Sarah's Key

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF TATIANA DE ROSNAY

De Rosnay is the daughter of a Frenchman, scientist Joël de Rosnay, and an Englishwoman named Stella Jebb. On her father's side, de Rosnay is of Russian heritage. De Rosnay grew up first in Paris and later in Boston, where she moved when her father began teaching at MIT. De Rosnay received her bachelor's degree from the University of East Anglia, in Norwich, England, and then went on to work as a journalist and editor in Paris. She has published over ten novels in French and several books in English. She lives in Paris with her husband and their children.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The key event of the novel is the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup. On July 16, 1942, under Nazi orders, the French police conducted a mass arrest of Jews living in Paris and the city's suburbs. The police arrested over eight thousand people, including more than four thousand children, and held them in the Vélodrome d'Hiver, an indoor cycling track. From the Velodrome, adults without children were deported to Drancy, an internment camp within Paris, and then to Auschwitz, where they were murdered. Parents and their children were deported south of Paris, to Pithviers and Beaune-la-Rolande, internment camps in the Loiret department of France. In the Loiret camps, French camp authorities separated parents from their children and deported the parents to Auschwitz. After about a month, the Nazi government in Berlin decided to deport the children to Auschwitz as well. To minimize public suspicion about a large number children traveling without adults, the Nazis first moved the children to Drancy, from whence they were deported along with other adults who had been imprisoned at Drancy. This mass arrest became known as the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup, though it was known by the French police who conducted it by the code name *Opération Vent printanier*, or "Operation Spring Breeze." The first time the French government acknowledged the role of the French authorities in the roundup was in 1995, when President Jacques Chirac delivered a formal apology.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The first epigraph to *Sarah's Key* is from *Suite française* by Irène Némirovsky. Némirovsky was a Jewish Ukrainian author who lived in Paris with her husband, Michel, and their two daughters, Denise and Élisabeth. Némirovsky immigrated to France as a teenager, when she and her family fled the violence of the Russian Revolution. Némirovsky achieved moderate success as a writer during her lifetime. As World War Two began, Némirovsky formally converted to Catholicism, but was denied French citizenship. She soon fled Paris with her family in hopes of escaping the Nazis. However, Némirovsky was arrested by the French police in July of 1942. She was held at Pithviers internment camp and was then deported to Auschwitz, where she died of typhus. Némirovsky's husband was arrested four months after his wife and was murdered in the gas chambers at Auschwitz. Denise and Élisabeth were hidden by various neighbors for the reminder of the war, which both survived. In 2004, Denise discovered among her mother's papers the plans for a series of five novellas, which would have been titled *Suite française*. Before she was arrested, Némirovsky wrote the first two of these novellas, *Tempête en juin* and *Dolce* as the events of World War Two unfolded around her. Denise arranged for her mother's novella's to be published, and they received glowing critical reviews. Though incomplete, Némirovsky's *Suite française* is nonetheless regarded as a stunning and unique piece of writing. It is among the first works of fiction written about World War Two. In a 2005 interview with the BBC, Denise stated, "It is an extraordinary feeling to have brought my mother back to life. It shows that the Nazis did not truly succeed in killing her. It is not vengeance, but it is a victory." Other fictional works set in World War Two France include *The Nightingale* by Kristin Hannah and *All the Light We Cannot See*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize, by Anthony Doerr. John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* focuses on the German context of the war, while Jamie Ford's *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet* tells the story of a Japanese-American girl living in an internment camp in the United States.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Sarah's Key*
- **Where Written:** Paris
- **When Published:** 2007
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary fiction; literary realism
- **Genre:** Historical fiction
- **Setting:** The majority of the novel (both Sarah's and Julia's timelines) takes place in Paris. However, Julia does spend time in the United States toward the end of the novel, when she is looking for Sarah and after she separates from her husband.
- **Climax:** Julia visits the home of Richard Rainsferd (Sarah Starzynski's husband) and learns that Sarah died forty years earlier in a car crash.
- **Antagonist:** The French police who arrested and imprisoned the Starzynskis and thousands of other French Jews. Bertrand, Julia's husband, is the main source of tension in Julia's storyline, though he is not an outright "bad" character.

- **Point of View:** The first third of the novel alternates between a third-person narration of Sarah's story and a first-person narration of Julia's story. For the remainder of the book, Julia narrates in the first-person.

EXTRA CREDIT

Polyglot. Tatiana de Rosnay describes herself as "franglaise," a hybrid of the adjectives française (French) and anglaise (English). Although de Rosnay writes in both French and English, *Sarah's Key* is the first novel she wrote in English.

Multimedia Success. *Sarah's Key* was adapted into a French-directed film starring Kristin Scott Thomas as Julia Jarmond in 2010. The film, like the novel, is known in French as *Elle s'appelait Sarah*, or "Her Name Was Sarah." This title is itself a song lyric, from Jean-Jacques Goldman's 1982 song *Comme toi* (Like You), also about a Jewish girl named Sarah.

PLOT SUMMARY

Sarah's Key tells the intertwined stories of Sarah Starzynski, a ten-year-old Jewish girl living in Paris during World War Two, and Julia Jarmond, a forty-five-year-old American-born journalist living in Paris in 2002. For the first third of the novel, Sarah's and Julia's stories are intertwined, while the remainder of the book focuses on Julia's story.

Sarah's story begins in July of 1942. Along with her mother and father, ten-year-old Sarah is rounded up by the French police as part of a mass arrest of Parisian Jews known as the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup. Sarah's younger brother, four-year-old Michel, convinces Sarah to lock him in the secret cupboard where the siblings often read and play together. Sarah, not realizing the implications of her family's arrest, pockets the cupboard **key** and promises to return for Michel soon. As the Starzynski family is escorted out of their apartment building on the rue de Saintonge, Sarah infers from the concierge's conversation with the police that she, Madame Royer, was the one who sold out Sarah's family to the police.

After being held in a garage on the rue de Bretagne, where she recognizes fellow detainees and neighborhood policemen alike, Sarah and her family are moved to the Vélodrome d'Hiver, an indoor cycling track, where they are held without food, water, or sanitation for several days along with thousands of other Jewish families. By this point, Sarah has shown the key to her mother and father and both parents have reacted in despair, realizing that Sarah has unwittingly left her brother to die. Sarah, however, vows to find a way to return to her brother. Eventually, Sarah and her parents are taken to a railway station and transported away from Paris to the Beaune-la-Rolande internment camp. Upon their arrival, the men are separated from the women and children, and shortly thereafter the French police running the camp violently separate the mothers and children, as well. Left alone with the other children, many of them very young, Sarah befriends a girl named Rachel. Sarah and Rachel agree to escape from the camp, which they do successfully after Sarah persuades the policeman who catches them crawling under the barbed wire fence to let them go.

Sarah and Rachel walk for miles across the countryside, hiding in the forest and eventually in a dog shed. It is here they are discovered by an elderly man named Jules Dufare. Jules and his wife, Geneviève, feed and shelter Sarah and Rachel. However, when Rachel becomes dangerously ill with dysentery, Jules and Geneviève decide they must take the risk of calling a doctor. As a precaution, they order Sarah to hide in the basement, as her shaved head will give her away as an escapee. The doctor visits Rachel and leaves only to return with several German officers. Sarah manages to stay safe hiding in the cellar, but the Germans take Rachel away with them and Sarah never hears of her again. Devastated by Rachel's capture and the loss of both her parents, Sarah resolves to return to Paris to find Michel. Jules and Geneviève decide to accompany her.

By bribing a policeman and pretending that Sarah is Jules and Geneviève's granddaughter, the three are able to make their way back into occupied Paris. There, Sarah leads the way back to her apartment, where she is greeted by a young boy her age (Edouard Tézac) who is now living there with his family. Sarah forces her way into the apartment and unlocks the secret cupboard with the key she has kept safe all this time. Inside she finds her brother's blackened, dead body and, overcome by grief, she collapses screaming. Sarah's story leaves off here, and the reader learns further details of Sarah's life only via Julia's story.

Julia is an American living in Paris with a French husband, Bertrand Tézac, and an eleven-year-old daughter, Zoë. At the beginning of her story, Julia is planning to move into the apartment in Paris formerly belonging to Bertrand's grandmother, known affectionately to the family as Mamé. While Julia has never felt accepted by her husband's family, she enjoys a close relationship with Mamé, whom she visits weekly at the nursing home. While touring the apartment, Julia receives a call from her boss, Joshua, asking her to come into work. Once there, Julia receives an assignment to write an article about the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup, which will be commemorated in a few months. Julia is only vaguely familiar with this historical event, but she eagerly begins researching. Soon, she has become obsessed with the tragic deaths of the thousands of children arrested as part of the roundup. She tries talking about the topic with her husband, but Bertrand is dismissive, telling Julia no one cares about the roundup up and, thus, no one will read her article. It is revealed that Julia is hoping for a second child, but that several early miscarriages and a difficult pregnancy with Zoë have limited her options.

Through research, interviews, and a discussion with Mamé,

Julia learns that the apartment she will soon move into formerly belonged to a Jewish family arrested during the roundup. She soon receives a call from her father-in-law, Edouard, forbidding her from discussing the topic further with Mamé, which only piques her interest. At this time, Julia discovers she is pregnant. Although she is elated, Bertrand insists she must have an abortion because another baby would "kill" him. During this conversation, it is revealed that Bertrand formerly had a mistress by the name of Amélie.

Helped by a local expert, Franck Lévy, Julia learns that the family who used to live in Mamé's apartment was the Starzynskis. While Wladyslaw and Rywka, Sarah's parents, are known to have died at Auschwitz, Sarah's fate is unclear from the written record, and Julia becomes determined to track her down. She makes visits to two internment camps and continues researching, but is unable to learn anything until Edouard reveals that he was present when Sarah returned to the apartment on rue de Saintonge. Edouard's father, André, had forbidden young Edouard from speaking of Sarah's visit to his mother, Mamé, who was not at home that day. André also left some confidential papers in a safe at his death, and both Julia and Edouard become excited by the possibility that these papers might reveal something about Sarah's fate. Upon examining the papers, Julia learns that André Tézac sent the Dufares money every month for ten years to help provide for Sarah, who continued to live with Dufares after the war.

By this point, the Vel' d'Hiv' commemoration has arrived. It is the same day that Julia is scheduled to have an abortion. At the clinic, Julia receives a phone call from Nathalie Dufare, Jules and Geneviève's great-granddaughter. Elated by this development, Julia realizes she does not want the abortion, and abruptly leaves the clinic. By meeting with Gaspard Dufare, Nathalie's grandfather and Jules and Geneviève's grandson, Julia learns that Sarah left France in 1952, at the age of twenty. She moved to the United States and never contacted the Dufares again after 1955, when she wrote to say she was marrying an American.

Having essentially cut off communication with Bertrand, and still dead-set on finding Sarah, Julia soon leaves for the States with her daughter Zoë in tow. With the help of her sister, Charla, who is an attorney, Julia locates the house of Sarah's husband, Richard Rainsferd, in Connecticut. She arrives there and meets a woman whom she initially thinks is Sarah, but who is actually Richard's second wife. Sarah, Julia learns, died in a car crash in 1972 at the age of forty. Julia is stunned but remains hopeful upon hearing that Sarah and Richard have a son named William who now lives in Italy. Julia and Zoë fly to Italy to look up William, whom they are able to convince to meet with them. In this conversation, it becomes clear that William knows nothing of his mother's past. After Julia shows him a photograph of Sarah wearing a **yellow star**, William becomes angry and instructs Julia never to contact him again.

As she and Zoë leave to return to their hotel, Julia finds blood on her skirt and passes out.

Several weeks later, Julia is back home in Paris and on bed rest, awaiting the birth of her child. All in one day Julia learns that Mamé has had a stroke and that Bertrand is again having an affair with Amélie. As she is about to leave for the hospital to see Mamé, William shows up at Julia's door, finally ready to learn about his mother. The two of them go to the hospital together, where William meets Edouard. Julia translates Sarah's diary, which William has discovered along with the cupboard key. William also reveals that Sarah's death was a suicide. At home that evening, the Tézac family and Julia receive another shock when Zoë announces that Mamé knew all along about Sarah, despite her husband and son's efforts to keep Sarah a secret.

Three years later, Julia has separated from Bertrand and is living in New York City with Zoë and her new baby daughter. Incredibly unhappy, Julia thinks often about looking up William. One day she receives an out-of-the-blue call from William, who also now finds himself divorced and living in New York City. The two agree to meet for coffee, where they discuss Sarah Starzynski and where Julia reveals that she has named her new daughter Sarah in honor of William's mother. Julia and William clasp **hands** and cry together.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Sarah "Sirka" Starzynski – One of the novel's two protagonists, along with Julia. Ten-year-old Sarah is arrested with her parents during the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup of 1942. Although both her parents are deported to and murdered at Auschwitz, Sarah manages to escape the internment camp at Beaune-la-Rolande and return to Paris in search of her brother, whom she locked into a secret cupboard for safety on the night of the roundup. Sarah is devastated when she returns to her former apartment and finds her brother, Michel, dead. According to other characters who knew her, such as Gaspard Dufaure (who grew up as Sarah's adoptive brother), Sarah was never the same after her brother's death. As a child, Sarah was energetic and hopeful, but as a young woman she is described as serious and melancholy, a young woman who seems much older than her actual age. By the end of the novel, Julia discovers that Sarah's death in a car accident at age forty was a suicide. The deep grief that Sarah carried with her is hinted at through her journal entries, which surface toward the end of the novel. In her journal, an adult Sarah wrote that she could not bear the grief of her family's death, and that she often wants to die. Sarah was thus completely changed by her experiences during World War Two, demonstrating incredible bravery but also becoming bitter and depressed. Sarah is referred to as "the girl" for the

first third of the novel. Eventually, it is revealed that she is called Sirka (a childhood nickname), but after her friend Rachel is taken away by the Nazis, Sirka asks to be called by the more grownup name Sarah.

Michel Starzynski – Sarah's younger brother, who was four years old at the time of the roundup. Michel only appears in one scene, where he refuses to accompany his mother and sister, instead convincing Sarah to lock him in a cupboard where he can hide from the French police. Michel is portrayed as brave but naïve. He loved the stories which Sarah often read aloud to him from his favorite book, *Un Petit Diable*. Sarah blames herself for Michel's death and never fully recovers from losing him and her parents. Michel's name is not revealed until one-third of the way into the novel, when Sarah explains to Jules and Geneviève Dufaure that she needs to return to Paris to rescue her brother.

Wladyslaw Starzynski – Sarah's father, originally from Poland. Wladyslaw is a kind man who is devoted to his family. He is hiding in the cellar on the night of the roundup, but when his wife, Rywka, screams for him as she and Sarah are being lead away by the French police, he emerges and insists he be arrested along with his family. Although Sarah expresses anger with her father for shielding her from the political reality of the Second World War rather than explaining it to her, she is nevertheless very close Wladyslaw and feels safer when he is around. Wladyslaw encourages Sarah to be brave and when the family is deported from Paris to the Beaune-la-Rolande internment camp, he tells her, "I am here with you. And we are with your brother. He is in our prayers, in our hearts." Wladyslaw is separated from Sarah and her mother upon arrival at Beaune-la-Rolande, so Sarah is not able to say goodbye to him. Julia learns that Wladyslaw was transported from Beaune-la-Rolande on convoy 15, which infamously travelled to Auschwitz.

Rywka Starzynski – Sarah's mother, also from Poland. Before the war, Rywka was cheerful and outgoing. She laughed often and was an attentive mother and compassionate neighbor. She even helped nurse Madame Royer's baby, a detail which makes it all the more devastating that Madame Royer is the one to sell out the Starzynski family to the French police. Rywka's joyful personality is destroyed by the events of 1942, as she becomes completely paralyzed by the horror her family experiences. Following the roundup and for much of the time that Rywka and Sarah spend at Beaune-la-Rolande, Rywka is essentially catatonic. Sarah expresses frustration over what she sees as her mother's helplessness, and she even begins to feel that her mother is "already dead." However, when the French police at Beaune-la-Rolande brutally separate the Jewish mothers and children, Sarah witnesses her mother come alive again, fighting the police off of her in order to hug her daughter one final time. She also offers Sarah "a tiny, brave smile" before she is also transported away on convoy 15. Rywka is thus a complex character, at once a mixture of crippling naiveté and loving courage.

Julia Jarmond – One of the novel's two protagonists, along with Sarah Starzynski. Julia is a forty-five-year-old American living and working in Paris. She is married to Bertrand and is mother to Zoë (and later young Sarah). Julia grew up in Massachusetts and attended Boston University, then moved to Paris in her twenties to work as a journalist. Despite speaking fluent French and having lived in France for twenty-five years, Julia constantly feels like an outsider—not only in the context of her family's conservative French family but also in the context of Paris at large. Julia worries about getting older and longs for a second child, having had a difficult pregnancy with Zoë and suffering several miscarriages. She is persistent and introspective, but prone to sadness. Julia is very close to her daughter, Zoë, and to her younger sister, Charla. As she learns more about the events of the Vel' d'Hiv' Roundup—as well as Sarah's life and death—Julia becomes increasingly obsessed with uncovering the details of Sarah's life, as it overlaps with the history of her in-laws, the Tézacs. Julia's preoccupation with Sarah's life stirs in her strong feelings of dissatisfaction with her own life and marriage, ultimately leading her to leave her husband and her adopted country of France. By the end of the novel, Julia has given birth to a second child despite her husband's desires, marking a reclamation of her sense of independence and agency. She names her second child after Sarah—and, it's implied, goes on to form a romantic relationship with Sarah's son, William.

Zoë Tézac – Julia and Bertrand's eleven-year-old daughter. Zoë is upbeat and energetic, with a strong sense of humor. She is also incredibly perceptive. Although Julia does not tell her daughter that she is pregnant, when Julia nearly suffers a miscarriage in Italy, Zoë immediately intuits that this pregnancy is what is causing unspoken tension between her parents. Zoë is very supportive of her mother, eager to help with Julia's research and even occasionally reprimanding Bertrand for his ill-spirited teasing of Julia.

Charla – Julia's younger sister, an attorney. Julia is very close to Charla, who is one of the few people Julia tells about her pregnancy in its early stages. Charla lives in New York City. She is married to a man named Barry and divorced from her first husband, Ben, with whom she has two children, Cooper and Alex. It is Charla who tracks down Sarah Starzynski's husband, Richard Rainsferd, in Connecticut. Charla is a commanding, vibrant presence, which is demonstrated by the bright colors in which she has painted her house. (These stand in stark contrast to the neutral colors Julia prefers.) Charla is very disapproving of Bertrand, finding him arrogant, and she also cautions Julia about the dangers of discussing Sarah Starzynski's past with her son, William, saying, "Maybe he doesn't want to be reminded."

Heather Jarmond – Julia's mother, a former champion tennis

player. When Julia calls her mother to tell her she is going to Italy and won't be able to visit her, Heather expresses worry over Julia's "rushed" actions. This is the only time Julia's mother appears in the story, as Julia does not tell her about her research on the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup, or even about her pregnancy.

Bertrand Tézac – Julia's husband. Bertrand is very charming, with an "infectious laugh, a cross between a hyena and a saxophone." He and Julia met at a discotheque when Julia was twenty-seven. Bertrand comes from a well-to-do French family, none of whom are pleased by his choice to wed an American. Bertrand himself often mocks Julia for her American sensibilities, which Julia has increasingly come to resent. Bertrand and Julia's marriage is deeply strained, and when Julia becomes pregnant, Bertrand insists that another baby will ruin his life. By the end of the novel, Bertrand has become depressed, and he is hurt by the fact that Julia's obsession with Sarah Starzynski's story means that she hasn't noticed what he's "going through." Overall, Bertrand is portrayed as a less-than-compassionate character who acts mostly out of careless selfishness. By the end of the novel, Bertrand has reunited with Amélie, his former mistress, with whom he had previously cheated on Julia.

Edouard – Bertrand's father, and Julia's father-in-law. Edouard is formal and reserved. Julia reflects that she "could not imagine him showing any other emotion apart from anger, pride, and self-satisfaction." While Edouard is very close with Zoë, he is stiff and impersonal toward Julia, giving her the feeling he is "holding something back." As Julia ultimately learns from Edouard himself, Edouard was a young boy living in the rue de Saintonge apartment when Sarah Starzynski returned and uncovered her brother's body. This event—and his father's insistence that he never speak of it—traumatized Edouard. Over the course of the novel, Edouard becomes much more emotionally open and he and Julia bond over the effort of uncovering Sarah Starzynski's story.

