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The Paris Daughter

by Kristin Harmel



About the Book

From the bestselling author of the ?heart-stopping tale of survival and heroism? (*People*) THE BOOK OF LOST NAMES comes a gripping historical novel about two mothers who must make unthinkable choices in the face of the Nazi occupation.

Paris, 1939: Young mothers Elise and Juliette become fast friends the day they meet in the beautiful Bois de Boulogne. Though there is a shadow of war creeping across Europe, neither woman suspects that their lives are about to irrevocably change.

When Elise becomes a target of the German occupation, she entrusts Juliette with the most precious thing in her life --- her young daughter, playmate to Juliette?s own little girl. But nowhere is safe in war, not even a quiet little bookshop like Juliette?s Librairie des Rêves, and, when a bomb falls on their neighborhood, Juliette?s world is destroyed along with it.

More than a year later, with the war finally ending, Elise returns to reunite with her daughter, only to find her friend?s bookstore reduced to rubble --- and Juliette nowhere to be found. What happened to her daughter in those last, terrible moments? Juliette has seemingly vanished without a trace, taking all the answers with her. Elise?s desperate search leads her to New York --- and to Juliette --- one final, fateful time.

An ?exquisite and gut-wrenching novel? (Lisa Barr, *New York Times* bestselling author) you won?t soon forget, THE PARIS DAUGHTER is also a sweeping celebration of resilience, motherhood and love.

Discussion Guide

1. Both Juliette and Elise are transplants who followed love and passion to end up in Paris. How has their love of the city

and of their spouses changed over the years? What are the things, big and small, that have allowed them to make a home there?

2. A woman?s place in the home and at work plays a significant role in both Elise?s and Juliette?s relationships with their husbands. While Juliette and Paul have a partnership running their bookstore, Elise feels stifled by her husband and his career. In what ways does Elise struggle against the boundaries society has placed on her?

3. Both Elise and Juliette are pregnant at the same time. While Elise hopes ?the baby would change everything? (page 5) and notes that the pregnancy wasn?t intended, Juliette is both thrilled and terrified to be pregnant again, after the sudden loss of her daughter. How does each woman cope with her fear? In what ways does it bring them closer? In what ways does it set them up to drift apart?

4. After they initially meet, as things in Paris start to move closer to war, Elise and Juliette cling to each other. Elise even says, ?So we will be each other?s family? (page 61), while Juliette responds, ?I?ve always wanted a sister? (page 62). How is a deep friendship like theirs built? In what ways can a friendship fracture? How do extraordinary circumstances play into keeping a friendship or breaking one apart?

5. Being a good mother is something that Elise, Juliette and Ruth all struggle with throughout the book. Juliette, in particular, is horrified when Ruth and Elise send their children away in hopes of saving them. Ruth tells a disbelieving Juliette, ?The hope is that the children live. That they will survive and tell the world who they really are one day. In that, they will honor their families? (page 58). How do these different ideas of ?good? motherhood affect each of the women? What other extraordinary acts of love do these women demonstrate? In what ways do you agree or disagree with their actions?

6. Grief plays a huge role throughout each of the mothers? journeys. Elise, galvanized by her grief, begins to help with the rescue and reunification efforts in Paris. Juliette, embittered by her grief, finds herself leaving Paris for New York, and clings to her memories. Have you ever experienced a time when grief led to a fundamental shift in your world? How do different people process loss? How do we, as humans, find ways to cope?

7. Bernard tells Elise, ?The world breaks all the time...and always, always, it is put back together again? (page 142). In what ways, big and small, do Juliette and Elise attempt to put things back together again, both during and after the war?

8. Hope takes many forms in this novel. Elise hopes she can find news of Juliette, while Suzanne and Georges Levy hope they will be reunited with their mother. Juliette hopes she can put the past behind her and reinvent herself on a new continent. In what ways do people hold on to hope even in the face of impossible odds? In what ways are the characters? hopes rewarded or dashed in the novel? How do their hopes change over the course of the story?

9. Ruth eventually decides it is time for her and her children to leave Paris, saying to Elise, ?This country no longer feels like a home for us. How can I ever forget that it turned its back on me, and on my children, in the first place? I?ve been thinking about this for some time, and I simply cannot stay, cannot let my children become adults here. What if France turns on us again? How can we ever feel safe?? (page 208). As much as Paris feels like home to them at the beginning of the novel, even Elise?s and Juliette?s relationships to the city change in the wake of the war. How do grief and trauma shape our view of home, and of safety? How do each of the mothers try to create a sense of home and safety for themselves and their children?

10. When they arrive in New York, Juliette sets about building an exact replica of La Librairie des Rêves, just as she remembers it from Paris. Upon its completion, she feels at home, but Lucie is deeply uncomfortable, calling it ?the scary place,? even though Juliette promises that ?we will have only happiness here? (page 219). How do their different reactions to loss and their grief over the deaths of their family cause them to be at odds with one another? In what ways do adults and children remember events differently? In what ways do we block or revise our memories to help us cope?

11. Upon their reunion, Elise is stunned by Juliette?s anger when Juliette states, ?But decisions have consequences. And your decision took everything from me? (page 304). In what ways do small decisions throughout the book lead to much larger consequences? Is Juliette justified in her anger? Or, in times of war, are certain actions necessary?

12. Lucie paints a scene of Paris to show her mother she remembers, too. Olivier LeClair paints images of protest, and Elise carves endless depictions of her daughter?s face. How does art help convey emotion? How does its creation help the characters in the novel process their situations?

13. Questions of fate plague each of the characters throughout the book. Juliette feels ?fury at the universe for continuing to push them [Juliette and Elise] together? (page 346), while first Elise, and then Lucie, repeats, ?Under these stars, fate has brought you home? (page 359). Each major event is bookended by a plane first: the bombing of Boulogne-Billancourt, and then the midair collision of United Flight 826 and TWA Flight 266. Are there other aspects of the book that parallel one another? How are each of the characters in control of their destinies? In what ways do their actions change the destiny of others? And how, throughout it all, does a mother?s love play into their decisions?

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 and THE BOOK OF LOST NAMES. She is published in more than 30 languages and is the cofounder and cohost of the popular web series, "Friends and Fiction." She lives with her husband and son in Orlando, Florida.

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Publication Date: May 14, 2024
Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction, Women's Fiction
Paperback: 416 pages
Publisher: Gallery Books
ISBN-10: 1982191716
ISBN-13: 9781982191719