of *THE LOST GIRLS OF PARIS* and *THE ALICE NETWORK*, *THE BOOK OF LOST NAMES* is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the power of bravery and love in the

face of evil.

## Discussion Guide

1. On page 16, Mamusia tells Eva, "If we shrink from them, if we lose our goodness, we let them erase us. We cannot do that, Eva. We cannot." Compare her stance here with how she behaves in Aurignon, after Tatu is taken by the Germans. How does her outlook change? Rereading this and knowing that Mamusia felt this way before tragedy struck, how do your opinions of her and her reaction to Eva's work as a forger change? Do you believe Joseph when he tells Eva that Mamusia said she was proud of the work Eva did to help keep children from being erased?

2. The beginning of Eva's nightmare falls on the night her father is taken away and she is forced to watch it happen in silence. Do you think she did the right thing by keeping quiet, or should she have done more to try to save him? What do you think you would have done in this situation? What did Eva's decision reveal about her character and what she might accomplish later in the novel?

3. Eva has to risk her and her mother's safety on numerous occasions by trusting others. Discuss the many characters Eva and Mamusia trusted to keep their secrets. Was any of this trust misplaced? Were there any red flags about those they should not have trusted?

What does the selflessness present in so many in Aurignon say about the promise of the human capacity for goodness in times of crisis?

4. On page 117, Eva watches officers walking around unbothered in Drancy and thinks to herself, "Could they all be that evil? Or had they discovered a switch within themselves that allowed them to turn off their civility? Did they go home to their wives at night and simply flip the switches back on, become human once more?" What do you think of her questions? In wartime, do you think those who don't fight for what is right are evil? Do you think they can become immune to atrocities? Discuss.

5. Eva and her mother react very differently to the news that Tatu had been sent to Auschwitz. What do their reactions reveal about them as characters? Do you think there is a right way or a wrong way to react to such news? Why? Which reaction do you think would be most beneficial in helping someone get through a war?

6. On page 165, Eva says, "I've always thought that it's those children --- the ones who realize that books are magic --- who will have the brightest lives." How did Eva's love of books help her throughout different points in the story? Discuss with your group your favorite books as children. When did you first realize the power of books? What book made you fall in love with reading? Do you think your life would be different if you hadn't found the joy of reading?

7. On page 166, Eva thinks to herself, "Parents make all sorts of errors, because our ability to raise our children is always colored by the lives we've lived before they came along." How do you think Eva's past affected the way she raised her son? How do you think children of Jewish parents who survived World War II are affected by their parents' pasts? Do you think it's possible for their parents' trauma and/or resilience to be passed down to them?

8. Mamusia feels as if Eva is abandoning her. She also tells Eva that she is being brainwashed and has forgotten who she

is as she erases Jewish children's names and attends masses. Do you think Mamusia is justified in feeling betrayed by Eva? Did you feel sympathetic toward Mamusia as she was left behind in Madame Barbier's boardinghouse, or did you grow irritated by her inability to understand Eva's drive to help others? Who or what do you believe is responsible for the growing hostility in their relationship?

**9.** On page 204, Père Clément says, "The path of life is darkest when we choose to walk it alone." Do you agree that this statement is true in all situations? Discuss the moments in the novel when Eva decides to go it alone and compare them to the moments when she trusts others with her secrets, her wants and her fears. Do you think the moments she decided to work alone would have been easier if she had a partner, or do you think that would have only increased her stress? What about the moments she opened up to others? Would she have been better off keeping to herself?

**10.** Were you surprised to find out that Joseph was the one who betrayed the forgery network? Were there any red flags? Why do you think the author decided Joseph would be the traitor? What would you have done in Joseph's position?

**11.** Was moving on and trying to forget Rémy the right decision for Eva, or do you believe that she should have waited even longer to make sure that Rémy hadn't survived? Discuss with your group the pros and cons of each choice. Did Tatu give Eva sound advice in telling her to start living her own life? Would you have moved to the United States with Louis even if you knew you would never love him like you did Rémy?

**12.** Eva believed that Rémy went to his grave not knowing how she felt about him because she told him she couldn't marry him. Do you think Rémy ever thought that Eva had given up on him when he waited for her on the library steps and she never showed? If they had ended up finding each other before they both moved on to live separate lives, do you think they would have made it as a couple? Why or why not?

**13.** On page 370, Eva says, "We aren't defined by the names we carry or the religion we practice, or the nation whose flag flies over our heads. I know that now. We're defined by who we are in our hearts, who we choose to be on this earth." How would you define the main characters in the book? Do their religions or countries play into who they are as people? Do you think they can truly be separated from their backgrounds and judged only by what is in their hearts and what they choose to do?

**14.** Why do you think Eva kept her past from her son? Do you think she was embarrassed or still felt guilty about anything? Do you think it was a coping mechanism and a way for her to move on? Discuss with your group.

**15.** In her author's note, on page 384, Kristin Harmel says, "You don't need money or weapons or a big platform to change the world. Sometimes, something as simple as a pen and a bit of imagination can alter the course of history." Discuss this as a group and share with your book club those people --- either famous or not --- who you believe best exemplify this sentiment.

## Author Bio

Kristin Harmel is the *New York Times* bestselling author of more than a dozen novels, including *THE STOLEN LIFE*

OF COLETTE MARCEAU, THE PARIS DAUGHTER, THE FOREST OF VANISHING STARS, THE BOOK OF LOST NAMES, THE ROOM ON RUE AMÉLIE and THE SWEETNESS OF FORGETTING. She is published in more than 30 languages and is the cofounder and cohost of the popular web series, "Friends and Fiction." She lives in Orlando, Florida.

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