Marcelle Tézac, aka Mamé – Edouard's mother and Bertrand's paternal grandmother. At the beginning of the novel, Mamé is living in a nursing home due to her dementia. Mamé is outspoken and rebellious and has always been welcoming of Julia, despite the fact that she is American. Mamé willingly discusses the roundup with Julia, expressing pain and shame at the way her country acted. Mamé suffers a stroke at the end of the novel, but before this happens she reveals to Zoë that she knew about Sarah Starzynski's return to the rue de Saintonge apartment and her discovery of her dead brother.

André – Edouard's father and Bertrand's paternal grandfather. André inherited his family's wine business, but ended up opening an antique store. André and Edouard were present the day Sarah Starzynski returned to the rue de Saintonge apartment. Because his wife, Mamé, was not in the apartment that day, André forbade Edouard from discussing the traumatic incident with her. For years, André kept in touch with Sarah's adoptive father, Jules Dufaure, and sent money to assist Sarah and her new family. André died of lung cancer long before the novel begins.

William Rainsferd – Son of Richard Rainsferd and Sarah Starzynski. When Julia first meets him, William is living in Lucca, Italy, with his wife, Francesca, and their daughters, Stefania and Giustina. William is described as being very handsome and sharing his mother's eyes, which are "turquoise and slanted." When she meets with William to discuss Sarah, Julia finds that William knows nothing about his mother's past. He believes Sarah's maiden name was Dufaure and that she grew up in Orléans. William becomes extremely angry, telling Julia to keep "the whole story" to herself and ordering her not to contact him again. Eventually, William turns up at Julia's apartment in Paris. Having discovered his mother's journal, along with the **key** to the secret cupboard in which his uncle Michel died, William is finally ready to hear what Julia has to say. By the end of the novel, William, like Julia, is divorced and living in New York City. The novel closes with the image of William and Julia clasping **hands** and crying together in a coffee shop.

Jules and Geneviève Dufaure – Sarah Starzynski's adoptive parents. An elderly couple living south of Paris in Orléans, Jules and Geneviève harbor Sarah and Rachel after Jules discovers them hiding in his shed. When Sarah tells them she intends to return to Paris in search of her brother, Jules and Geneviève insist on accompanying her. Thus, they are both present when Sarah discovers Michel's dead body. For the remainder of the war, Jules and Geneviève hide Sarah, and afterwards raise her as part of their family. They are both deeply grieved by Sarah's decision to move to the States and cut off contact with her friends in France.

Gaspard and Nicolas Dufaure – Jules and Geneviève's grandsons, and Sarah Starzynski's adoptive brothers. Julia conducts an interview with Gaspard, in which she learns of Sarah's marriage to Richard Rainsferd and in which Gaspard pushes her to articulate why Sarah's story is so important to her. By the end of the novel, Julia also meets Nicolas when she invites the Dufaure brothers to meet her father-in-law, Edouard, a man who is also part of Sarah's story. Gaspard and Nicolas remember Sarah as a quiet and serious girl. Growing up, all Gaspard and Nicolas knew about Sarah was that she had been adopted by Jules and Geneviève. Only after the death of their grandparents did the Dufaure brothers learn that Sarah was Jewish and her given name was Starzynski.

Rachel – A young girl whom Sarah Starzynski befriends in the Beaune-la-Rolande internment camp. Rachel is fierce and brave, and Sarah is initially put off by Rachel's intensity. Rachel proposes that she and Sarah try to escape the camp, and they do so successfully, but only because Sarah is able to persuade the policeman who apprehends them (the same policeman who

used to work in Sarah's neighborhood in Paris) to let them go. By the time Rachel and Sarah are discovered and cared for by Jules and Geneviève Dufaure, Rachel is extremely ill with dysentery. Rachel is ultimately captured and taken away by the Nazis. The sense of loss and helplessness she feels at Rachel's arrest prompts Sarah to return to Paris in search of her brother, Michel.

Joshua – Julia's boss at the magazine *Seine Scenes*. Originally from New York City, Joshua is exacting and intense. Joshua gives Julia the assignment to write about the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup. When Julia's article is eventually published, Joshua commends her on the attention the article gets but also points out that Julia neglected to interview any of the French policemen or bus drivers that participated in the roundup. Although he is confused and annoyed by Julia's focus on the Vel' d'Hiv' children, Joshua ultimately agrees to give Julia an advance on her paycheck, which allows her to take Zoë to Italy in search of William.

Bamber – Julia's coworker, a photojournalist. Bamber is British and has a good sense of humor. With Julia, Bamber visits the sites of the Drancy and Beaune-la-Rolande camps and photographs them for Julia's article. Bamber's Britishness makes him particularly keen at pointing out the failures of the French government to adequately acknowledge France's role in the roundup and the Holocaust more generally.

Hervé - Julia's good friend and former roommate. Hervé is in his forties and is one of Julia's closest friends, someone with whom she never feels like "l'Américaine" (i.e., the American). Normally Julia would confide in Hervé, but she chooses not to tell him how disturbed she feels about her Vel' d'Hiv' research or about the tension she is feeling with Bertrand.

Madame Royer – The concierge who sells out Sarah's family and then re-lets the flat to Mamé Tézac and family. Madame Royer is anti-Semitic, callous, and self-serving. She offers to help the French police locate Sarah's brother, and also claims that she knows of other Jewish families living in the neighboring building. Madame Royer is the only civilian character in the novel who demonstrates a hatred of Jews and actively collaborates with the French government.

The Policeman – The policeman from Sarah's neighborhood in Paris. She recognizes him as she is being deported on a bus from Paris, but when she waves he refuses to meet her eyes. Later, he shaves Sarah's head. When Sarah and Rachel attempt to escape from the internment camp where they are being held, this policeman catches them, but ultimately allows them to escape, telling them both to remove their **stars**.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Young Sarah – Julia and Bertrand's younger daughter, only two years old by the end of the book. Julia names her after Sarah Starzynski, as a tribute to "the little girl with the **yellow star**" who changed her life.

Sean Jarmond – Julia's father, a professor at MIT.

Colette – Bertrand's mother. Colette plays a minor role in the novel, but is shown to be similar to Laure in her coldness toward Julia and her attachment to the norms of traditional, reserved French society.

Laure – Bertrand's sister, blond and "angular." Laure is businesslike and cold. She sides with her mother, Colette, in strongly disapproving of Julia's research about the rue de Saintonge apartment.

Cécile – Bertrand's younger sister, red-haired and "voluptuous." Cécile runs the antique store started by her grandfather, André, and formerly run by her father, Edouard. She is more emotional than Laure, and is ultimately approving of Julia's decision to uncover the intertwined history of the Starzynskis and Tézacs.

Richard Rainsferd – Sarah Starzynski's husband. By the time Julia locates him, Richard is unconscious and bedridden with cancer. Little is revealed about Richard except that he is American and married Sarah in 1955.

Mara – Richard's second wife, originally from Italy. Mara is plump and kind, with "black" eyes. She raised William, Sarah Starzynski's son, from the time he was twelve, after Sarah died. After Julia mistakes Mara for Sarah, Mara gives Julia William's address in Italy so she can contact him.

Ornella – Daughter of Richard and Mara, and William's half sister. Ornella is in her mid-thirties and very friendly. She invites Julia in and introduces her to her mother.

Alain Dufaure – Son of Jules and Geneviève, father of Gaspard and Nicolas.

Henriette – Alain's wife, mother of Gaspard and Nicolas.

Nathalie – Gaspard Dufaure's granddaughter. In an effort to track down Sarah Starzynski, Julia traces the Dufaure family and comes into contact with Nathalie. Nathalie does not know anything about her grandfather's past, but is eager to learn, and helps facilitate Julia's interview with Gaspard.

Alessandra – Julia's coworker, a minor character. Alessandra is Italian. She is attractive and ambitious. Julia admits to not liking Alessandra very much, finding her self-important.

Antoine – Bertrand's business partner in an architectural form. Antoine is helping to coordinate the renovation of the rue de Saintonge apartment.

Amélie – Bertrand's mistress. Amélie is French and seems to Julia "the image of Parisian perfection." At the end of the novel, Bertrand has moved back in with Amélie.

Franck Lévy – Head of a French association that helps Jewish people track their families' histories following the Holocaust. Lévy is in his sixties, dignified and serious. He helps Julia track the fates of the Starzynskis, on the condition that she will not

publish the information in her magazine.

Christophe - Julia's good friend and former roommate. Christophe and Hervé are still roommates and often host dinner parties. Together, Julia refers to them as "the boys."

Guillaume – Friend of Hervé and Christophe. Guillaume's grandmother was the only member of his family to survive the Holocaust, specifically the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup. Julia meets Guillaume at a dinner party hosted by Hervé and Christophe. Guillaume is supportive of Julia's research.

Isabelle – One of Julia's closest French friends. Julia and Isabelle's daughters are in a ballet class together. Isabelle is incredibly supportive of Julia's difficulties in getting pregnant and in her marital troubles with Bertrand.

Armelle – Sarah's best friend. Armelle is also Jewish, but she and her family escaped Paris before the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup. Armelle is clever, mischievous, and brave. Her bravery makes her a kind of role model for Sarah, even though Armelle herself never appears in the novel.

Léon – Sarah's childhood schoolmate. Léon is Jewish and is imprisoned in the Vélodrome along with the Starzynskis. He asks Sarah to escape with him, but she declines. Léon manages to escape successfully.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

REMEMBRANCE AND HISTORY

The central event of *Sarah's Key* is the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup, which was a mass arrest of Parisian Jews conducted by the French police on July 16, 1942. The interwoven plots of the novel track the lives of Sarah Starzynski, a ten-tear-old arrested with her parents in that roundup, and Julia Jarmond, an American expat working as a journalist in Paris in 2002. Although many of the characters in the novel struggle with confronting the horrors of the past, de Rosnay shows the vital importance of remembering both private and public histories. While painful, remembering the past can ultimately allow for healing and establish a sense of meaning that comes from a deepened connection to the collective human experience.

When Julia is assigned to write an article on the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup for an American magazine, she finds herself having to directly confront the reluctance of French society to acknowledge France's role in the Holocaust. As Julia discovers, the first time the French government openly acknowledged France's role in the murder of its Jewish citizens was in 1995. This reluctance to come to terms with the past seems to pervade French society; Julia's French husband, Bertrand, insists that no one will read an article on the Vel' d'Hiv' because "nobody cares anymore" and "nobody remembers. Write about something else," he says. Julia struggles to find not only books about the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup, but also people who are willing to be interviewed about the subject.

Yet de Rosnay argues that, regardless of people's willingness to remember it, history makes itself present in physical spaces. Julia finds that she can't imagine living in the apartment once occupied by the Starzynskis, where Michel Starzynski, Sarah's younger brother, died in a cupboard after Sarah hid him there on the night of the mass arrest. While other characters are not so sensitive to the past as Julia, de Rosnay shows that past traumas are nevertheless embedded in physical spaces. This can be seen when Julia and a colleague visit Drancy. Once the site of an internment camp from which Jews were deported to the gas chambers at Auschwitz, Drancy now houses four hundred families in cheap apartments. Julia is struck by the new name of the apartment building: Cité de la Muette, City of the Mute. She interprets the name as a symbol of French people's unwillingness to deal with their national past. She experiences this same frustration at Beaune-la-Rolande, the site of the camp where Sarah was held prisoner, and where a children's daycare now stands.

Julia remains determined in her goal of uncovering the history of the Starzynskis and their connection to her in-laws, the Tézacs. She eventually succeeds in forcing the Tézac family to wrestle with their family's past, and she also shares what she has learned with Sarah Starzynski's son, William Rainsferd. But these acknowledgments of history come at a cost. While ultimately cathartic, Julia's revelations strain her relationship with her husband's family, and William also has a negative reaction to learning about his mother's life as a Holocaust survivor, abruptly cutting off communication with Julia for months and ordering her not to contact him. William's reaction reflects the advice of Julia's older sister, Charla, who responds to Julia's passionate declaration, "I want to make sure [William] knows nobody has forgotten what happened," with the statement, "Maybe he doesn't want to be reminded."

Remembrance is thus a fraught act. De Rosnay is clear that history persists in physical spaces, and that ignoring history does a disservice to not only past generations, but also to the current one. After all, Julia ends up leading a much richer life as a result of learning Sarah Starzynski's story. She leaves her toxic marriage, remains strong in her decision not to terminate her pregnancy, and possibly, the novel suggests, finds love with William Rainsferd. But her work and personal life are affected by the demanding task of remembrance, which becomes an obsession for Julia. The novel argues, then, that blind devotion to uncovering and remembering the past can be just as

emotionally damaging as denying the past. The various characters struggle, in *Sarah's Key*, to find balance: to be courageous enough to acknowledge past horrors, but not to allow these horrors to swallow one's life in the present moment. None of the characters, even Julia, gets this balance quite right, but de Rosnay shows that striving for this balance is more worthwhile than ignoring historical traumas altogether.

THE POWER OF SILENCE

De Rosnay's novel is filled with different kinds of silence. In Julia's story, silence is an indicator of the status of her relationships. Strained silence reveals the tension in Julia's relationship to her husband and his family—but the comfortable silence Julia experiences with William is one of the first signs that these two characters might have a meaningful bond. Silence also has contrasting meanings in Sarah's storyline, as silence can represent weakness and complicity, or it can be mobilized as an act of heroic defiance. While silence has no single meaning in the novel, de Rosnay is clear about the fact that silence is never neutral. Silence may be the absence of sound, but de Rosnay shows that it is clearly *not* the absence of emotion or power.

For Julia, silence becomes a litmus test in her relationships with men. She does not discuss her research on the Vel' d'Hiv' children with Bertrand, nor does she confront him about her suspicion (which is proved correct) that he is still involved with his former mistress, Amélie. A doctor is the person who informs Bertrand that Julia has decided against having an abortion, rather than Julia herself telling her husband, and by the end of the novel, Bertrand has revealed that he is depressed, making his mental health another important issue which has been swallowed up by silence. This kind of strained silence is contrasted with the uniquely comfortable silence Julia experiences with William, as she feels that they somehow both know each other. Silence, for Julia, thus becomes an external manifestation of her innermost emotions.

In Sarah's story, silence is far more ambiguous. While always complicated, silence acts in three distinct ways. When Sarah watches with a sense of confusion and betrayal as her neighbors silently observe her family's arrest, silence is presented as a marker of passivity and complicity. Sarah also interprets her mother's silence in the face of the French police as a sign of helplessness. Yet de Rosnay shows that despite their silence, none of these people is evil. One of Sarah's neighbors who is silent on the night of the roundup is a music teacher, who would formerly play French and Polish songs for Sarah's family across their shared courtyard. While he calls out once to the police, saying, "You can't do this!," he ultimately falls silent, even as Sarah's mother breaks down in sobs. And although Sarah's mother, Rywka, does not seem brave to Sarah, de Rosnay compassionately portrays her as a woman paralyzed by grief—after all, as a grown woman Rywka realizes that Sarah's decision to lock Michel in the cupboard will ultimately kill him long before Sarah has this realization herself. Thus, even when functioning as a means of complicity, silence is shown to be neither simply lazy nor morally bankrupt—but rather a symptom of dread, grief, and paralysis.

A second function of silence is as a misguided act of compassion. Even when used with good intent, silence and secrecy lead to suffering in the novel. This is clear in the case of the Tézacs. Although Mamé is not at home when Sarah returns to the rue de Saintonge apartment, both André and a young Edouard witness Sarah's discovery of her brother's dead body. André demands that Edouard keep the discovery a secret from his mother, and Edouard lives with this painful secret for sixty years, even as it devastates his relationship with his father. Furthermore, by the end of the novel, Edouard discovers that his mother knew about Sarah all along, despite his father's insistence on secrecy. If the family had openly discussed Michel's death and Sarah's return, they could have spared themselves sixty years of emotional pain. Although André uses silence (in the form of secrecy) in an attempt to shield his family from emotional pain, the novel shows clearly that this use of secrecy is misguided and ultimately further compounds his family's suffering. This is true in Sarah's story as well: Sarah's parents deliberately conceal from her the details of the arrests that preceded the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup. Imprisoned in the Vélodrome, Sarah wonders, "If they had told her, if they had told her everything they knew, wouldn't that have made today easier?" The rhetorical nature of this question suggests, on one level, that nothing could have made the horror of the Holocaust more bearable or comprehensible. However, the way de Rosnay writes this moment also strongly implies that Sarah's parents miscalculated in keeping so much from her, and that keeping fewer secrets could have somehow better prepared their daughter for the days ahead.

The final function of silence in Sarah's story is as an act of deliberate resistance to authority. This kind of silence is most clearly demonstrated by Sarah herself, who silently stares down many authority figures, including the French Nazi sympathizer—her former neighborhood policeman—who shaves her head in the internment camp. Rather than using silence as a way to avoid action or confrontation, Sarah uses silence to confront power, staring at the policeman with all the bitterness she can conjure. This is the most active form silence takes on in the novel, yet de Rosnay complicates this use of silence as well. Although Sarah is resisting in the best way she can, the novel suggests that silence as a response to oppression is a safe option, and one that is not fully honest. This is most clearly seen in the case of a woman in the Vel' d'Hiv' who gives birth to a stillborn baby and wails over the baby for an entire night. "No one could silence her," the narrator says. Even in her grief, this woman is able to exert some kind of agency by voicing her pain. De Rosnay seems to suggest that this woman's form

of resistance is more powerful than Sarah's silent form, which causes her to internalize hatred and become embittered. Silence, then, is never a neutral phenomenon. Rather, the novel shows, silence is imbued with power, but it functions ambiguously.

GUILT

Guilt is perhaps the most pervasive emotion in the novel. Almost immediately after leaving her brother behind, Sarah begins to worry that she is at fault, and ultimately she carries this feeling with her for the remainder of her life. The book suggests that her combined survivor's guilt after losing her family in the camps and her guilt over leaving her brother in the cupboard directly contribute to her decision to end her own life. Although her case is far less extreme, Julia is also motivated by a powerful sense of guilt (as well as a desire to prove herself to her husband's family) when pursuing her research on the Starzynski family. While deliberately refusing to cast judgment on Sarah and her death, de Rosnay argues that guilt is a destructive emotion, an outsized feeling of culpability which ultimately devastates rather than redeems.

The question of guilt exists on multiple levels within the novel. At the largest scale, the novel examines France's role in the Holocaust. De Rosnay shows how fear of admission of guilt leads French society at large to avoid acknowledging their country's past actions and their complicity in the murder of Jews during the Holocaust. This attempt at avoiding discomfort shows up most obviously in Bertrand's reaction to Julia's research. When Julia asks Bertrand if he knows the history of his family's apartment (which formerly belonged to the Starzynskis) he replies with a laugh, "I didn't know, [my family] never told me, but it still doesn't bother me. I'm sure a lot of Parisians moved into empty apartments in July of '42, after the roundup. Surely that doesn't make my family collaborationists, does it?" De Rosnay depicts this abdication of responsibility as crass and disrespectful. Furthermore, she shows that Bertrand *still* feels (or at least comes across as) uncomfortable, regardless of his attempt to avoid this very feeling.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is Julia, who shoulders an inordinate sense of responsibility for France's role in the Holocaust, despite not even being French. When Sarah's adoptive brother, Gaspard Dufaure, asks Julia why she is so committed to learning Sarah's story, Julia replies that she wants Sarah to know she's "sorry." Gaspard prods her, saying that, as an American, Julia has nothing to feel sorry for, pointing out that the Americans liberated France in 1944. Julia responds by clarifying that she is "sorry for not knowing. Sorry for being forty-five years old and not knowing." While researching Sarah, Julia has trouble sleeping, she almost loses her pregnancy, and she becomes depressed. By showing the extreme toll that this obsession with Sarah takes on Julia, de Rosnay shows that Julia is overcompensating, and that her sense of guilt has crossed a line into self-destructive behavior. It is clear that Julia's noble desire to learn about and honor the Starzynskis' story has mutated, taking on an unhealthy dimension. De Rosnay implies that a healthier path would be for French society to begin to collectively acknowledge the past and accept responsibility for their country's role in the Holocaust. As an example, de Rosnay depicts in detail the public commemoration ceremony of the Vel' d'Hiv roundup, which includes a moving speech by the prime minister. Julia, who is in attendance, notes that people loudly applaud the speech, and that they cry and hug one another afterwards. Without explicitly stating it, de Rosnay thus suggests that such events aid healing by allowing people to demonstrate accountability. The commemoration is a serious and humble acceptance of responsibility, but not an over-acceptance that might lead to excessive and destructive guilt.

Sarah's guilt is more complicated than that of Julia's story, and de Rosnay thus treats it with an appropriate amount of nuance. Although Sarah was the person to lock her brother into the cupboard, she was also, as de Rosnay shows, young and incredibly naïve and did not understand the dire stakes of the arrest that occurred that night. Sarah also twice risks her own life—to escape from Beaune-la-Rolande, and to return to occupied Paris—in an effort to save her brother. By establishing these facts, de Rosnay suggests that Sarah's extreme sense of guilt over Michel's death is perhaps excessive. However, despite her compassion for Sarah, de Rosnay shows that Sarah is unable to show compassion to herself. Thus, while de Rosnay uses Sarah's story to underscore the way that guilt can acquire a life of its own and ultimately destroy the person who harbors it, she also clearly implies that, as a Holocaust survivor, Sarah's guilt is her own and that non-survivors are not in a position to cast judgment on how Sarah processes the complicated emotions that come with surviving such horrific events.

The novel presents accountability as a more sustainable option than Julia's extreme sense of guilt, on the one hand, and a more ethical option than Bertrand's willful amnesia on the other. De Rosnay fills the novel with specific details that suggest a deeper sense of responsibility is needed in French society. These details include plaques that reference only "Hitlerian barbarity" without acknowledging the role of French people in that very barbarity, and the fact that neither of Julia's former roommates, both of whom are French, know that the Vel' d'Hiv' was led by the French rather than the Germans. However, de Rosnay also shows that accepting too much responsibility, in the form of guilt, is more destructive than productive, demonstrating that claiming full responsibility and abjuring all responsibility are equally ineffective ways of confronting historical trauma and wrongdoing.

IDENTITY

A fraught concept in any context, the question of identity becomes extremely complex in this novel due to the historical context of the Holocaust. In the eyes of the Nazis and their collaborators, Sarah is nothing more than a Jew, which condemns her to death. However, de Rosnay shows that such a simple label cannot encompass Sarah's complexity as an individual, let alone encapsulate an enormous and diverse group. For one, Sarah is ethnically Jewish, but not religious (meaning that she did not grow up in a family that practiced Judaism). Furthermore, though her parents are from Poland, Sarah was born and raised in France. The soldiers' insistence that Sarah does not belong in France because she is Jewish therefore seems doubly absurd, since Sarah certainly sees herself more as French than as Jewish. This complexity suggests that any attempt to reduce a group or individual to a single aspect of their identity is impossible, unjust, and absurd.

Julia's plotline confirms this point, though with much lower stakes. The Tézacs consistently refer to Julia not just as American, but as *the* American (*l'Américaine*), reducing her to the single identity marker of her nation of origin. However, when Julia moves to New York City after splitting from Bertrand late in the novel, she finds herself wryly identifying as a "Frenchy" (the nickname her daughter, Zoë, gets teased with at her new school). De Rosnay uses Julia's consistent sense of being an outsider to show that identity often cannot be explained through a binary framework in which someone either "is" something or isn't. The novel suggests that perhaps a more truthful and humane way of thinking about identity is to consider the accumulated lived experiences that make up a person's past.

Although de Rosnay shows that Sarah and Julia both desire to be viewed compassionately and humanely in the context of their complex lives, she also explores characters' desires *not* to be viewed in the context of their past. While de Rosnay does not explicitly suggest that a person cannot overcome her past, she shows that trying to erase one's past is not a viable way of re-forging one's identity. This is made clear in Sarah's case, as her choice to not tell her husband or son that she is the sole Holocaust survivor of her immediate family does not free her to live life as an entirely new person. Instead, it only isolates her and compounds her grief. Sarah's identity is part and parcel with her past experiences. Trying to divorce oneself from one's past is not only impossible, but also incredibly destructive. De Rosnay thus shows that identity is far too complex to be reduced to discrete labels, or one facet of a person's being. Furthermore, identity is rooted more firmly in experiences than in any single characteristic. William Rainsferd attests to this when he says of Sarah, "I didn't know who my mother was [...] I knew what she looked like, I knew her face, her smile, but nothing about her inner life."

BRAVERY

Like many stories of the Holocaust, *Sarah's Key* explores the nature of bravery. De Rosnay presents a complex definition of bravery, demonstrating that the bravest acts are often the quietest, rather than the grandest. De Rosnay refuses to romanticize bravery and instead complicates the concept by showing that bravery need not be defined by its ability to effect change. On the contrary, brave acts can be simply symbolic, ineffective, or even personally devastating or destructive.

Although de Rosnay's definition of bravery is expansive, some characters in the story demonstrate clear, conventional bravery. In defiance of Nazi-aligned French authority, for example, Jules and Geneviève harbor Sarah and her friend Rachel, who have themselves undertaken a brave escape from Beaune-la-Rolande. However, de Rosnay is deliberate in showing that these examples do not encompass the full range of what may constitute a brave act. For example, de Rosnay depicts Sarah's poise as a form of bravery, carefully outlining how Sarah reacts with a sense of grace beyond her years to various Nazi authorities. Julia's story also corroborates de Rosnay's notion that acts of bravery often play out in silence, or in seemingly everyday affairs. Julia, whose charming-but-toxic husband wants her to terminate her unexpected pregnancy, remains true to her desire to have a second child, proving that she's willing to bravely stand up for herself even if it means destroying her marriage. Another example of Julia's quiet bravery is her dogged commitment to uncovering the Starzynskis' story, despite the friction she knows it will cause in both her nuclear and extended family. She opposes the cultural norm of silence about the Holocaust, demonstrating that bravery can be enacted in times of peace just as in extraordinary historical circumstances.

Although these acts are clearly brave, de Rosnay refuses to allow readers to understand them as being straightforwardly positive. For instance, sometimes bravery fails. Rachel manages to escape from Beaune-la-Rolande with Sarah, but she is ultimately captured by the Nazis—a sobering turn of events that reminds readers that bravery does not ensure a good outcome. In addition, de Rosnay shows that courage sometimes stems from horror, thereby complicating conventional notions about the value of courage. Sarah's poise allows her to be brave, but her maturity is a direct consequence of the ways in which she was deprived of a normal childhood and subjected to immense trauma by the circumstances of the war. Although her courage and bravery are badges of honor, it would certainly have been preferable that she never would have had to exhibit such courage in the first place, and that she never would have been robbed of a childhood. The novel thus suggests that courage and pain are inextricably linked.

Sarah's brother Michel's childish courage during the roundup shows that bravery can also be foolish. When the French police

arrive at the Starzynski home, Sarah tries to convince Michel to come with the rest of the family, but he refuses, running instead to the secret cupboard. "I'm not afraid," he tells Sarah. "You lock me in. They won't get me." Sarah complies, and Michel is trapped there until he dies. Michel thus deeply complicates the idea of bravery as a heroic—or even a tragically heroic—quality. Sarah regrets her decision to enable Michel's act of resistance, and her survival coupled with Michel's death raises the possibility that bravery is not always the "right" choice, nor is it always linked to wisdom or triumph.

THE LIMITS OF LOVE

The novel presents familial love as a potential antidote to the various sufferings of its characters. Both Julia and Sarah feel strongly bonded to their siblings, yet de Rosnay stops short of depicting love of any kind as a means of redemption or cure for trauma. Instead, she repeatedly points to the limits of love as a healing force, arguing that there are wounds that no force, even one as powerful as love, can mend.

Biological and adoptive siblings play a major role in both plots of the novel. Sarah's relationship with her little brother, Michel, is the most prominent of these relationships, but Julia's relationship with her sister, Charla, is also significant, and even Bertrand, a deeply unsympathetic character, has a relationship with his two sisters, making him slightly more relatable. De Rosnay depicts these sibling relationships as imbuing the characters' lives with deep meaning, even suggesting that, through her research, Julia is able to forge a sort of sisterly bond with Sarah. Just as Sarah carries Michel's memory "as [she] would a child," Julia comes to carry Sarah's "story, her suffering," with her in her daily life. Familial love, particularly between siblings, anchors the characters in times of distress.

De Rosany portrays love, then, as a sustaining force—but, through Sarah's story, she highlights the fact that love is not fully redemptive. Although in her life after the camps she is surrounded by a loving adoptive family (as well as by her own husband and son), Sarah is so devastated by the trauma she has experienced that she is consumed by grief and ultimately commits suicide. Similarly, de Rosnay underscores the notion that love cannot save people in the storyline of Julia and William, who seem to have a possible romantic future together. The novel ends with the image of Julia and William finally meeting eyes after each of them cries over Sarah's tragic story and its significance to them. This suggests that the processing of pain is ultimately an individual act, though it's one that can be eased by supportive, loving relationships.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE YELLOW STAR

Like other Jewish families living during the Holocaust, Sarah Starzynski and her parents are forced to wear yellow stars on their clothing. (At four years old Michel is too young to wear a star.) Initially Sarah doesn't like that she must wear a star but her mother, Rywka, tells her she should wear it with pride. After escaping from the internment camp at Beaune-la-Rolande, Sarah and her friend Rachel realize they must remove their stars if they do not want people to recognize them as escapees. Sarah has trouble ripping her star off her clothes because her mother has sewed it on so tightly, but she is finally able to remove it and comments on how "small" it looks. Rachel then deems the stars "dead" and buries them, which makes Sarah laugh. Immediately, Sarah feels guilty for laughing, remembering her mother's injunction to wear the star with pride, but she puts the thought out of her mind. However, the star eventually plays a role in Julia's plot, when seeing a photo of his mother wearing the yellow star is the only thing that convinces William Rainsferd that Julia is telling the truth. Discovering the star and **the key** among his mother's things then prompts William to seek Julia out again so he can learn the full story about his mother. The yellow star is thus a multilayered symbol. On a large scale, it represents the evil of the Nazi regime, which ordered and carried out the murder of millions of people based solely on one aspect of their identity. Sarah's dislike for the star shows how she resists the narrowing of her identity. However, the star simultaneously represents the Starzynskis' pride in their Jewish heritage and their love for one another. Michel cries when his mother tells him he does not have to wear a star, and Sarah feels a sense of shame in shedding her star. In some ways the star is able to transcend its origins as a symbol of discrimination and evil. Because of Rywka's treatment of the star—and its history as a symbol of the Jewish faith—it becomes a symbol that is also imbued with love. However, the fact that Sarah and Rachel bury the star underscores the fact that the star is not a symbol that can be fully reclaimed and redefined—at least not in their brief lifetimes.

THE KEY

On the night of the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup, Sarah locks Michel into the secret cupboard in their bedroom to hide him from the French police. Not understanding the stakes of the roundup, Sarah vows to return for her brother. She pockets the key and keeps it with her not just for the remainder of the war, but for the rest of her life. The key represents not only Sarah's deep love for her brother but also her debilitating grief over his death. In her journal, Sarah writes that the key is the only physical reminder she has of her brother

aside from his grave. On a larger scale, the key also illustrates the way in which physical objects serve as vessels for history. Julia articulates this when she sees the key for the first time. William brings it with him to Julia's apartment, and later, as she translates Sarah's journal for William, Julia notes, "The brass key lay between us on the table, a silent witness of the past, of Michel's death." The key thus illustrates how history is inscribed not only in places or in people's stories, but also in everyday objects.

HANDS

As one might expect, hands and handholding represent intimacy and connection in *Sarah's Key*. Although the symbolism here is simple, this image is moving given the intense loneliness and longing for connection that both Sarah and Julia experience. Sarah is struggling to survive the horrifying circumstances of the Holocaust, and holding hands with people like Armelle, Rachel, and her mother, Rywka, gives Sarah a feeling of solidarity and comfort. Furthermore, the gesture of extending a hand to someone speaks to Sarah's deep-held hope that people are still good. This can be seen in the moment after the French policeman helps Sarah and Rachel escape from Beaune-la-Rolande: before turning to run, Sarah wishes she could "hold her hand out to him." Handholding also represents deep connection in Julia's story. The most sensual moment of the novel occurs not between Julia and Bertrand (her husband), but between Julia and William. At the end of the novel, when Julia tells William she has named her new daughter after his mother, both William and Julia begin to cry. Julia closes her eyes and holds William's hand against her cheek even as it "grow[s] wet with her tears." Handholding thus becomes a gesture of vulnerability and shared emotion, reflecting the comfort and encouragement that comes from physically and emotionally connecting with other people.

DUST

Dust pervades the novel. Sarah and her parents spend days imprisoned in the stinking heat of the Vélodrome d'Hiver, where "dry, feathery dust" threatens to choke Sarah. After being transported out of Paris to Beaune-la-Rolande, Sarah and the other Jewish families with her are forced to make "an endless, dusty walk from the little train station, through a small town, where more people had stared and pointed." On this level, dust comes to represent the oppression of French Jews during World War Two. Dust also takes on a more figurative connotation, through Julia's story. When she finds herself almost compulsively ruminating on Sarah's fate, Julia stops to remind herself: "She couldn't be alive. She had disappeared off the face of the earth, with the rest of the Vel' d'Hiv' children. She had never come back from Auschwitz. She was a handful of dust." In this regard, dust symbolizes the persistence of history: even as she convinces herself that Sarah is long dead, her body reduced to dust, Julia cannot help but care about her and continue to strive to learn her story. This meaning of dust also connects to the way dust symbolizes the oppression of French Jews, as Nazis gassed Jews in concentration camps and then burned their bodies, thus literally reducing them to ash.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the St. Martin's Press edition of *Sarah's Key* published in 2008.

Chapter 1 Quotes

"The mother pulled her daughter close to her. The girl could feel the woman's heart beating through her dressing gown. She wanted to push her mother away. She wanted her mother to stand up straight and look at the men boldly, to stop cowering, to prevent her heart from beating like that, like a frightened animal's. She wanted her mother to be brave.

Related Characters: Sarah "Sirka" Starzynski (speaker), Rywka Starzynski

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

The French police appear at the Starzynskis' door in the middle of the night, so it is understandable that Rywka—who understands her family's arrest in the broader political context of the War—would be terrified. However, Sarah has a limited understanding of what is going on, believing that the French police would never harm a French family like hers. This quotation thus shows Sarah's childish naïveté and her limited understanding of what it means to be brave. Here at the very beginning of the novel, Sarah conceives of bravery as outspoken and active, and she therefore interprets her mother's passivity as weakness. As Sarah grows over the course of the novel, she will begin to understand her mother more and to expand her idea of bravery to include quieter acts of resistance.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ Why did Bertrand take such pleasure in making me out to be the snide, prejudiced American, ever critical of the French? And why did I just stand there and let him get away with it? It had been funny, at one point. In the beginning of our marriage, it had been a classic joke, the kind that made both our American and French friends roar with laughter. In the beginning.

Related Characters: Julia Jarmond (speaker), Bertrand Tézac

Related Themes:

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation immediately establishes the tension in Julia and Bertrand's marriage. Much of the conflict between these two characters springs from the fact that Bertrand is judgmental of Julia's identity as American. This quotation also shows that Julia is at a crossroads: Bertrand's teasing didn't used to bother her, but now it does. The fact that she does not confront Bertrand about how uncomfortable he is making her suggests that Julia doesn't trust her husband to take her seriously. Silence, in the form of a lack of communication, will continue to trouble Julia and Bertrand's relationship over the course of the novel, as will Julia's quest to determine what her "outsider" status as an American means to her.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ Her father looked down at her. He said her name again, very softly. His eyes were still wet, his eyelashes spiked with tears. He put his hand on the back of her neck.
"Be brave, my sweet love. Be brave, as brave as you can."
She could not cry. Her fear was so great it seemed to engulf everything else, it seemed to suck up every single emotion within her, like a monstrous, powerful vacuum.

Related Characters: Wladyslaw Starzynski (speaker), Sarah "Sirka" Starzynski

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

Sarah's father gives her this advice as the Starzynski family huddles in a garage in the early hours of the morning, awaiting the orders of the French police who have just arrested them. Sarah has just shown her father the key and explained to him that she has left her younger brother locked in the secret cupboard at the Starzynskis' apartment. Wladyslaw's horrified reaction, along with his straightforward advice, shows that he is aware of the terrible consequences of Sarah's decision, even though she is not. Her father's advice will continue to motivate Sarah throughout her journey, as she tries to act in ways that would make her father proud. The fact that Wladyslaw doesn't explain what he means when he uses the term "brave" means that Sarah is left to figure out her own definition of bravery over the course of her story—an enormous task for a ten-year-old, and one that shows the extreme toll that traumatic events can take on a person's development.

❝ Through the bus's dusty pane, she recognized one of them, the young red-haired one who had often helped her cross the street on her way home from school. She tapped on the glass to attract his attention. When his eyes locked onto hers, he quickly looked away. He seemed embarrassed, almost annoyed. She wondered why.

Related Characters: Sarah "Sirka" Starzynski (speaker), The Policeman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

As Sarah and her family are loaded onto city buses to be transported from the garage to the Vélodrome, Sarah notices her neighborhood policeman and has this interaction with him. This is an important moment of foreshadowing, because Sarah will encounter this policeman two more times, while she is a prisoner at the Beaune-la-Rolande camp. The policeman's inability to meet her eyes confuses Sarah, but to the reader it clearly suggests his sense of guilt and shame. This quotation also touches up on the theme of identity. By greeting the policeman, Sarah claims a kind of kinship with him not only as a friendly neighborhood face but also as a fellow French person. The policeman, however, seems to be viewing Sarah solely as Jewish, and therefore as someone who must be excluded from French society. Though she has not yet begun to wrestle with these questions of identity herself,

Sarah will soon begin to think deeply about what her Jewish identity means to others and to her, and to how these definitions differ.

Chapter 11 Quotes

But she had seen. She knew what it was. A young woman, her mother's age, and a small child. The woman had jumped, her child held close, from the highest railing.
From where the girl sat, she could see the dislocated body of the woman, the bloody skull of the child, sliced open like a ripe tomato.
The girl bent her head and cried.

Related Characters: Sarah "Sirka" Starzynski (speaker), Wladyslaw Starzynski

Related Themes:

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

While imprisoned in the Vel' d'Hiv', Sarah silently watches another prisoner kill herself and her child, despite her father's attempts to cover her eyes. This is a devastating moment, both for Sarah and for the reader. It raises complicated questions about the nature of a mother's love. The mother in this scene kills her baby to protect it from being killed in a concentration camp, and also, presumably, to spare herself the devastation of being separated from her child. This raises the question of whether wanting to die on her own terms, along with her child, makes this mother's decision a selfish one or a selfless one. Although the novel does not provide a clear answer to this question, the description of this young woman's death is a compassionate one, which shows how complicated it is to make decisions about a loved one—a feeling to which Sarah herself can certainly relate. This woman's suicide also contrasts with Rywka's passivity throughout the remainder of the novel. It also subtly foreshadows Sarah's own suicide.

Chapter 13 Quotes

As she looked at Eva and her mother, the girl wondered if her parents had been right to protect her from everything, if they had been right to keep disturbing, bad news away fro her. If they had been right not to explain why so many things had changed from them since the beginning of the war. Like when Eva's husband never came back last year. He had disappeared. Where? Nobody would tell her. Nobody would explain. She hated being treated like a baby. She hated the voices being lowered when she entered the room.

If they had told her, if they had told her everything they knew, wouldn't that have made today easier?

Related Characters: Sarah "Sirka" Starzynski (speaker), Wladyslaw Starzynski, Rywka Starzynski

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

This episode occurs in the Vel' d'Hiv' when Sarah observes her mother talking to another Polish woman, named Eva, whose husband was arrested before the roundup, during one of the arrests that targeted only men. Sarah's sense of betrayal here is important because it shows an evolution in her character. She is suddenly mature enough to critically wonder whether her parents have made the right decision. This quotation is also significant because it shows a character explicitly reflecting on the way that silence can have different consequences than intended. Clearly, Sarah's parents intended to protect her by shielding her from the frightening events taking place. However, this moment shows how, even when well-intentioned, silence can have devastating effects on the people we love. Finally, this is a powerful quotation because it leaves the reader to wonder whether there could be any way of preparing mentally for such a terrible reality that may have made it less traumatizing for Sarah.

Chapter 15 Quotes

She couldn't bear the idea of him waiting in the dark. He must be hungry, thirsty. His water had probably run out. And the battery on the flashlight. But anything was better than here, she thought. Anything was better than this hell, the stink, the heat, the dust, the people screaming, the people dying.

Related Characters: Sarah "Sirka" Starzynski (speaker), Michel Starzynski

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

While imprisoned in the Vel' d'Hiv', Sarah thinks about her brother, whom she has left locked in the cupboard. This quotation is significant because it demonstrates Sarah's early feelings of guilt over having left her brother behind, while also showing her conviction that she did the right thing by sparing her brother from the horror she is now experiencing. This quotation thus illustrates the complexity of Sarah's decision to leave her brother behind. Though she never again shows herself the compassion she does here, this quotation suggests the possibility that Sarah need not feel wholly guilty about her choice—since perhaps leaving Michel behind was, ultimately, a merciful act. This quotation is important, then, for the way it shows the ambiguities of Sarah's action—even though, after discovering Michel's body, she is never able to see those ambiguities again.

Chapter 19 Quotes

The one who smelled a warm, comforting, motherly smell: delicious cooking, fresh soap, clean linen. The one with the infectious laugh. The one who said that even if there was a war, they'd pull through, because they were a strong, good family, a family full of love.

That woman had little by little disappeared. She had become gaunt, and pale, and she never smiled or laughed. She smelled rank, bitter. Her hair had become brittle and dry, streaked with gray.

The girl felt like her mother was already dead.

Related Characters: Sarah "Sirka" Starzynski (speaker), Rywka Starzynski

Related Themes:

Page Number: 66

Explanation and Analysis

Her first night at Beaune-la-Rolande, Sarah returns from the latrine to find her mother nearly unrecognizable. This quotation shows the devastating toll that suffering has taken on Rywka, whose response has been to shut down emotionally. In a subtle way, Rywka's silence foreshadows the silent, serious woman that Sarah will become. At this point in the novel, Rywka knows her son is lost to her (and her husband has also been taken away), even though Sarah is not yet fully conscious of Michel's death. This quotation is also important because it contextualizes Sarah's relatively mild reaction when her mother is actually taken away from her by showing that Sarah has already effectively experienced the loss of the mother she loves. Finally, this moment is important because it shows how, even though Rywka seems to be using silence as a coping or self-soothing mechanism, her decision has a negative impact on her daughter.

Chapter 21 Quotes

In that sheltered, gentle life that seemed far away, the girl would have believed her mother. She used to believe everything her mother said. But in this harsh new world, the girl felt she had grown up. She felt older than her mother. She knew the other women were saying the truth. She knew the rumors were true. She did not know how to explain this to her mother. Her mother had become like a child.

Related Characters: Sarah "Sirka" Starzynski (speaker), Rywka Starzynski

Related Themes:

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation occurs shortly after Sarah and her mother overhear a rumor that the camp officials are planning to separate the mothers and children. Rywka adamantly denies the rumor, but Sarah realizes it must be true. This quotation poignantly shows the role reversal that has occurred in Sarah's relationship to her mother. The trauma they have experienced has reduced Rywka to the status of a naïve child, and forced Sarah to take on the role of the wise adult. The fact that Sarah is unable to make her mother understand the truth emphasizes the limits of the power of Sarah's love for her mother at the same time that it suggests that Sarah might now have a greater understanding for how her mother struggled to explain to her the terrifying events that preceded the family's arrest.

Chapter 22 Quotes

"Please don't worry about it," I said. "I don't use my married name."
"It's an American thing," said Mamé. "Miss Jarmond is American."
"Yes, I had noticed that," said Véronique, in better spirits.
Noticed what? I felt like asking. My accent, my clothes, my shoes?

Related Characters: Julia Jarmond (speaker), Marcelle Tézac, aka Mamé

Related Themes:

Page Number: 74

Explanation and Analysis

During a visit to Mamé's nursing home, Julia gets called Madame Tézac by a nurse named Véronique. Mamé corrects the nurse, telling her that Julia hates being called Mrs. Tézac and should be addressed as Miss Jarmond. The nurse's reaction makes Julia self-conscious. She wonders if her Americanness is physically obvious, in a way that parallels Sarah's confusion over whether Jewishness is a quality that can be physically observed. This quotation shows that Julia's feeling of being an outsider makes her feel unique but also causes her pain. It also reveals how narrowly the French define their community, since even though Julia has lived in France for twenty-five years and speaks the language fluently, "real" French people still comment on her accent. This suggests that questions of who "belongs" in France have morphed, rather than disappeared, since Sarah lived in Paris in the 1940s. Finally, this quotation shows the bond that Julia shares with Mamé, the only member of her husband's family who welcomed her from the outset.

Chapter 23 Quotes

She held his gaze, not glancing down once. His eyes were a strange, yellowish color, like gold. His face was red with embarrassment, and she thought she felt him tremble. She said nothing, staring at him with all the contempt she could muster. He could only look back at her, motionless. The girl smiled, a bitter smile for a child of ten, and brushed off his heavy hands.

Related Characters: Sarah "Sirka" Starzynski (speaker), The Policeman

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 81-82

Explanation and Analysis

This is a rare instance in the novel where hands are depicted in a negative capacity. Normally, hands (and handholding) function as a symbol of connection and strength, but here the officer's "heavy hands" represent the oppression under which Sarah is struggling to survive. This is an important moment because it illustrates how Sarah's understanding of bravery has evolved. At the beginning of the novel, she seemed to see silence as a sign of weakness, but now she utilizes it as a form of resistance. This passage is also significant because it reinforces the officer's shame over his complicity in Sarah's suffering. Because the officer is so embarrassed, and Sarah so righteous, the power dynamic between the two characters is momentarily flipped, showing that silence can be an act of resistance. Finally, this moment shows that Sarah's newfound sense of bravery comes at a cost, as she develops feelings of bitterness that no young child should have to feel.

Chapter 27 Quotes

She had grown up too much to be afraid anymore. She was no longer a baby. Her parents would be proud of her. That's what she wanted them to be. Proud because she had escaped from that camp. Proud because she was going to Paris, to save her brother. Proud, because she wasn't afraid.
She fell upon the tar with her teeth, gnawing at her mother's minute stitches. Finally, the yellow piece of cloth fell away from the blouse. She looked at it. Big, black letters. JEW. She rolled it up in her hands.
"Doesn't it look small, all of a sudden?" she said to Rachel.

Related Characters: Sarah "Sirka" Starzynski (speaker), Rachel , Michel Starzynski, Rywka Starzynski , Wladyslaw Starzynski

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 97-98

Explanation and Analysis

After escaping from Beaune-la-Rolande, Sarah and Rachel stop to heed the policeman's advice and remove their stars. This is a powerful moment on many levels. First, it

represents Sarah's maturation: she still wants to make her parents proud, but by ripping apart her mother's fine stitches, she is symbolically separating from her parents, and becoming her own person. As such, this is also a deeply sad moment, as Sarah is very young to be forced to become independent from her parents. Secondly, Sarah's description of the star as small shows that her Jewishness is only one aspect of her identity, and she will no longer allow it to be the defining aspect of that identity. Finally, this moment underscores the transformation Sarah underwent in the camp, becoming a fierce young woman—someone who does not hesitate to rip clothing with her teeth if that is her only option.

Chapter 31 Quotes

All of a sudden, every ounce of hope she still harbored within her ran out. In the old lady's eyes she read what she most dreaded. Michel was dead. Dead in the cupboard. She knew. It was too late. She had waited too long. He had not survived. He had not made it. He had died there, all alone, in the dark, with no food and no water, just the bear and the storybook, and he had trusted her, he had waited, he had probably called out to her, screamed her name again an again, "Sirka, Sirka, where are you! Where are you?" He was dead, Michel was dead. He was four years old, and he was dead, because of her.

Related Characters: Sarah "Sirka" Starzynski (speaker), Michel Starzynski

Related Themes:

Page Number: 118-119

Explanation and Analysis

This moment occurs shortly after Sarah has escaped from Beuane-la-Rolande. She has been taken in by Jules and Geneviève Dufaure, and when telling Geneviève about Michel she finally realizes that he could not possibly have survived in the cupboard. Sarah is physically overwhelmed by her sense of guilt, collapsing the next moment. This moment is crucial because, despite her loss of hope, Sarah still makes her way back to Paris, showing that her love for her brother surpasses reason. Guilt, too, has this kind of power; for the rest of her life Sarah will never be able to forgive herself for her brother's death. Even as she ages, Sarah is unable to let go of her childhood conviction that she alone is responsible for her brother's death. This quotation thus introduces the idea that guilt has not only the positive ability to motivate a person (Sarah bravely smuggles her way back into Paris to return to Michel) but also the negative ability to hijack her entire life.

Chapter 32 Quotes

"I know they are holding something back. I want to know what it is."
"Be careful, Julia," he repeated. He smiled, but his eyes remained serious. "You're playing with Pandora's box. Sometimes, it's better not to open it. Sometimes, it's better not to know."

Related Characters: Julia Jarmond (speaker), Guillaume

Related Themes:

Page Number: 127

Explanation and Analysis

Julia has dinner with Guillaume after her meeting with Franck Lévy. She has just learned that the family who used to live in Mamé's apartment was called the Starzynskis and that their daughter's fate is unknown. Guillaume advises an excited Julia not to push too hard against the Tézacs' deliberate silence on the topic of the apartment, highlighting the fact that exploring the past can be a disruptive and painful experience. Ultimately, Julia finds that, for her, it *is* "better to know," and the same is true for other characters in the book such as Edouard and William. However, Guillaume's metaphor of Pandora's Box proves to be perceptive, as Julia's search for Sarah results in the destruction of both her marriage and that of William Rainsferd, and exposes serious discord within the Tézac family.

Chapter 34 Quotes

As I stood there, oblivious to the traffic, I felt I could almost see Sarah coming down the rue de Saintonge on that hot July morning, with her mother, and her father, and the policemen. Yes, I could see it all, I could see them being pushed into the garage, right here, where I now stood. I could see the sweet heart-shaped face, the incomprehension, the fear. The straight hair caught back in a bow, the slanted turquoise eyes. Sarah Starzynski. Was she still alive? She would be seventy today, I thought. No, she couldn't be alive. She had disappeared off the face of the earth, with the rest of the Vel' d'Hiv' children. She had never come back from Auschwitz. She was a handful of dust.

Related Characters: Julia Jarmond (speaker), Sarah "Sirka" Starzynski

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 133

Explanation and Analysis

On the day of her scheduled visit to Beaune-la-Rolande, Julia also visits the rue de Bretagne, the site of the garage in which the Starzynskis and other Jewish families were held before being taken to the Vélodrome. While standing on the rue de Bretagne, Julia wrestles with the hope that Sarah might have survived the Holocaust and her fear that Sarah's story is buried and unknowable. This quotation not only reflects Julia's passion for learning about history, on both a large and small scale, but also serves as a reminder that, in many cases, Holocaust victims' stories are lost to present generations. It also speaks to the importance of physical places in preserving memory. By standing on the street where Sarah once stood, Julia feels almost as if she can commune with Sarah's ghost. The novel is clear that not many people feel this sensitivity—but it also clearly suggests that being more alive to the past allows one to live a fuller, more compassionate life in the present.

❝ We wandered around the small, plain room, gazing at photographs, articles, maps. There were some yellow stars, placed behind a glass panel. It was the first time I saw a real one. I felt impressed and sickened.

Related Characters: Julia Jarmond (speaker), Bamber

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 134

Explanation and Analysis

This moment occurs when Julia and her colleague Bamber visit the site of the former Drancy internment camp in Paris. This is the camp from which most Parisian Jews were deported. From Drancy, trains followed a direct route to Auschwitz. Julia and Bamber visit the small museum, which is only open by appointment. Julia's horror at seeing the yellow stars in person highlights the power of physical objects to serve as witnesses to the past. It also contrasts with the way that people who live near Drancy, in cheap apartments built in 1947 almost immediately after World War Two, live their daily lives oblivious to the history of their neighborhood. Here and throughout the novel, Tatiana de Rosnay suggests that living in ignorance of the past is a dishonest way to live, and that learning about the history of one's home (both on a national and local level) is a key part of living a full and fulfilling life.

Chapter 36 Quotes

❝ There were several names and dates on the side of the tombstone. I leaned forward for a closer look. Children. Barely two or three years old. Children who had died at the camp, in July and August 1942. Vel' d'Hiv' children.
I had always been acutely aware that everything I had read about the roundup was true. And yet, on that hot spring day, as I stood looking at the grave, it hit me. The whole reality of it hit me.
And I knew that I would no longer rest, no longer be at peace, until I found out precisely what had become of Sarah Starzynski.

Related Characters: Julia Jarmond (speaker), Sarah "Sirka" Starzynski , Bamber

Related Themes:

Page Number: 143-144

Explanation and Analysis

This moment occurs at the cemetery in Beaune-la-Rolande, which Julia visits with her colleague Bamber. The impact that seeing a physical memorial to the Vel' d'Hiv' children has on Julia shows the huge importance of concrete, public remembrance of history. Even though she has conducted extensive research on the roundup, the horrible truth of this historical event does not fully strike Julia until she sees the victims' names listed on this monument. This moment is especially important because the monument that so moves Julia was paid for by Jewish survivors who survived the roundup in order to honor their "martyrs," rather than by the French government, and it references only the German role in the war, not the French. This quotation thus also implies that French society at large needs to do more to responsibly acknowledge its role in the murder of its Jewish citizens during the Holocaust. Finally, this moment is important because it drives home the importance of Sarah's story to Julia, and foreshadows the drastic measures she will eventually take to learn Sarah's fate.

Chapter 39 Quotes

❝ Number 26 appeared in front of them. Nothing had changed in the street, she noticed. It was still the same calm, narrow road she had always known. How was it possible that entire lives could change, could be destroyed, and that streets and buildings remained the same, she wondered.

Related Characters: Sarah "Sirka" Starzynski (speaker), Jules and Geneviève Dufaure

Related Themes:

Page Number: 158

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation appears when Sarah returns to Paris in search of Michel, accompanied by Jules and Geneviève Dufaure. Sarah is baffled by the fact that her neighborhood has remained unchanged, even as she herself has changed beyond recognition. This moment is thus at odds with many other instances in the novel where "streets and buildings" serve as prime reminders of the horrors of the past. This quotation thus presents a different view, showing how, even when the horrors of the Holocaust were unfurling, people still demonstrated indifference, much like the people Julia encounters as she researches the roundup. Here, de Rosnay seems to be critiquing the fact that people are often unaware of the lives that are changing and being destroyed around them, so long as their own go unaffected.

Chapter 41 Quotes

❝ I longed for the birth, for the sensation of the baby's head pressing down through me, for that unmistakable, pure, painful sensation of bringing a child into the world, albeit with pain, with tears. I wanted those tears. I wanted that pain. I did not want the pain of emptiness, the tears of a barren, scarred womb.

Related Characters: Julia Jarmond (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 168

Explanation and Analysis

Julia has this reflection almost immediately after scheduling an abortion. Despite realizing how badly she wants a second child, she does not cancel the appointment she has just made. This illustrates what a profound influence Bertrand has on Julia. Even though she has finally come to terms with the fact that she wants to keep her pregnancy, she is still going to comply with her husband's wish to have it terminated. This quotation thus shows how unsure Julia is of herself and how much she allows herself to be emotionally manipulated by her husband. By illustrating how difficult Julia finds it to assert her will over her husband's, this quotation also makes Julia's ultimate decision to keep her pregnancy more dramatic and triumphant.

Chapter 42 Quotes

❝ I thought of Sarah Starzynski, who had been Zoë's age when horror came into her life.
I closed my eyes. But I could still see the moment when the policemen tore the children from the mothers at Beaune-la-Rolande. I could not get the image out of my mind.
I held Zoë close, so close she gasped.

Related Characters: Julia Jarmond (speaker), Sarah "Sirka" Starzynski , Zoë Tézac

Related Themes:

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

Julia has just finished reading the file about Sarah that André Tézac left in his safe at his death. This quotation, in which Julia expressly conflates Sarah and Zoë, shows how learning about Sarah has made Julia a more compassionate person, reshaping her self-image as a mother. This moment thus serves as a powerful example of the way that learning about the past helps Julia become more invested in her present. At the same time, the fact that Julia cannot "get the image out of [her] mind" hints that Julia is starting to become perhaps too immersed in her research.

Chapter 44 Quotes

❝ I sat on the narrow bed and took the Sarah file out of my bag. Sarah was the only person I could bear thinking about right now. Finding her felt like a sacred mission, felt like the only possible way to keep my head up, to dispel the sadness in which my life had become immersed.

Related Characters: Julia Jarmond (speaker), Sarah "Sirka" Starzynski

Related Themes:

Page Number: 177

Explanation and Analysis

On the night before her scheduled abortion, Julia sits in the clinic and reads Sarah's file. This quotation illustrates the way that uncovering Sarah's story has become a saving grace in Julia's life, giving her a sense of stability and purpose even as her marriage is beginning to unravel. It also evokes Julia's extreme loneliness. The fact that "the only person [she can] bear thinking about" is a woman who lived sixty years ago shows how isolated and empty her life has become. Even after she makes the decision to keep her pregnancy, Julia continues to experience signs of depression, and focusing on Sarah continues to sustain her.

Chapter 46 Quotes

❝ As the prime minister went on, my eyes moved over the crowd. Was there anyone here who knew and remembered Sarah Starzynski? Was she here herself? Right now, at this very moment? Was she here with a husband, a child, a grandchild? Behind me, in front of me? I carefully picked out women in their seventies, scanning wrinkled, solemn faces for the slanted green eyes. But I did not feel comfortable ogling these grieving strangers. I lowered my gaze.

Related Characters: Julia Jarmond (speaker), Sarah "Sirka" Starzynski

Related Themes:

Page Number: 185

Explanation and Analysis

This moment occurs when Julia attends the sixtieth commemoration of the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup. The commemoration serves as a rare example in the novel of a responsible and honest acknowledgment of the past. Julia's conscious decision not to be a voyeur "ogling" the survivors in attendance also represents respectful engagement with the past. Finally, this quotation evokes the intensity of Julia's desire to connect with Sarah. Since seeing the photo of Sarah at her meeting with Franck Lévy, Julia has been haunted by Sarah's eyes. Eventually, she will have the almost spiritual experience of seeing these "slanted green eyes" in person when she meets Sarah's son, William.

Chapter 47 Quotes

❝ After my conversation with my sister, I lay on the sofa for a long time, my hand folded over my stomach like a protective shield. Little by little, I felt vitality pumping back into me.
As ever, I thought of Sarah Starzynski, and of what I now knew. I had not needed to tape Gaspard Dufaure. Nor jot anything down. It was all written inside me.

Related Characters: Julia Jarmond (speaker), Gaspard and Nicolas Dufaure , Sarah "Sirka" Starzynski , Charla

Related Themes:

Page Number: 188

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation appears when Julia is resting at home after having visited with Sarah's adoptive brother, Gaspard Dufaure, in Orléans. Part of what makes this quotation striking is the way that Julia's body becomes inscribed with memory, paralleling the way that physical objects and buildings have been imbued with memory throughout the novel. This speaks to the profound impact that Sarah's story has had on Julia—almost as if it has modified Julia's physical existence in the world. This quotation also speaks to how integral Sarah's story is in Julia's process of personal transformation by emphasizing that Sarah is as responsible as Julia's pregnancy for revitalizing Julia and making her feel a sense of purpose.

Chapter 62 Quotes

❝ Was it to do with Sarah, with the rue de Saintonge? Or was it just a belated coming-of-age? I could not tell. I only knew that I felt as if I had emerged from a long-lasting, mellow, protective fog. Now my senses were sharpened, keen. There was no fog. There was nothing mellow. There were only facts. Finding this man. Telling him his mother had never been forgotten by the Tézacs, by the Dufaures.

Related Characters: Julia Jarmond (speaker), Sarah "Sirka" Starzynski , William Rainsferd

Related Themes:

Page Number: 228

Explanation and Analysis

Julia has this reflection the day she arrives in Lucca, Italy, in search of William Rainsferd. This quotation speaks to the sense of responsibility Julia feels to Sarah. She feels it is her

duty to tell Sarah's son that his mother is not forgotten. It also shows the profound impact that learning about Sarah has had on Julia. This quotation implies that uncovering Sarah's story has catalyzed a kind of "coming-of-age" for Julia, giving her a renewed and strengthened sense of her identity. In this way, it is as though learning about Sarah has helped save Julia from having the kind of midlife crisis suffered by her husband, Bertrand. This quotation is thus a testament to the profoundly positive impact that learning about the past can have on a person, even if it comes with discomfort or is disruptive.

Chapter 71 Quotes

❝ I cannot bear the weight of my past.
Yet I cannot throw away the key to your cupboard.
It is the only concrete thing that links me to you, apart from your grave.

Related Characters: Sarah "Sirka" Starzynski (speaker), Michel Starzynski

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 260

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation comes from an entry in Sarah's journal, which William Rainsferd finds among his dying father's possessions, along with the key itself. The quotation shows the devastating effect that Sarah's loss has had on her: she experiences the guilt of Michel's death as a physical, crushing weight. This quotation is noteworthy because it highlights the importance of the key in the story. It is crucial that Sarah held onto the key during her imprisonment at and escape from Beaune-la-Rolande because the key made it possible for her to reopen the cupboard and see Michel's body. Symbolically, as this quotation shows, the key is important because it provides Sarah a modicum of comfort by serving as a link between her and Michel. Physical objects thus have the ability to serve as witnesses of the past, which, this quotation suggests, might have made Sarah feel slightly less alone in her new life in America.

Chapter 72 Quotes

❝ Somehow he was no stranger to me, and more bizarre still, I felt even less a stranger to him. What had brought us together? My quest, my thirst for truth, my compassion for his mother? He knew nothing of me, knew nothing of my failing marriage, my near miscarriage in Lucca, my job, my life. What did I know of him, of his wife, his children, his career? His present was a mystery. But his past, his mother's past, had been etched out to me like fiery torches along a dark path. And I longed to show this man that I cared, that what happened to his mother had altered my life.

Related Characters: Julia Jarmond (speaker), Sarah "Sirka" Starzynski , William Rainsferd

Related Themes:

Page Number: 262

Explanation and Analysis

After William shows up in Paris in search of Julia, the two of them visit Mamé in the hospital, where she is recovering from a stroke, and then go to a café together to discuss Sarah's story. This quotation occurs just after Julia has told William his mother's life story in full, and shows the powerful way that Julia's research on Sarah has not only linked her to the past, but has made her feel more connected to a person in her present: William. This quotation also depicts the one positive example of the effects of silence in the novel, which is the uniquely comfortable silence Julia feels with William. This silence is a testament to the powerful bond Julia feels with William, thanks to their connection to Sarah, and also contrasts profoundly with the toxic silence Julia felt in her relationship with Bertrand. By providing a direct contrast with the silence of her marriage, the silence Julia feels with William thus also serves as an indication that Julia might have a romantic future with Sarah's son.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

In July 1942, Sarah Starzynski awakens to the sound of knocking on her apartment door. Sarah worries that the police might have found her father, Wladyslaw, who has been spending nights hiding in the family's cellar due to recent arrests of Jewish men. Sarah rushes to awaken her mother, Rywka, who opens the door, expecting the "green-gray suits" of the Germans, but finding instead two French officers. Sarah's mother lies to the officers, telling them her husband is not present. The officers insist that Rywka and Sarah pack their things and come with them.

This chapter introduces the reader to Sarah, one of the novel's two protagonists. Sarah's frustration in this chapter with her mother's silent acquiescence to the policemen's demands shows how Sarah values bravery and associates it with action. Over the course of the novel, as she finds herself in increasingly horrific circumstances, Sarah's idea of bravery will begin to shift, as she turns to quieter forms to resistance.

CHAPTER 2

In May of 2002 in Paris, Julia Jarmond and her eleven-year-old daughter, Zoë, visit the apartment they are about to move into. The apartment formerly belonged to Mamé Tézac, the grandmother of Julia's husband, Bertrand. Julia and Zoë are accompanied on their visit by Bertrand, who talks noisily on his cell phone the entire time, and Bertrand's business partner, Antoine, who will be coordinating the apartment's renovation. While waiting to take the elevator up to the apartment, Julia receives a phone call from her boss, Joshua, telling her she needs to come into work to help with "closing the July issues." In the elevator, Julia contemplates herself in the mirror, thinking she looks "as eroded as the groaning lift."

This chapter introduces Julia, the novel's second protagonist. Julia is shown struggling to reconcile the reality of her life as a middle-aged woman in a less than happy marriage with an elusive, deeper sense of herself. This search for a core sense of selfhood will constitute a large part of Julia's journey in the novel, as will her evolving relationship to her husband, who in this chapter is introduced as narcissistic and obnoxious. By establishing the context of Julia's move into her grandmother-in-law's old apartment, this chapter also subtly alludes to the power of physical spaces and their role in preserving historical memory.

CHAPTER 3

Back in 1942, Sarah's mother orders her to fetch her younger brother, Michel. She does, but her brother insists he is going to their "secret place," a cupboard in their bedroom in which the siblings often play. Sarah's brother persuades her to lock him into the cupboard, where he will be hidden from the police. Sarah does, then pockets **the key** as she promises Michel she will come back for him.

This is a crucial plot point: Sarah's hasty, naïve decision to follow her brother's suggestion ultimately leads to years of devastating guilt. While Michel is depicted as brave—he remains endearingly undaunted in the face of arrest, and unafraid of being left behind by his mother and sister—this chapter also introduces the idea that bravery isn't always wise. Sometimes, it can be a misguided choice. This is true for Sarah as well; she agrees to her brother's plan because she loves him, but the novel will, from this point on, begin to explore the idea that loving people is often not enough to save them.

CHAPTER 4

Back in 2002, Julia, Zoë, and Antoine begin a tour of Mamé's old apartment. Julia tells Antoine that it was Bertrand's idea to renovate the place, and that she would have preferred to move somewhere newer. Julia then privately recalls meeting Mamé for the first time in this very apartment.

As she learns more about the apartment's history, Julia's reluctance to live in a place that holds such dark memories will only grow. This chapter also introduces the fact that Julia's relationship to her husband's extended family is strained at best.

CHAPTER 5

Back in 1942, the policemen consult a list and realize that "there's a child missing." Rywka lies again, saying her "brother" is not present, but the police don't believe her and search the apartment anyway. Unable to find Michel or Wladyslaw, the police lead Sarah and Rywka away. As she exists the building, Sarah notices the gloating expression on the face of the concierge, Madame Royer. Madame Royer offers to help the police track down Michel and Wladyslaw, and even claims she knows of other Jewish families living in the apartment next door, but the police insist they don't have time, saying, "We'll come back later if we have to." Sarah notes that Madame Royer pronounces the names of Jewish families as if they were swearwords.

This chapter introduces Madame Royer, the novel's only purely evil character, who sells out the Starzynski family to the police. Sarah is confused by Madame Royer's triumphant attitude and hateful tone. As Sarah's story unfolds, she will wrestle with what it means to be Jewish, and how other people can hate an entire group based on their race or religion.

CHAPTER 6

Back in 2002, Bertrand finally finishes his phone call, and asks Julia what she thinks of the apartment, "cupping [her] ass with a careless, possessive hand" as he does so. Bertrand, Julia, and Zoë discuss the apartment before Julia announces that she has to leave for work. Bertrand takes multiple digs at Julia for being American. Zoë admonishes her father, grasping her mother's **hand** and telling Bertrand, "Papa, stop it, you're so rude!"

This chapter introduces the tension in Julia's relationship with her husband. Bertrand's teasing tends to focus on Julia's "outsider" status as an American, and Julia's growing discomfort with this teasing hints that she may be approaching a breaking point. This chapter also underscores the close bond Julia has with her daughter, as Zoë tries to come to Julia's defense.

CHAPTER 7

Back in 1942, the policemen lead Rywka and Sarah away from their apartment building as the neighbors watch silently from their windows. One neighbor, a music teacher who used to play songs for the Starzynski family from across their shared courtyard, calls out to the police, "You can't do this! They're honest, good people!" but he ultimately falls silent, too. Rywka breaks down sobbing and shouts for her husband. Wladyslaw emerges from his hiding spot in the cellar and tells the policemen, "Take me with my family." Sarah takes hold of her father's **hand** and as she and her parents are led away through the growing daylight, she consoles herself with the thought, "This was the French police, not the Germans. No one was going to hurt them."

This chapter introduces the theme of silence. Sarah is hurt and confused when she sees her neighbors silently observing her families arrest from behind closed, curtained windows. Even Sarah's friend the music teacher, who tries to speak up on behalf of the Starzynskis, falls silent and can only wave helplessly as Sarah is led away. From this point on, Sarah's resentment of other people's complicity in (or indifference to) her suffering will continue to grow. This chapter also highlights the bond Sarah has with her father, as well as the way in which she relies on him for a sense of safety, a dependence she will be forced to renegotiate as the novel's events unfold.

CHAPTER 8

Although Bertrand insists that Julia "adores" his sense of humor, Julia confesses to herself that Bertrand's nasty joking makes her feel foolish. She changes the subject, asking Bertrand if he's been to visit Mamé recently, to which he responds in the negative. As she leaves the apartment, Julia once again contemplates her reflection in the elevator mirror and thinks for the first time that she's had enough of Bertrand's humor.

For the first of several times in the novel, Julia begins to suspect that she has reached a turning point in her marriage. This chapter shows Julia struggling with her identity not only as a wife but as an aging woman. As her storyline unfolds, Julia will struggle to establish her identity on her own terms, separate from her marriage to Bertrand. This chapter also gestures at the profound effect that time can have on a person's physical sense of self, which foregrounds the novel's later exploration of the toll of time on characters' emotional lives.

CHAPTER 9

Sarah, Rywka, and Wladyslaw are led into a large garage, where they wait along with many other families. Sarah recognizes a schoolmate, Léon, whose worried face makes her doubt her confidence that everything is going to be alright. She shows her father **the key** and explains that she's left Michel locked in their secret cupboard. When her father begins to cry, Sarah demands that he tell her what's going on. Wladyslaw says only that the family will not be going home, and asks Sarah to "be brave."

Until this chapter, Sarah has felt confident that the French police, unlike the Germans, will not do anything to harm her and her family. Arriving at the garage is the first time Sarah's trust in her fellow French citizens begins to waver. Wladyslaw's devastated reaction to seeing Sarah's key also confuses Sarah, who, despite her flickers of doubt, remains sure that she will soon be able to return to her brother. Wladyslaw's injunction to Sarah—be brave—will also continue to influence her throughout the novel.

The police order the families onto the green-and-white city buses. Through the window of the bus, Sarah recognizes her neighborhood policeman, but when she waves to him he refuses to meet her eyes. The buses transport the Jewish families to "a great pale building" (the Vélodrome d'Hiver), where they are forced to take their place along with hundreds of other people cramped into the sweltering arena. Sarah asks her father why all the people are there, placing her hand over **the yellow star** she wears and saying, "It's because of this, isn't it?" Although Wladyslaw answers in the affirmative, Sarah feels as though no one will ever be able to adequately explain to her why this is all happening.

Sarah's brief moment of eye contact with the local police officer will take on significance later in the novel, when Sarah again crosses paths with this officer. This chapter also includes the first moment in which ten-year-old Sarah consciously makes the connection between the yellow star she is forced to wear and the fact that she and her family have been arrested. Sarah's unresolved childlike confusion over the connection between these two things highlights the absurdity of defining people based on one facet of their identity.

CHAPTER 10

At work, Julia receives an assignment from her boss, Joshua, to write an article about the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup of 1942, in light of the upcoming sixtieth commemoration. Julia accepts the assignment, even though she is only vaguely familiar with the roundup. Joshua suggests Julia start her research by tracing survivors and witnesses of the roundup. He recommends she contact Franck Lévy, founder of a local association that "help[s] Jewish people find their families after the Holocaust."

The upcoming Vel' d'Hiv' commemoration represents an important attempt on the part of French society to grapple with France's role in the Holocaust. As Julia begins her research, she will quickly discover that acknowledging historical trauma and wrongdoing is a particularly difficult task for the French, who are averse to the idea that the French government and non-Jewish civilians collaborated with the Nazis.

Julia heads to her office and begins her research, only to find that many of the books on the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup are out of print or hard to acquire. This piques her interest, as does the devastating fact that four thousand French Jewish children between the ages of two and twelve were arrested in the roundup and ultimately murdered in concentration camps.

Julia gets her first taste of the profound silence that surrounds the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup. She will spend the rest of the novel working against this amnesiac tendency within her husband's family, as she fights to uncover the history of Mamé's apartment on rue de Saintonge.

CHAPTER 11

In the heat of the Vélodrome, Sarah waits with her parents. There is no food, no water, and no working sanitary facility. Sarah's schoolmate, Léon, asks Sarah if she wants to attempt escape with him, but she is too hesitant. She watches as Léon escapes, darting past the police, who are distracted by a group of angry prisoners. Sarah soon notices a commotion overhead. Although her father attempts to turn her face away, Sarah sees a woman jump with her baby from the highest railing in the arena. Both mother and baby are killed on impact.

This is the first chapter to describe in such vivid detail the horror inflicted on French Jewish families during the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup. Sarah begins to have an inkling that the stakes of her decision to leave Michel behind were much higher than she could've ever imagined, as the direness of her situation is impressed on her by the bloody suicide she witnesses. Sarah's refusal to join Léon in an escape attempt is also important because it stands in contrast to Sarah's later actions in the novel. Sarah's hesitance to leave her parents demonstrates her strong love for and reliance on her parents.

CHAPTER 12

Julia recounts her life story. She grew up in Brookline, Massachusetts, with a mother, father, and younger sister, Charla. Even as a girl she was captivated by Paris, drawn to the city's "paradoxes, its secrets, its surprises." Shortly after graduating from Boston University, Julia moved to Paris to write for a fashion magazine. Not long thereafter she took a new job writing for TV, and moved into an apartment with two gay French men, Hervé and Christophe.

Julia's backstory reveals that she has felt like an outsider in Paris for many years. It also shows that Julia is attracted to the idea of secrets, an aspect of her personality which will become more and more evident as she continues her research.

Julia has a dinner date with Hervé and Christophe, who are still roommates. (The novel is not clear about whether they are lovers.) Hervé notices that Julia doesn't look herself and asks if she's alright. Julia claims she is, though she privately admits that her research into the events of July 1942 "had awakened a vulnerability within her, triggered something deep, unspoken."

For the first time, the reader begins to sense what an impact learning about the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup is having on Julia. Her knowledge is described as a physical burden, an image that will recur throughout the novel. Julia's white lie to Hervé also shows how unwilling Julia is to discuss her personal issues, a pattern that will continue throughout the novel.

CHAPTER 13

To distract herself from the noises of sobbing and defecation that surround her, Sarah tries to think of happy memories. Several of these memories involve her best friend, Armelle. Sarah also recalls a family trip to the seaside, and how Michel, a toddler at the time, loved the ocean. Sarah looks up and notices her mother speaking with a Polish friend whose husband was arrested earlier in the year. This causes Sarah to reflect on the day her family heard the news of "something terrible" that had happened in Poland. Thinking of this, Sarah feels frustrated at the fact that her parents have consistently tried to shield her from bad news. She resents being "treated like a baby," and wonders if all she is going through might have been easier had her parents mentally prepared her.

In this chapter Sarah takes the first step toward separating herself from her parents. By criticizing their decision to shield her from knowledge of the political reality, Sarah is beginning to forge an identity that is separate from her complete reliance on her parents. The fact that Sarah is beginning this process of self-actualization at the young age of ten, and under pressure from such horrific circumstances, underscores the impact that traumas such as those inflicted during the Holocaust can have on an individual's psyche. On that note, the "something terrible" that Julia remembers is likely a reference to a pogrom (that is, an organized massacre of Jews).

CHAPTER 14

Hervé remains skeptical that Julia is okay. She reflects that normally she would confide in Hervé, and contemplates telling him not only about her research, but also about the increasing tension she has been feeling with Bertrand. However, she remains silent until another dinner party guest, a man named Guillaume, asks what she is writing about for work. Julia then explains that she is writing about the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup. Despite being French, both Hervé and Christophe express surprise when Guillaume points out that it was the French police who arrested Jews during the roundup, not the Nazis. The mood of the party darkens. Guillaume then shares that his grandmother was fifteen in 1942 and was the only member of her family to escape the roundup and survive the Holocaust.

The events at this dinner party clearly demonstrate the failure of French society to pay attention to events such as the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup. Guillaume is the only person at dinner who correctly recounts the details of the roundup, and it is strongly implied that he is informed only because he has a personal connection to the event. Julia is surprised at her former roommates' misinformed, and even blasé, attitudes about the roundup—a rare instance in which Tatiana de Rosnay seems to take direct aim at an institution of the French government—the education system—and offers a critique on its role in appropriately acknowledging and memorializing the Holocaust.

CHAPTER 15

Sarah has survived a horrible night in the Vélodrome, during which a woman gave birth to a stillborn baby and wailed in anguish for hours. In the early morning, Wladyslaw begs the policemen to allow him to return home to fetch Michel, but his appeal is denied. Sarah drifts off to sleep and awakens to a kind nurse who gives her water and then leaves. The nurse is unable to answer Sarah's questions about why she is being held in the Vélodrome and when she will be allowed to leave. Frustrated, Sarah recalls another inexplicable incident when she and Armelle were walking home from school and were called "dirty Jews" by a classmate. This, in turn, causes her to remember how badly Michel wanted to wear a **yellow star**, like his parents and sister, and how her mother had to explain that he was too young. Sarah grips the key in her pocket and swears again that she will find a way back to Michel.

Sarah continues to question why she and the other Jewish prisoners in the Vélodrome are being treated so degradingly. She struggles to comprehend her reality; her child's perspective again shows how unfathomable it is that millions of people during World War Two accepted the notion that Jews were inherently inferior to non-Jews. Sarah's memory of Michel also poignantly demonstrates how tight-knit the Starzynski family is, and Sarah's resolve to return to her brother further emphasizes the strength of that familial love. However, this moment also has ominous undertones; it seems likely that the strength of Sarah's love for her brother will not be sufficient to overcome the forces that are being marshaled against her.

CHAPTER 16

Guillaume shares more information about his grandmother. He even offers to share photographs of her with Julia, and the two exchange phone numbers. At home, Julia tells Bertrand about the dinner conversation and asks if he thinks people will read her article about the roundup. Bertrand responds sneeringly, saying, "Nobody cares anymore. Nobody remembers. Write about something else. Something funny, something cute. You know how to do that."

Bertrand's derisive, arguably even misogynistic comments to Julia further establish his role as a toxic character in her life. Through these comments Bertrand also represents the French public at large, underscoring French society's overall apathy toward Holocaust history. Julia will continually have to struggle against this apathy as she continues her research.

Julia exits the room, angry. She recalls her history with Bertrand. The two met when Julia was twenty-seven and dating another man, a fellow American. Bertrand insisted on dancing with Julia; his persistence and charm meant she was instantly smitten. She recalls meeting Bertrand's family, the Tézacs, for the first time, and how they were all mystified by Bertrand's choice to marry an American. Bertrand and his parents expected Julia to have several children, but she suffered several miscarriages and had Zoë after six years and a difficult pregnancy. Although Julia and Bertrand had both hoped for a second child, they no longer discuss the issue. Julia then thinks: "And then there was Amélie," though she doesn't elaborate on this. Normally, Julia thinks, she would return to Bertrand after a fight and allow him to woo her, but instead she gets into bed and reads more about the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup before going to sleep.

This backstory further highlights the emotional power that Bertrand holds over Julia. In the past Bertrand's charm has been enough to dictate Julia's decisions—so the fact that Julia breaks with her pattern and does not return to Bertrand after their argument signals, yet again, that she is nearing a tipping point in her marriage and in her struggle to assert her own identity. The fact that Julia reads about the roundup before going to bed also signals her intense interest in the topic, which will continue to build into a kind of obsession over the course of the following chapters. Finally, this chapter is important because it provides further details about Julia's relationship with her in-laws, who disapprove of her being American.

CHAPTER 17

After several days that have all blurred together in her mind, Sarah is ordered, along with everyone else in the Vélodrome to collect her belongings and gather near the front entrance. The prisoners are then herded down the street, where a woman rushes over to Sarah and presses a bread roll into her hand before being shooed off by the police. The woman's words, "You poor little girl. May God have pity," make Sarah wonder if God has "given up on them" or is "punishing them for something she [does] not know about."

This is the first and only time in the novel that Sarah explicitly worries about God. Raised in a non-practicing Jewish family, Sarah's identity as a Jew is complicated, and the fact that she worries whether God is specifically punishing her family for their non-traditional lifestyle they live heartbreakingly speaks to the devastation that occurs when a single, narrow identity marker is imposed upon an incredibly diverse population of people.

The prisoners are transported via city bus to a railway station. Sarah begins to panic, thinking again of her brother. She starts to sob, screaming at her father, "You never told me, Papa, you never explained, you never told me about the danger, never!" Wladyslaw tells Sarah that Michel is "in our prayers, in our hearts." The Starzynskis are then pushed onto a covered cattle train. Through a crack in the train door, Sarah holds eye contact with another little girl in a fancy lilac dress who stands on the opposite platform.

This chapter reemphasizes the fact that French city buses were used to transport arrested Jews; not only does this mundane detail add to the horror of Sarah's situation, but it also helps explain her persistent conviction that no harm will come to her and her family as long as they are under the authority of the French, rather than the Germans—for these are the very same buses she has ridden her entire life.

CHAPTER 18

Together with her photojournalist colleague, Bamber, Julia visits the rue Nélaton in Paris—the site of the Vélodrome d'Hiver prior to its demolition. The site is marked only by a small sign, which Julia finds surprising. After discussing some basic facts about the roundup, Julia and Bamber go for coffee. The waiter who serves them notices Bamber's camera and asks if Julia and Bamber are American tourists looking for the nearby Eiffel Tower. Julia informs him that they are journalists and asks if he knows of anyone in the neighborhood whom they can interview, explaining that she specifically wants to speak to someone who witnessed the roundup. The waiter directs them to a man whose mother they might be able to interview.

The waiter's assumption that Julia and Bamber are tourists highlights how little attention locals pay to the history of the Holocaust in their city, a phenomenon that is also evidenced by the small, inconspicuous marker at the site of the Vélodrome. This is another moment in the novel in which de Rosnay seems to step from behind the curtain to actively critique the cultural norm of silence about World War Two in her native France.

CHAPTER 19

Sarah and the other prisoners arrive at an internment camp somewhere in the French countryside. The women and children are allowed to remain together but the policemen order the men, including Wladyslaw, to separate from their families. Sarah gets one last glimpse of her father before he disappears. As she huddles against her mother, Sarah finds herself wondering about the people on the other side of the barbed-wire fence, and wonders "why there was such a difference between those children and her." That night, unable to sleep, Sarah makes her way to the latrine, where she pulls her skirt down "over her loins" to shield herself from the watchmen in the camp towers. Back in the barracks, Sarah hardly recognizes her mother, who is now "gaunt, and pale." She feels Rywka is "already dead."

From this point on, Sarah is essentially without her parents, marking a turning point in her journey. Her father has been deported and her mother is essentially catatonic, which means Sarah will no longer be able to rely on her parents. This chapter is also significant because it emphasizes the stark contrast between the experiences of Jews and non-Jews during World War Two. Sarah's ruminations on what makes her different from non-Jewish children continue to force the reader to consider the question for him or herself, as the novel inexorably points to the answer: that there is no difference.

CHAPTER 20

Julia and Bamber meet with the woman referred to them by the waiter. She was thirty-five at the time of the roundup, and tells Julia, "it's hard to forget the children." The woman recalls trying to throw bread and fruit to the children that finally emerged from the Vélodrome, but she was forbidden to do so by the police. "Shame on us all," the woman says, "for not having stopped it." Julia tries to encourage the woman by saying that perhaps this year will be different—people will finally take an interest in the Vel' d'Hiv' children. The woman disagrees, saying, "Nobody remembers. Why should they? Those were the darkest days of our country."

Julia's interview with this woman is important because it is the only time in the novel that the reader is introduced to someone who witnessed the roundup as an adult. The woman's memories of the children highlights the uniqueness of the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup, which targeted thousands of Jewish children, many of whom were under 10. The woman in this chapter also echoes Bertrand's sentiment that no one cares about the roundup, but the woman additionally tries to account for this cultural amnesia but saying that people are justified in not wanting to remember hard times. The novel will challenge this reasoning as the story continues to unfold.

CHAPTER 21

Sarah has been in the camp for about a week, and she is haunted by thoughts of Michel. One day she overhears a rumor that the women of the camp are going to be separated from their children and transported east to a work camp. Rywka doubts the rumor but Sarah suspects it to be true. When the policemen enter the barracks to round up the prisoners, Sarah isn't afraid—rather, she feels "hardened." Women from the nearby village assist the policemen in stripping the women of their money and jewelry (though Sarah is able to keep a hold of **the key**). The policemen then descend on the prisoners "like a swarm of large, dark birds" and violently separate the women from their children. Sarah sees Rywka come alive again, as she beats off a policeman to give her daughter a final, split-second-long hug. Sarah watches as her mother and the other women are led out of the camp, toward the train station.

This chapter clearly demonstrates the role reversal that has occurred in Sarah's relationship with her mother. The fact that Sarah is now in a position where she must explain difficult things to her mother shows how much Sarah has had to mature since the beginning of the novel. This chapter also underscores that Sarah's newfound bravery is not an unadulterated, positive quality, but rather comes at the price of Sarah feeling hardened and embittered at the young age of ten. Another important aspect of this chapter is Rywka's final redemption; although she has become increasingly passive, the fierceness with which she fights off the officer to reach her daughter shows that she has not lost all sense of herself, while also deepening the sense of all the Rywka has *lost.*

CHAPTER 22

Julia visits Mamé at the nursing home where she lives. Mamé suffers from dementia and Julia has been informed by Mamé's doctor that "it [is] excellent therapy to ask Mamé about the past." On this visit, Julia asks Mamé when she and her husband, André, moved into their apartment on the rue de Saintonge. Mamé says she found out the apartment had been "suddenly vacated" from the building concierge, Madame Royer. Mamé says she was aware the apartment had become vacated due to a recent "big roundup," but when Julia asks if Mamé ever wondered whether the apartment's original inhabitants would return she obstinately replies, "We knew nothing [...] Nothing at all."

Julia gets her first "lead" on the story behind the rue de Saintonge apartment, which will dominate her journey for the remainder of the novel. She also begins to get a taste of how difficult it will be to uncover this story due to the Tézacs' extreme reluctance to discuss the past. This chapter thus foreshadows the way that the existing tensions between Julia and her in-laws will only be exacerbated.

CHAPTER 23

Sarah and the other children in the camp pass a miserable night together. Sarah wonders if the policemen have children of their own and, if so, how they can treat children so brutally. Over the next several days, Sarah begins to feel "hard, and rude, and wild." She does, however, feel a soft spot for the younger children in the camp and begins to "tell them the stories she used to tell her brother."

Sarah's sense of herself as hardened emphasizes the toll that trauma can take on individuals' personalities. This chapter suggests that Sarah's accelerated maturation is more negative than positive, and that it would have been better if Sarah never had to develop these qualities of toughness. This chapter is also significant in the way it subtly emphasizes Sarah's growing guilt about Michel by showing how tender she is with the young children around camp, despite her tough new persona.

An older girl named Rachel, who is Sarah's age, begins listening to Sarah's nighttime stories. One evening Rachel approaches Sarah and proposes they escape the camp. Sarah initially refuses but is touched when Rachel ends the conversation by squeezing her **hand**, "the way Armelle used to."

Rachel is an important character because she is the person with whom Sarah becomes most closely bonded in the novel. Sarah's friendship with Rachel will prove to be important to Sarah's negotiation of her Jewish identity.

The next day, the camp policemen shave the children's heads. Sarah forces herself not to cry as she has her head shaved. When she looks up she realizes the man shaving her head is her former neighborhood policeman, the one she recognized through the bus window on the night of the roundup. This time the policeman is "too close […] to look away." Sarah fiercely holds the policeman's gaze "with all the contempt she [can] muster." She then smiles "a bitter smile for a child of ten" and pushes his **hands** away.

This moment shows how Sarah's stance on silence as a form of resistance has shifted since the beginning of the novel, when she interpreted her mother's silence as weakness. Here, Sarah actively uses silence as a means to communicate her refusal to be broken by the camp and its officers. Sarah's maturation is also reemphasized here in her bitter smile and her defiantly pushing the policeman's hands away.

CHAPTER 24

Julia leaves Mamé's nursing home "in a sort of daze" and heads to the rue de Saintonge apartment. Julia walks through the apartment and thinks about the upcoming deadline for her article, before which she still plans to visit the internment camps outside of Paris and meet with Franck Lévy. While walking through the apartment, Julia discovers a concealed cupboard and thinks "it would have made a good hiding place."

The fact that Julia goes to the rue de Saintonge apartment after talking about it with Mamé attests to the power of physical spaces to act as places to commune with the past. Julia will have this experience at other points in the novel, such as when she visits Beaune-la-Rolande.

Julia phones Bertrand and asks if his family ever told him that Mamé and her family had moved into the apartment after the roundup. Bertrand says he didn't know, but that it doesn't bother him. "There was a world war going on, remember," he says. "Tough times for everybody." After Bertrand hangs up, Julia lingers in the apartment, feeling overwhelmed by all she has learned about the roundup and her in-laws' connection to it.

Bertrand's dismissive attitude toward the history of Mamé's apartment solidifies his role as a largely unsympathetic character, and widens the gap between Julia and her husband, with whom she will ultimately stop discussing her research or discoveries about the family that once lived in this apartment.

CHAPTER 25

Sarah has decided to attempt escape along with Rachel. She feels "as if all the evil, all the hatred in the world was concentrated right here, stocked up all around her," and she can't help but wonder if it will be the same even after she escapes—if people will still hate her because she is Jewish. She struggles to understand this hatred, thinking that she has never hated anyone—except maybe for a teacher, once.

This is one of the most poignant episodes of the novel, because Sarah realizes that escaping the camp does not mean she can escape being hated by people who don't even know her. This moment also represents a change in Sarah's attitude, with her determination to change her fate crystallizing, thanks to her growing friendship with Rachel.

Rachel and Sarah don extra, protective layers of clothing and make their way toward the barbed-wire fence, which they plan to crawl under. They are caught crawling under the fence by Sarah's neighborhood policeman. Rachel begins to sob but Sarah realizes she is not afraid of the policeman. Instead, she feels "a strange pity for him." Sarah asks the policeman if he remembers Michel, "the little blond boy with the curly hair." When he nods, Sarah tells him that she must return to Paris to save Michel. She pleads with him to let her go, and he agrees, shoving Sarah under the fence—but keeping hold of Rachel. With "the voice of a young woman" Sarah asks the policeman to let Rachel go, too. He agrees, and also hands the girls a wad of money through the fence. Rachel and Sarah run away from the camp as fast as they can.

Sarah's escape from Beaune-la-Rolande is a dramatic high point of the plot. Her ability to persuade the policeman to release not only her but also Rachel speaks to her tremendous resolve, her poise, and her love for Michel. This moment is especially important because it is the first and only time that Sarah is "braver" than Rachel; while Sarah calmly negotiates with the policeman, Rachel, the mastermind behind the girls' escape plan, breaks down in sobs. This moment also underscores a crucial aspect of the novel: characters are not solely good or evil. The policeman's sense of humanity in his release of Sarah and Rachel complicates him as a character, and makes it harder for the reader to see the French officers who coordinated and executed the roundup as purely evil.

CHAPTER 26

Julia arrives home and realizes that she has been nauseated for the past couple days. She takes a pregnancy test and discovers she is pregnant. She is overwhelmed, reflecting on her past miscarriages and the pressure she feels from her in-laws to continue the Tézac family name. Eventually, though, she is overcome with joy. She books a babysitter for Zoë and makes a reservation at her favorite restaurant.

Julia's pregnancy is a major plot point and plays a key role in the evolution of her relationship with Bertrand. This chapter also elucidates some of the tension Julia feels from her in-laws, who have high (though perhaps laughably old-fashioned) expectations for her to produce a male heir.

When Zoë gets home from school, Julia wraps her in a hug. Zoë remarks that she is glad to see her mom in good spirits, saying, "You've been weird lately […] because of those kids," referring to the Vel' d'Hiv' children. Zoë asks if Julia plans to "find out" about the children, worrying that "Papa won't like it." Julia assures Zoë that Bertrand won't mind, and she thinks with pleasure that her husband will be happy when he finds out she is pregnant.

This conversation demonstrates the close bond that Julia has with her daughter. It also implies that there are serious issues with Julia's marriage, given that her eleven-year-old daughter is uneasy about Julia's refusal to discuss her research with her own husband.

CHAPTER 27

When they finally stop to rest, Rachel and Sarah remember the policeman's parting words: "Take off your stars." They both do so and Rachel buries the **yellow stars**, saying, "They're dead. In their grave. Forever and ever." Instead of heading toward the village (which they finally learn is called Beaune-la-Rolande, thanks to a nearby signpost), Rachel and Sarah head away from town. They eventually reach a forest, where they stop to drink, bathe, and rest. Sarah sleeps soundly for the first time in many days.

Rachel's burial of the stars is a complex and powerful moment for Sarah, who can't help but guiltily recall her mother's advice that she should wear her yellow star with pride. This moment shows yet again how complicated Sarah's relationship to her identity as a Jewish person is. If a single person can have such a multilayered experience of only one aspect of her identity, it is outrageous to judge an entire group of people based on a single, shared identity marker.

CHAPTER 28

Julia sits at her "usual table" in the restaurant and waits for Bertrand to meet her. This is the same table at which she sat when Bertrand proposed, when she told him she was pregnant with Zoë, and when he told her about Amélie. Through Julia's reflections, it is finally revealed that Amélie is Bertrand's mistress, a former girlfriend whom "he [has] never stopped fucking." Julia wonders if she still believes Bertrand's firm declaration that he has stopped seeing Amélie once and for all.

This moment is important not only because it reveals Amélie's identity, but also because it is a rare instance of profane language on Julia's part. Her colloquial use of the word "fucking" to describe Bertrand's relationship with Amélie is anomalous, and thus an indication of how angry she is about her husband's infidelity. This makes the fact that she hardly discusses Amélie with Bertrand even more painful. The fact that Julia is sitting at her "usual table" also illustrates yet again how physical spaces function as receptacles of memory.

Resolving not to think about Amélie and knowing Bertrand will be "late, as usual," Julia takes out her notes on the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup and becomes absorbed in her work. Bertrand finally arrives, and soon after ordering dinner Julia reveals that she is pregnant. Bertrand sighs and wearily responds that he doesn't want to be "an old father." A baby, he says, "would not fit into our life." Julia angrily realizes that Bertrand is asking her to have an abortion and she begins to sob, shutting out Bertrand's voice as he tries to comfort her.

Bertrand's reaction to Julia's pregnancy is a key plot point, as it precipitates the eventual unraveling of Julia's marriage. Julia's attempt to shut out her husband's voice as he soothes her also begins a long pattern of confused numbness on her part whenever she thinks about her pregnancy.

CHAPTER 29

By the time Sarah and Rachel awaken, night has fallen. They continue to make their way through the forest, but have to stop and hide when a German convoy passes. They continue undetected and eventually come upon a farmhouse. Rachel knocks on the door and asks for water, but is denied. The girls continue walking and families continue to deny them water. Finally, Rachel and Sarah collapse in a large dog shed. They are awakened by a dog barking; an old man (Jules Dufaure) stands over them. He asks the girls if they are lost and invites them in. Upon seeing Sarah and Rachel, Jules's wife, Geneviève, firmly declares, "They must be hidden at once." She assures the girls, "You are safe with us."

Jules and Geneviève take a huge personal risk in deciding to harbor Rachel and Sarah. Their compassionate decision injects a sense of hope into the novel—hope that Sarah's fear that the outside world is full only of hateful people is, at least in part, unfounded. The Dufaures' bravery also combines with Sarah's bravery in escaping the camp to demonstrate that brave acts can be performed by people who might not traditionally be seen as "heroes," including children and elderly folks.

CHAPTER 30

Julia awakens the day after her disastrous dinner date with Bertrand, feeling as if she has "aged overnight." She is on her way to the office in low spirits when she receives a call from Guillaume, who asks her to meet him at six in the evening. A few minutes later, Julia gets another phone call, this time from her father-in-law, Edouard Tézac. Edouard has learned from Mamé, his mother, that Julia has been asking her questions about the rue de Saintonge apartment. He asks Julia to stop asking such questions and calmly hangs up. Baffled, Julia wonders what Edouard does not want her to know.

This chapter establishes Edouard as a possible threat to Julia's investigation of the rue de Saintonge apartment. Despite his efforts to quash Julia's search, Edouard's strange silence about the apartment only causes Julia's interest in it to deepen. This chapter raises the possibility that Julia's "outsider" position in the Tézac family might be of some advantage to her in breaking through the silence that her in-laws have come to accept as normal.

Still devastated by Bertrand's reaction to her pregnancy, Julia decides she can't handle going into the office. Instead she calls Franck Lévy and asks to move up her appointment with him, which she'd originally scheduled for later in the day. At the meeting, the two discuss specific details of the roundup. Julia feels overwhelmed by the photos of Jewish children in Lévy's office and the knowledge that most of them died, numbering in the thousands.

The toll of her unwanted (from Bertrand's perspective) pregnancy and her depressing research begin to manifest themselves physically in Julia's body. She rededicates herself to her work as a way of coping with her feelings—a behavior which will continue to be a pattern for her.

CHAPTER 31

Jules and Geneviève feed Rachel and Sarah, and Geneviève helps the girls to bathe. Geneviève sees blisters on Rachel's body and realizes that she is ill, so she immediately puts her to bed. For the first time in the novel, Sarah's name is revealed. Sarah introduces herself with her nickname, Sirka. She also tells Geneviève about Michel, breaking down in anguish. Geneviève comforts Sarah and puts her to bed.

Up until this point in the novel, Sarah has been referred to as "the girl" and Michel only as "her brother," making this the first chapter where the Starzynski children's names are revealed. This moment of revelation is powerful because it causes Sarah to formally become a specific individual, not merely an anonymous girl. This chapter is also significant because it introduces the plot point that Rachel might be seriously ill.

Sarah awakens the following morning in a pleasant bedroom. As she makes her way downstairs to the kitchen, Sarah overhears Geneviève saying that she is worried about Rachel. Sarah enters the room and asks what has happened to **the key** and the money from the policeman, both of which were in her pocket. Geneviève points to a shelf where she has stored the items. Sarah explains that the key is to the cupboard where she has left Michel and inquires how she can get to Paris. Jules and Geneviève inform Sarah that she is now in a village near Orléans, southwest of Paris, but Sarah insists that she must return to Paris.

The urgency with which she inquires about the key demonstrates how desperately Sarah is clinging to her only physical reminder of Michel. This implies that she has managed to preserve the hope that he has somehow survived during her absence. The fact that Sarah overhears Jules and Geneviève's conservation also echoes Sarah's former habit of eavesdropping on her parents, who refused to discuss politics or bad news with her. This sets up the context for Sarah's later outburst at Jules and Geneviève.

Before Geneviève can respond, Rachel lets out a scream from upstairs. Geneviève tells Jules that she thinks Rachel is suffering from dysentery and Jules leaves to fetch the village doctor, only to return an hour later. The village doctor was nowhere to be found, but Jules has found a doctor in Orléans who has agreed to visit the house. When this doctor arrives, Geneviève orders Sarah to hide. From the cellar, Sarah can hear the doctor asking badgering questions about Rachel's identity and wondering aloud "what the Kommandantur would think of this dark, thin little girl." After the doctor leaves, Jules asks Geneviève, "What have we done?"

Jules's question to Geneviève suggests that he is aware that the doctor's visit has put Rachel in danger, since the doctor is clearly, at the very least, a Nazi sympathizer. Although it does not address the repercussions of bravery, this chapter does show how Jules and Geneviève's compassionate act of seeking medical care for Rachel backfires, in much the same way that Sarah's decision to lock Michel in the cupboard did.

CHAPTER 32

Still in her meeting with Lévy, Julia asks him to help her trace the family that lived in the rue de Saintonge before the Tézacs moved in. Lévy agrees on the condition that Julia will not publish the information. Lévy is able to find information that indicates Wladyslaw and Rywka were transported from the Beaune-la-Rolande internment camp on convoy 15, which Julia knows traveled directly to Auschwitz. Sarah, however, is not listed as having left Beaune-la-Rolande. (Most of the children at the camp, Lévy explains, were sent back to Paris, to the camp at Drancy, and then deported to Auschwitz.) Lévy also shows Julia a school photo of Sarah wearing her **yellow star**. Julia asks if Sarah could have possibly escaped the camp and survived the Holocaust and Lévy responds that it is possible, but warns her about digging too deep into the past. That night, Julia shares what she has learned with Guillaume and he gives her the same advice as Lévy, saying, "Sometimes, it's better not to know."

This chapter confirms that the rue de Saintonge apartment is the Starzynskis' old apartment. It is also the first time Julia sees a photo of Sarah; Sarah's eyes will haunt Julia throughout the novel and will be the first way Julia is able to recognize Sarah's son, William. Most importantly, this chapter foreshadows the fallout that will occur in the Tézac family and in Julia's personal life due to her research on Sarah. Guillaume's warning will ultimately be disproven, as various characters will find catharsis in learning Sarah's story, but not without serious emotional repercussions.

CHAPTER 33

Panicked, Jules and Geneviève try to move Rachel but ultimately leave her in her bed because she is too weak. They refuse to answer Sarah's questions, and both of them seem to have calmed down by the evening. Jules tells Sarah to return to the cellar and climb under a bag of potatoes to hide. Moments later, the dog barks and Sarah realizes the Germans are coming. She hides in the basement as the Germans upstairs tear a screaming Rachel from her bed. The Germans suspect that other Jewish children might be hiding in the cellar but Jules and Geneviève are able to persuade them not to search the house, offering them wine and food as a distraction. Eventually the Germans leave and Jules beckons Sarah back upstairs. Through tears, Geneviève praises Sarah's bravery, calling her "little Sirka." She also tells Sarah that the Germans took Rachel away with them. Sarah asks Geneviève and Jules to stop using her "baby name" and proudly announces that her name is Sarah Starzynski.

In shedding her childhood nickname, Sarah symbolically becomes a mature person. This poignantly underscores the trauma Sarah has withstood, and how it has forced her to think and act in ways that most children never have to. Ten years of age is, after all, an incredibly young to be leaving one's childhood behind. Losing Rachel also compounds Sarah's loss of both her parents, and will ultimately serve as a catalyst for Sarah's decision to return to Paris in search of Michel. Another important aspect of this chapter is the risk that Jules and Geneviève take in attempting to convince the German soldiers not to search the cellar where Sarah is hiding. Their commitment to protecting a person they hardly know, albeit a child, is shown to be noble in its selflessness.

CHAPTER 34

Julia stops by the rue de Bretagne, the location of the garage in which Sarah and her family were held before being moved to the Vélodrome. Looking at the place where Sarah's journey began, Julia finds herself wondering where this journey ended. She also reflects on her visit to the former Drancy internment camp with Guillaume earlier that morning, where she was unnerved by both the **yellow stars** she saw on display and the fact that the former camp is now filled with apartment buildings—a neighborhood whose name translates as "City of the Mute."

Once again, the novel emphasizes the uncanny ability of physical places and objects to act as silent witnesses to historical events. With her description of the "City of the Mute," de Rosnay seems to be taking aim at French citizens who are both ignorant and uncurious about the history of their homes. Julia's discomfort at seeing the yellow stars also speaks to the way that objects such as the stars and Sarah's key are imbued with histories of their own.

In the afternoon, Julia meets Bamber so they can visit Beaune-la-Rolande together. Bamber asks if Julia is okay and she realizes she must look terrible, having stayed up all night talking to Bertrand. In an "awful, broken voice [she] did not recognize," Bertrand had given Julia an ultimatum: if she decides to keep her pregnancy, their marriage will end. Julia obliquely tells Bamber she had "a hell of a night," to which he responds with compassion and support. On the drive to Beaune-la-Rolande, Julia thinks about calling her sister, Charla, to tell her about her pregnancy.

Julia's continued reluctance to discuss the issues in her marriage shows that even she is not immune to the tendency to be silent and secretive about difficult subjects. This chapter, by explaining Bertrand's ultimatum, also raises the stakes of Julia's decision to keep or terminate her pregnancy.

Julia and Bamber arrive in Beaune-la-Rolande and tour the town and train station, which has been converted into a daycare center. The woman working at the center blithely says that she is "too young" to know anything about the history of her workplace, despite the fact that Julia has just noticed a plaque above the door of the center commemorating those held prisoner at Beaune-la-Rolande.

De Rosnay is explicitly satirizing the young generation of French people who assume that the excuse of being "too young" to remember the Second World War is sufficient to excuse their profound ignorance and disinterest in that history. This passage shows that putting up memorial plaques is not a sufficient way for a country to memorialize an event as tragic and massive as the Holocaust. Rather, this episode suggests, a cultural shift is required.

CHAPTER 35

The evening after Rachel's capture, Sarah sleeps poorly, unable to take her mind off Michel. The next morning Sarah announces to Jules and Geneviève that she is leaving for Paris to find her brother. Jules and Geneviève do not initially respond to her rescue plan with enthusiasm, and for the first time Sarah feels "fed up with trying to be an adult." She asks Jules and Geneviève not to try to stop her, to which Jules responds: "We're not stopping you, you silly, stubborn girl. We're coming with you."

Sarah becomes frustrated and slightly petulant when Jules and Geneviève do not initially respond to her rescue plan with enthusiasm. That she feels "fed up with trying to be an adult" underscores the fact that she has been forced by her circumstances to grow up prematurely. This chapter attests to the deep affection Jules and Geneviève have for Sarah, as they agree to help her return to Nazi-occupied Paris.

CHAPTER 36

Julia and Bamber visit the cemetery at Beaune-la-Rolande. Seeing the graves of children makes Julia determined to uncover Sarah's fate. On their walk back to town, Julia and Bamber meet an old man who recalls the "roar" that went through Beaune-la-Rolande on the day the mothers in the camp were separated from their children. Julia is unsettled by the man's "indifference, his scorn." Bamber and Julia drive to the site of the camp itself, where they find another monument to "the victims of the Nazis." Bamber and Julia are both disturbed by the fact that the monument does not acknowledge that the camp was run by French police. As she contemplates the monument, Julia hears her cell phone ring. It's her sister, Charla, who says, "I had a feeling I should call you."

Both Julia and Bamber are unimpressed by the memorials at Beaune-la-Rolande, which seem to place blame for the horror that occurred there on the Nazis rather than on the French. Again, de Rosnay is pointing out the failures of not only the French government but also French society at large (represented by the scornful old man) to sufficiently grapple with the country's role in the murder of Jews during World War Two. This chapter is also significant because it establishes the intense bond that Julia has with her younger sister, who knows she should call her seemingly by instinct. This intense sibling bond mirrors Sarah's bond with Michel.

CHAPTER 37

Jules, Geneviève, and Sarah are at the Orléans train station. Sarah is dressed in Nicolas Dufaure's clothes and posing as Jules and Geneviève's granddaughter. Sarah realizes that eventually one of the French soldiers will ask for her identity card, but because she doesn't have one she persuades Jules to bribe the police with the money she has instead. On the train, Sarah is able to pass as the Dufaures' grandson thanks to her blue eyes and blond hair, making her wonder if "being Jewish is something that one could immediately see." When they arrive in Paris, the Dufaures are able to successfully bribe a policeman, who allows Sarah to enter the city along with Jules and Geneviève.

Sarah continues to wrestle with what it means to be or "look" Jewish. The very fact that she is able to pass as non-Jewish because of her physical features once again underlines the absurd, bigoted logic behind the anti-Semitism that was rampant during World War Two. This chapter is also important because it shows that Sarah is not only courageous, but also clever, as she alone concocts the bribing plan to get herself back into Paris.

CHAPTER 38

Julia recalls her phone call with her sister, in which Charla suggested Bertrand might be going through a midlife crisis. After speaking to Charla, Julia then went to see her friend Isabelle, with whom she discussed the implications of separating from Bertrand. Julia feels incredibly conflicted. She will have to make a decision regarding an abortion within the next two weeks. Today, though, she is visiting Mamé. When she arrives at the nursing home, she recognizes Edouard's car in the parking lot. After visiting with Mamé, Edouard asks to speak to Julia in his car. He says he's learned from Zoë that Julia has continued her research—or, as Edouard calls it, her "prying into the past." During the conversation that ensues, Edouard becomes distraught, repeatedly saying, "nobody knows." Finally, he reveals that he was home in the rue de Saintonge apartment when Sarah returned.

Julia continues to agonize over whether she will carry her pregnancy to term. The most significant aspect of this chapter is the shift in Edouard's character. In his car conversation with Julia, he suddenly shifts from being cold and slightly menacing to being vulnerable and emotional. Edouard's transformation reveals that the reason he has tried to keep Julia from investigating the rue de Saintonge apartment is not because he is willfully ignorant, like Bertrand, but because he has been harboring unacknowledged emotional trauma related to that very apartment.

CHAPTER 39

Sarah, Jules, and Geneviève arrive at Sarah's old apartment. Madame Royer assumes the Dufaures must be looking to rent an apartment. Although the Starzynskis' apartment has already been leased, she says, "there's a very nice place on the second floor" that she can show them. Sarah races to her old apartment, where a twelve-year-old boy (young Edouard) answers the door. Sarah demands to see Michel. She pushes past the boy, who cries out for his father. In her former bedroom, Sarah uses **the key** to unlock the cupboard. An overpowering smell immediately fills the room. Jules, Geneviève, and the boy's father (André) enter the bedroom and although Jules tries to pull her away, Sarah sees her brother's blackened, dead body at the back of the cupboard. She collapses to her knees and "scream[s] at the top of her lungs."

This chapter is the climax of Sarah's story. Discovering Michel's body emotionally damages Sarah for the rest of her life, compounding the loss of her parents and causing Sarah to be wracked with guilt until the end of her life. This chapter underscores the heartbreaking reality that Sarah's love for Michel, and the risks she took to return to him despite overwhelming odds, were not enough to save him.

CHAPTER 40

Through tears, Edouard describes the day of Sarah's return to Julia. He can't remember what was done with Michel's body but he recalls his father, André Tézac, weeping after Sarah, Jules, and Geneviève left. It was the first time Edouard had seen his father cry. André forbade Edouard from telling his mother (Mamé), who was not at home in the apartment that day, about Sarah's return. When André was on his deathbed, he even extorted a promise from Edouard to never tell his wife (Colette) or children. Edouard tells Julia that he would like to help her find out what happened to Sarah. André left confidential papers in a safe at the time of his death. Because Edouard went through these papers very hastily when his father died, he is not sure if there is any information about Sarah contained in them. Edouard and Julia head to the bank to examine the papers, but it has closed for the lunch hour. Edouard tells Julia he'll return in the afternoon and phone her if the papers contain any information on Sarah.

In this chapter, Edouard gives his account of Sarah's return to the apartment. At the request of his father, Edouard has kept this day a secret from his entire family for sixty years. This has clearly been torturous, and Edouard admits that this secret effectively destroyed his relationship with his father, replacing his sense of adoration of the man with resentment. The chapter introduces the possibility that something in André's papers will not only redeem him in Edouard's eyes but also provide clues to Sarah's whereabouts. It also marks a significant shift in Julia's relationship with her father-in-law, as he becomes her first ally—aside from her work colleagues—in the search for Sarah.

CHAPTER 41

From this point on, all chapters focus on Julia's storyline. At the doctor's office, Julia makes several appointments, though for what is not specified. She thinks about her tender conversation with Bertrand the night before, when he told her all she "had always dreamed of hearing him say." She also thinks about Isabelle, who has encouraged her to make whatever decision about the pregnancy she feels is best for her. Julia admits to herself that she desperately wants to have the baby. When she gets home, Julia finds a large envelope on her desk and opens it to find a file where she immediately notices the word "Sarah."

Julia's narrative takes over at this point in the novel. This is interesting on a formal level because it suggests that there are still secrets about Sarah's life that will never be answered, silences that will never be filled. This chapter is important because Julia has finally made a decision about her pregnancy; though the text is not entirely clear, it seems likely that Julia has decided to have an abortion. Her inability to emotionally connect with Bertrand, despite him finally saying all the right things, suggests that the growing divide in her marriage may be unbridgeable.

CHAPTER 42

Inside the file, Julia finds twelve letters to André Tézac from Jules Dufaure, each containing updates on Sarah's wellbeing. The file also contains monthly bank statements which show that André sent money to the Dufaures for ten years. Julia also finds a photograph of Sarah at age eighteen and is struck by Sarah's "palpable sadness." While Julia is going through the file, Zoë enters the room. She asks Julia what's wrong, and who the girl in the photograph is. Julia gives Zoë some basic information about Sarah and admits that she is going to try to track her down, despite the fact that there is no information about Sarah after 1952 contained in the file.

Reading the contents of the folder provides Julia with important facts about Sarah's life after the war. Seeing these photographs of Sarah deepens Julia's feeling of connection with her, while uncovering more information about her life prior to 1952 only makes Julia hungrier for more details.

CHAPTER 43

It is revealed that Julia has scheduled an abortion, which will take place on July 16th, the same day as the Vel' d'Hiv' commemoration. Zoë has left for the States to stay with Charla for the summer, and Julia will join her later. Without her daughter, Julia feels lonely. Though she feels that "Paris without its Parisians" finally belongs to her, she also misses America like never before.

The fact that Julia's abortion will take place on the anniversary of the roundup underscores the interconnectedness of the past and present, and the connection between Sarah's and Julia's stories. This chapter is also significant because it foreshadows Julia's decision to return to America later in the novel.

CHAPTER 44

It is July 15th and Julia waits at the abortion clinic. She has told no one about the abortion, except for Bertrand. While she waits, she reads Sarah's file. Earlier in the morning, Julia had contacted a Nathalie Dufaure, great-granddaughter of Jules and Geneviève, and she is hoping to hear back from her. Julia's phone rings and she answers breathlessly, only to hear Bertrand's voice on the other end of the line. "What [can] I say to him?" she thinks bitterly.

This chapter emphasizes the depth of Julia's obsession with learning Sarah's fate. Even as she waits to have an abortion she doesn't want, she is focused on thinking about Sarah. Julia's disappointment at hearing Bertrand's voice on the other end of the phone also shows the alienation she feels from her husband.

CHAPTER 45

Julia stays the night in the abortion clinic in preparation for her procedure, as per her doctor's instructions. In the morning, she turns on the TV and sees coverage of the Vel' d'Hiv' commemoration. She also discovers a late-night voicemail from Nathalie, asking if Julia would like to accompany her on a visit to see her grandfather, Gaspard Dufaure, the following day. When the nurse arrives in Julia's room, Julia declares that she will be keeping the baby. She leaves the clinic.

For the first time, it seems, Julia makes her own decision instead of being swayed by Bertrand. This is a key step in Julia's growth into a more confident, self-assured character. This chapter also reemphasizes the impact that Sarah's story has had on Julia's life—as hearing from Nathalie snaps Julia out of the daze she has been in, and allows her to see clearly that she wants to carry her pregnancy to term rather than terminate it.


CHAPTER 46

Julia attends the Vel' d'Hiv' commemoration with Guillaume. She has to resist the urge to scan the faces in the crowd in search of Sarah. As she leaves the commemoration, on her way to meet Nathalie Dufaure, Julia wonders if she still cares what Bertrand will think about her decision to carry the pregnancy to term.

The commemoration ceremony is depicted as respectful and responsible. This is the first time in the novel that the French government is shown to be practicing any form of accountability for its role in the Holocaust. Julia's sense of detachment from Bertrand shows the limits of her love for him, and foreshadows the couple's eventual separation.


CHAPTER 47

When she gets home from her meeting with Nathalie and Gaspard in Orléans, Julia lies down, exhausted. She receives a phone call from Charla. When she learns that Julia has not had the abortion, Charla says she is "so proud." After hanging up, Julia thinks about her conversation with Gaspard and feels "vitality pumping back into [her]."

This chapter shows the positive effect that researching Sarah's story is having on Julia. She seems to be gaining confidence and a sense of purpose from making connections with people from Sarah's life. Even as tracking down Sarah takes an emotional toll on Julia, it also revitalizes her in a deep way, helping her feel more connected not only to people in the past but also in the present.

CHAPTER 48

The narration jumps backward in chronological order, to describe Julia's conversation with Gaspard. Gaspard and Nicolas grew up as Sarah's brothers, having been told that Sarah's parents died during the war and she had been adopted by their grandparents, Jules and Geneviève. It was years before they learned the truth about Sarah's background. Julia asks Gaspard about Sarah's current whereabouts, but Gaspard insists that he must first know "why this is so important" to Julia.

Gaspard and Nicolas not being told Sarah's real backstory may be the one example of a secret that does not have damaging consequences in the novel. The novel suggests that Jules and Geneviève's decision to shield their grandsons from the truth in this regard allowed Sarah the space she needed to begin healing. This chapter also sets up, for the first time, an opportunity for Julia to articulate why she is so invested in Sarah's story.

CHAPTER 49

The narration jumps ahead again. Julia receives a phone call from Zoë, who is eager to know what progress Julia has made on Sarah's case. Julia says that Sarah left France for the States in 1952. She then privately reflects on her conversation with Gaspard. She told him how Sarah's story is linked to her in-laws, and that she wants to find Sarah "to tell her we care, to tell her we have not forgotten"—and also to apologize. Gaspard had scoffed, saying that, as an American, Julia has nothing to apologize for. Julia clarifies: "Sorry for not knowing. Sorry for being forty-five years old and not knowing."

This chapter is significant because it underscores the importance of being educated about historical events. Julia's sense of guilt about "not knowing" is depicted as healthy rather than excessive, as other kinds of guilt in the novel are. This chapter suggests that educating oneself about the past is necessary to being whole as a person. For Julia, remedying her ignorance about the past seems to be a key ingredient in the journey to finding fulfillment at the midpoint of her life.

CHAPTER 50

The narration returns to Julia's meeting with Gaspard. Gaspard says that the last time his grandparents heard from Sarah was in 1955, when she sent a letter from the States to say she was engaged to an American. Gaspard says his grandparents waited years to hear from Sarah again, and died with their hearts broken. Gaspard begs Julia to find Sarah and give her a message of love from him and his brother. He also gives Julia a letter, written by Geneviève to her son, Alain, Gaspard's father.

This chapter emphasizes how deeply Sarah was and is beloved by the Dufaure family. Simultaneously, it once again underlines the difficult reality that the love of Sarah's adoptive family was not enough to help her overcome her profound loss. Although this chapter indicates that Jules and Geneviève were devastated by losing touch with Sarah, it by no means suggests that loving Sarah was not wholly worthwhile for the entire Dufaure family.

CHAPTER 51

At home, Julia reads the letter given to her by Gaspard. She shares it with Edouard over the phone. The letter is dated September 1946 and in it Geneviève thanks Alain and his wife, Henriette, for hosting Sarah for the summer. Geneviève writes that Sarah never speaks of her family, but that she often sits for hours in front of her brother's grave, holding the key. Geneviève says that "peace has a bitter taste," and that she feels she now lives in a France that she doesn't recognize.

Geneviève's letter paints a picture of Sarah as a painfully quiet person who is intensely private about her pain. Geneviève expresses her wish that Sarah would share her pain—or, at the very least, allow Geneviève to accompany her to Michel's grave. This suggests the hopeful possibility that Sarah might have found some relief in sharing her grief with her adopted family. However, both the situational narration and the letter itself are relatively unsentimental; the reality seems to be that no amount of talking could have ever appreciably lessened Sarah's terrible grief.

CHAPTER 52

Julia now receives a phone call from Joshua. He praises her for the attention her article is getting, but mentions that "it would have been perfect if [Julia] could have gotten those roundup cops to talk." Julia realizes that she has become "obsessed" with the victims of the roundup, and that "a good journalist" would have also attempted to break down the silence around the French government's role in the roundup. Joshua advises Julia to take some time off and go home, and Julia agrees.

Julia's assignment began as a short article about the commemoration of the roundup, and has blossomed into an obsession. This suggests that Sarah's story has a profound resonance for Julia in her life—Julia feels a deep personal connection to Sarah. The novel subtly suggests that Julia's guilt-driven determination to track down Sarah may be slightly unhealthy, as it has clouded her ability to be an effective journalist.

CHAPTER 53

The final phone call Julia receives that evening is from Nathalie, who says she has found Sarah's final letter, in which she writes that she will be married to a man named Richard Rainsferd. Julia immediately calls Charla and asks her if she can help track someone for her. Before she can give Charla Richard's name, Julia hears the door open and realizes Bertrand is home. She hangs up, telling her sister she'll get back to her.

The name of Sarah's husband is an important clue to helping Julia track her down. This chapter establishes Charla as sympathetic to (though not fully informed about) Julia's cause. The fact that Julia instantly hangs up upon hearing the door open shows how dedicated she is to keeping Sarah's story a secret from Bertrand. Given that the novel has already established the destructive power of secrets, it seems likely that this will have negative consequences for Julia and Bertrand's marriage.

CHAPTER 54

Bertrand hugs Julia and tells her he has heard from the doctor that she decided against the abortion. He smiles "a strange, desperate smile" and downs a glass of cognac, which Julia thinks of as "an ugly gesture." Bertrand insists that Julia having the child will "destroy" him. He claims he is going through a midlife crisis, saying that Julia has been so absorbed in her own affairs that she "[hasn't] even noticed what [he's] been going through. Julia asks to talk things through, but Bertrand says he is too tired. Julia finally realizes that she has been missing signs of her husband's depression, including weight gain and fatigue. She feels ashamed, but also deeply conflicted, wondering how she can "want [Bertrand's] child and not him." Although she wants to cry, no tears come.

This chapter shows Bertrand in a slightly more sympathetic light by revealing his struggles with depression. Julia feels guilty about having ignored Bertrand, but the novel seems to subliminally suggest that it is not Julia's "job" as his wife to care for Bertrand's need as she would those of her own child.


CHAPTER 55

Later that night, having found the file containing Sarah's papers, Bertrand confronts Julia. "You just can't help it, can you?" he says. "You just can't leave the past alone." Julia and Bertrand argue, with Julia urging her husband to call his father and ask about the file. Bertrand eventually relents. "What happened to us?" he asks Julia before leaving the room. After Bertrand is gone, Julia finally begins to cry. Although he hears her sobs, Bertrand "[does] not come back."

This chapter is important because it shows the long-brewing crisis in Julia's marriage to Bertrand coming to its breaking point. It also reinforces the fact that silence is a deeply-rooted norm in the Tézac family, as Bertrand completely ignores both Julia's plea for him to ask his father about Sarah, as well as Julia's crying.

CHAPTER 56

Julia leaves for New York City, "propelled back across the Atlantic like a piece of steel pulled by a powerful magnet." She is determined to track down Richard Rainsferd and, in doing so, Sarah. Before leaving, Julia calls Edouard and promises him she is going to do her best to find out what happened to Sarah.

Julia's feeling that she is being drawn across the ocean on her mission to find Sarah suggests that Julia's sense of self-fulfillment is bound up with learning about Sarah's fate. The magnet simile seems to indicate that Julia and Sarah are somehow cosmically connected, by a force much more powerful than can be easily comprehended or explained.

CHAPTER 57

Julia is thrilled to be reunited with Charla. In her sister's New York City apartment, Julia explains Sarah's story in full. As soon as the story is finished, Charla bolts to the phone and asks the operator for information on Richard Rainsferd. She receives an address and a phone number in Connecticut. Charla then calls the phone number. Mrs. Rainsferd is not at home but Charla speaks with a nurse who attends to Richard, who is ailing and bedridden. "So what do I do?" Julia asks. "I just go there?" Charla laughs and responds, "You got any other idea?"

Charla's eagerness and efficiency make her easy to like as a character. The ease with which Charla locates the Rainsferds parallels the ease with which Franck Lévy was able to discover the fates of the Starzynskis. This suggests that historical answers are often readily available, and that it is a lack of investment and care that prevents people from learning about the past, rather than practical obstacles.

CHAPTER 58

Julia sits in her car outside the Rainsferd home in Roxbury, Connecticut. She agonizes over what she should say when she rings the doorbell, wishing she had written a letter instead. As she is waiting, a woman approaches Julia and asks if she is looking for someone. Julia responds that she is looking for a Mrs. Rainsferd. The woman responds, "my mom's out," and introduces herself as Ornella. Julia accepts Ornella's invitation to come inside for iced tea, and the two soon hear footsteps on the driveway. A fifty-year-old woman with "tanned, leathery skin, and jet-black eyes" enters the house and Julia realizes that she is *not* looking at Sarah Starzynski.

This chapter is the climax of Julia's story. To come so close to meeting Sarah only to be disappointed is a serious blow for Julia; however, her refusal to be defeated shows that learning about Sarah means more to her than merely meeting Sarah, as one might meet a celebrity. Rather, Julia is interested in knowing what actually happened to Sarah—in having the gaps in her story filled. The fact that Julia wishes she had merely written Sarah a letter is noteworthy as well, as it addresses the difficulty of talking *about difficult topics, which can often be mitigated by writing about them.*

CHAPTER 59

The woman greets Julia warmly in Italian-accented English. Bewildered, Julia makes to leave, saying she has "the wrong Mrs. Rainsferd," since she is looking for a woman called Sarah. The Italian woman tells Julia that Sarah was her husband's first wife, and that she is sorry to say Sarah died in a car accident in 1972. Julia is so devastated she cannot speak—but her hopes revive when the Italian woman mentions a boy, Sarah's son, William. William's mother, whose name is Mara, proudly tells Julia that William now lives in Italy, having left Connecticut because it "reminds him of his mother's death." Julia eagerly asks for William's address.

Julia's determination to find Sarah's son shows how committed she is to learning more about the ending of Sarah's story. However, it means she will also be bringing another person into her investigation and possibly exposing him to painful memories of his deceased mother. As Julia's search for Sarah wears on, it expands to touch the lives and experiences of more and more people, suggesting that history does not end with the lives of those who lived it.

CHAPTER 60

Julia phones Joshua and asks for an advance on her paycheck, saying she is taking her daughter to Tuscany. Joshua is disgruntled but agrees. Julia wonders how she will break the news of her unexpected Italy trip to Zoë, Bertrand, and her parents, who are expecting her to come visit them in Massachusetts. She starts by explaining everything to Charla, expecting her support. Charla, however, is hesitant, reminding Julia that she is pregnant and probably shouldn't be traveling. She also warns Julia that William might not want to be reminded of his mother. Undeterred, Julia looks forward to leaving in two days for Lucca, Italy, to meet with William.

Yet again, Julia is extremely selective when deciding how she will share news with people. Charla's worry shows that Julia's decision to take this unexpected trip is slightly reckless. A diminishment in her ability to think clearly might be another consequence of Julia's tunnel vision when it comes to her goal of finding out about Sarah. At this point, it seems that Julia has truly come to love *Sarah. That this passion makes her impulsive and even foolish suggests another limit of the power of love.*

CHAPTER 61

In Lucca, Julia and Zoë make their way to the hotel. Julia worries it was crazy to travel to Italy, but she is reassured when she looks at Zoë's face, "beautiful, incandescent with joy and excitement." Julia is comforted by the idea that she can make this "a summer [Zoë will] never forget."

Here, Julia actively includes Zoë in her investigation. It seems Julia is not only concerned with learning about Sarah for personal reasons, but is also committed to Zoë learning about the history of her country (France) and of her paternal relatives.

CHAPTER 62

In her hotel, Julia puts her feet up to ease the pain in her belly. She reflects on her decision not to explain her sudden trip to her parents, or to tell them of her pregnancy. She feels as though her life has "shifted subtly" in the past months and wonders if this is because of Sarah. Though she is eager to meet William, she is too nervous to phone him. Zoë gives Julia the encouragement she needs, and Julia leaves a voicemail for William.

This chapter shows the crucial role that Zoë's encouragement and positive attitude play in Julia's life. Here, they make the difference between Julia contacting William and never being brave enough to call him. This chapter is also important because it introduces the possibility that all might not be well with Julia's pregnancy, as she postpones telling her parents.

CHAPTER 63

Julia and Zoë go out to dinner, and when they return to the hotel they find a note on their door, asking that they call William Rainsferd. Julia does so, and she and William arrange to meet at noon the following day.

Julia is a step closer to finally meeting Sarah's son and learning more about how Sarah's story ended.

CHAPTER 64

Julia awakens the next day with intense abdominal pain. Putting it out of her mind, she takes Zoë into town to meet William. When William arrives at the café, Julia is speechless, touched by the fact that William has his mother's eyes. The conversation soon turns to William's mother and Julia explains that she would like to discuss "the tragic events of July '42" with him. William is baffled, asking what Julia means. As she continues to explain, Julia begins to realize that William does not know about his mother's past. She decides to leave while there is still "time to take off before [she] shatter[s] the peace in this man's life to pieces." William amiably maintains that Julia's "got the wrong Sarah." Before William and Julia can part ways, Zoë snatches a photo of Sarah from Julia's bag and hands it to William, asking, "Is this your mother?" William utters the word "Jesus" and sinks back into his chair.

Julia is shocked to realize that William had no idea that his mother was a Holocaust survivor. The fact that she never considered this as a possibility shocks her, and testifies to her almost single-minded passion for learning about Sarah's fate. Here, again, Zoë plays an important role. Like her mother, she is brave enough not to shy away from daunting social situations. In fact, Zoë is more confident than Julia in this situation, but her decision to show William the photo has an element of brashness in it. The novel shows once more that conversations like this one are necessary, but that they by no means leave the participants unscathed.

CHAPTER 65

As William stares at the photograph of Sarah, Julia realizes that Sarah "had never told her son about who she really was" because she had wanted to live a new life in America. William angrily demands that Julia tell him why she has come. She tries to explain but William insists that she has the wrong person. He says he doesn't want to see or talk to her again, then leaves. Julia watches him go, stunned. Finally, Julia wearily rises to leave. She hears Zoë calling out behind her and starts to notice people on the street staring at her, but she doesn't realize what is happening until Zoë points to her skirt, which is soaked in blood. Julia gasps, "the baby," and loses consciousness.

Julia begins to worry that she has made a mistake in contacting William. She is taken aback by his anger and feels guilty for having so profoundly and suddenly altered his image of his mother. For the first time, Julia feels defeated. This chapter is also significant because of the implication that Julia's near-miscarriage is, at least in part, a result of her having pushed her body to extremes in the context of her search for Sarah. This shows that delving headfirst into the past has both emotional and physical effects on Julia.

CHAPTER 66

Julia awakens in a hospital and receives the good news that her baby is fine. Zoë is with her and Bertrand is on his way. In the wake of her conversation with William, Julia feels utterly lost. After he arrives, Bertrand takes care of all the details of Julia's care and Julia begins "to feel like a little old lady." Though Bertrand is kind and calm, Julia is disheartened that he does not once mention the baby she is carrying.

This chapter underscores the limits of love as a saving force. Though Julia is relieved that she has not lost the baby she has fought so hard to keep, she also wonders what she has to look forward to, now that her disastrous conversation with William has seemingly stopped her efforts to uncover Sarah's story. Neither Zoë's attentiveness nor the hope of her future child are enough to pull Julia out of the beginnings of a depression.

CHAPTER 67

A few weeks later, Julia is back in Paris on bed rest. Edouard visits every Friday. He is as distressed as Julia over how the visit with William played out. Julia gets her doctor's approval to host a dinner party, to which she invites Edouard, Gaspard, Nicolas, and Nathalie Dufaure. The dinner is a "moving, magical moment" as Julia observes the conversation of "three elderly men who [have] an unforgettable little girl in common." Julia wishes that William were present, thinking that only he has the answers she craves to her lingering questions about Sarah.

Julia's dinner party shows clearly how cathartic it is to openly discuss the past. The joy of the three older men is evident as Julia observes them, and underscores the fact that pain can, perhaps, be lessened by being shared. Julia's continued thoughts of William and Sarah show that she still does not feel the type of closure that she seems to be witnessing in Edouard's meeting with the Dufaure brothers.


CHAPTER 68

Julia's due date approaches. Bertrand has decided to delay moving to the rue de Saintonge apartment due to Julia's difficult pregnancy. Julia feels trapped in this extended waiting. She wonders obsessively about how William is processing what she told him about his mother.

This chapter suggests that Julia is grappling with feelings of guilt over her interactions with William. Julia's worry about William also suggests that she might care about him as more than just Sarah's son, implying that she is perhaps romantically attracted to him.

CHAPTER 69

Julia visits the rue de Saintonge apartment, which is nearly fully renovated, and wonders if she will be able to bear living in the place where Michel died. One day in November, when Julia is visiting the apartment to make some decorating decisions, she receives a call from Mamé's nursing home. Mamé has had a stroke and the home has been unable to reach Bertrand. Julia phones both of Bertrand's sisters, and when Cécile reveals that she has just spoken to her brother, Julia realizes that Bertrand has been seeing Amélie again. She is infuriated by the fact that Bertrand's sisters are able to reach him in an emergency and she is not. She wonders when Bertrand will realize that it is his cowardice rather than his unfaithfulness that devastates her.

Julia's visit to the rue de Saintonge apartment once again emphasizes the important role that physical spaces play in embodying and perpetuating historical memory. Julia's anger over being unable to personally reach Bertrand at Amélie's shows, explicitly, how destructive she feels her husband's silence about his mistress is. The fact that Julia characterizes Bertrand's secretiveness as cowardice parallels the questions raised in Sarah's storyline about how keeping secrets can be a misguided act and how silence can easily amount to complicity.


Julia hears a knock at the door and opens it to find William Rainsferd looking "gaunt, haunted." Julia confusedly inquires how William got the rue de Saintonge address, since it is not yet listed. He produces a notebook and says the address was listed inside. Along with the notebook, he gives Julia a drawing and a **key**—item that he recently discovered while visiting his father. Julia's phone rings—it is Edouard, who tells her that Mamé has been asking for her. Julia asks William to come with her, saying, "There's someone I want you to meet."

This chapter is moving in the way it shows a clear, direct link between the past and the present. Without Sarah's notebook, William would not have been able to find Julia at the rue de Saintonge apartment. This profoundly emphasizes the interconnectedness of history and the present. The key also makes its first appearance in the present-day timeline of the novel, once again showing how physical objects and places serve as persistent witnesses to history.

CHAPTER 70

Julia visits Mamé, along with William, Bertrand, Colette, Edouard, Laure, and Cécile. After the family is informed that Mamé's condition has stabilized, Julia introduces William to her father-in-law. The Tézac women observe the meeting in confusion, but Julia senses that Bertrand understands what is happening. Edouard assures William that Julia will share Sarah's story. As Edouard and the Tézacs leave, Julia imagines the shock that Colette, Laure, and Cécile will experience if and when Edouard explains everything to them.

The meeting of Edouard and William in this chapter is rendered poignantly, and shows the power of breaking silence. Though Edouard leaves the conversation looking suddenly "like an old man, shrunken and wan," the novel continues to suggest that such emotional strain could have been avoided had the Tézac family not kept so many secrets.

CHAPTER 71

In the hall of the nursing home, William asks to hear his mother's story. The two go to a café, where Julia tells the story and then translates Sarah's diary, which is written in French. In it, Sarah writes that she has kept **the key** with her every day since the day of the roundup. She writes that coming to America "was a terrible mistake" as she is unable to leave her past behind her. In her dreams, she writes, Michel takes her by the **hand** and leads her away.

The excerpt from Sarah's journal drives home the devastating depth of her guilt over Michel's death. Sarah's writing makes it clear that she has never forgiven herself, and that the burden of her loss is a pain she has never been able to escape, despite having found a loving surrogate family in the Dufaures. Sarah's journal entry also emphasizes the impossibility of wholly abandoning one's past, by showing that Sarah viewed her immigration to America as a mistaken attempt at creating a new life and identity for herself.

CHAPTER 72

William reveals that Sarah killed herself by driving her car into a tree. Julia is at a loss for words, and although she wishes she could take William's **hand**, she feels something holding her back. Even in the ensuing silence, however, she feels comfortable in William's company. William thanks Julia for sharing Sarah's story. He vows that he will visit Beaune-la-Rolande and the site of the Vélodrome, but declines Julia's offer to accompany him. Julia watches as William leaves the café, wishing that he had asked to keep in touch. She "folds [her] palms over the roundness of [her] stomach, letting loneliness ebb into [her]."

The revelation that Sarah's death was a suicide further underscores the terrible toll that guilt took on her life (and on the life of her child, William). This chapter is also significant because Julia's total comfort in William's silence introduces the possibility for a deep, romantic connection between William and Julia. This is one of the first occasions in the novel where silence has a positive connotation.

CHAPTER 73

Julia arrives home to find the entire Tézac family, along with Bertrand and Zoë, waiting in the living room. The family is split: Edouard, Zoë, and Cécile agree with Julia's decision to research Sarah's fate, but Colette and Laure disagree, and Bertrand remains silent. The family argues vehemently over the issue, and Zoë finally jumps in to reveal that, despite André Tézac's efforts to hide Sarah's story from his wife, Mamé has known all along. Before her stroke, Zoë says, Mamé stated that the Tézacs were wrong to have kept Sarah's story hidden and that they "should have found the little girl's family." Zoë also declares that she wants to grow up to be like her mother. Edouard whispers to Julia that she's done the right thing, and the family disperses. That evening Julia lies awake thinking of William. Zoë sneaks into Julia's room and falls asleep with her mother. Though Julia feels peaceful thanks to Zoë's presence, "the ache, the sadness" remains.

The extended argument among the members of the Tézac family attests to how upsetting and disruptive learning about historical traumas can be. Ultimately, Edouard's approval and Zoë's pride in her assure Julia that she made the right choice—yet the ache she feels suggests that she still feels there is work to be done. This suggests that Julia's desire to learn about Sarah goes beyond prompting the Tézacs to break their habitual silence. On a personal level, Julia needs to feel that she has closure in her relationship with a person she has never, and will never, meet.

CHAPTER 74

The narrative jumps to the year 2005. Julia, Zoë, and Julia's two-year-old daughter (young Sarah) now live in New York City. Julia has a bland but kind boyfriend with whom she shares a "mechanical and dull" sex life. She feels like "a wooden Charlie Chaplin character," stumbling through her own life.

Julia is in the throes of an identity crisis that has been in motion since she first looked at her reflection in Chapter 2. She also seems to be depressed, which suggests the powerful hold that her research on Sarah still has on her nearly three years after the fact.

CHAPTER 75

Julia watches her daughters play in the park, reflecting on the recent changes in her life. Julia gave birth prematurely and, shortly thereafter, Bertrand confessed that he was in love with Amélie and would be moving in with her. Mamé died a few months later. One day, Zoë voiced her mother's thoughts, asking, "Mom, do we have to go live in the rue de Saintonge?" Julia said she'd rather not, and suggested a move to New York City instead.

Julia's extreme reluctance to live in the rue de Saintonge apartment attests to the power of history and, yet again, to the way that memory becomes embedded in physical structures. This chapter is also significant because it depicts Julia's relief, rather than anger, at hearing Bertrand's confession, underscoring the sense of consolation that comes from breaking silence instead of keeping up a charade.

CHAPTER 76

Though Bertrand was not thrilled at the prospect of Julia and Zoë moving, Julia insisted the move would not be permanent. Initially, Julia and Zoë stayed with Charla, but then moved into their own apartment. Julia now works from home for a French website and Zoë attends school a few blocks from the apartment. Zoë complains that her schoolmates call her Frenchy, which Julia finds amusing.

This chapter establishes the stakes of Julia's new life in New York City. It also hints at Zoë's struggle to fit in as a bicultural kid. Julia seems to romanticize this struggle, perhaps because she herself had to struggle for much of her adult life with fitting into a culture that was not the one she grew up in.

CHAPTER 77

Julia finds herself missing Paris, particularly "the way French men check women out." She feels she has "become invisible" in New York City. Even when she spends nights with her boyfriend, Julia is haunted by images, which consume her "like the tide creeping up the beach."

Julia is still struggling with her sense of selfhood. Her feeling of invisibility highlights the fact that she is unused to not having outside validation of her own worth. Her nighttime visions show that she is literally haunted by all she has learned about the past over the preceding months.

CHAPTER 78

Zoë catches Julia googling William Rainsferd. Julia abashedly admits that she has looked William up "regularly in the past year," and that she knows he his back in the States, living in New York City. Zoë tells Julia that she has to let go, but Julia insists that she "need[s] to know if what [she] did helped him." Zoë replies that William probably never wants to see Julia again. Julia hugs Zoë and resolves to take her advice about moving on, though she doesn't know how to begin.

This chapter paints a complicated picture of Zoë. Her advice to her mom is characterized as at once mature and perceptive, and slightly dismissive of Julia's compulsive need for closure with William. Zoë seems to be living in the "in-between" of childhood and adulthood, a phase that Sarah never got to experience.

CHAPTER 79

Julia keeps herself busy, working and meeting new people. She has trouble sleeping, dreaming often about Paris and "the horrors of the past." She also finds herself constantly thinking of William's eyes and face.

This chapter illustrates how obsessed Julia has continued to be with the past, and with William. This seems to be due to a mixture of guilt over having dropped a bombshell into his life, and a sense of attraction to William.

CHAPTER 80

The sixtieth commemoration of Auschwitz's liberation in January of 2005 causes Julia to wonder even more acutely about William. Along with Charla and Zoë, Julia watches the commemoration ceremony on TV, marveling at the candles "glowing through the darkness with a poignant, sharp mixture of grief and remembrance."

Julia continues to feel guilty about and to long for William. The commemoration of Auschwitz's liberation is depicted as tasteful and substantive—a nearly perfect model of how past horrors should be confronted and remembered.

CHAPTER 81

One day in May, Julia receives a phone call from William, who asks if she would like to meet for coffee in a half hour. Hardly able to breathe, Julia puts young Sarah in her stroller and heads out.

William finally breaks his silence by calling Julia, which elates her. It seems as though seeing William again may be the key to Julia feeling more at piece in her new life.

CHAPTER 82

At the café William and Julia exchange pleasantries. William takes a brief phone call and explains to Julia that it was his girlfriend calling. He tells Julia that his life fell apart after he learned his mother's story. He split from his wife and took his two daughters to visit Auschwitz, where he saw his grandparents' graves and felt both peace and pain. William shows Julia some photos he has of his mother, describing her as "an intense person, and a loving mother."

The dramatic changes in William's life after learning about his mother's history echo the changes in Julia's life. Though these changes were ultimately for the better, this chapter underscores the fact that they were not made without pain. Sarah's history continues to have a meaningful and dramatic impact on the lives of those who uncover it.

After looking at the photos, Julia hesitantly asks William if he has any "harsh feelings" toward her. He says he doesn't, and that he did not get in touch with Julia because he needed time to process. When William's girlfriend phones again, the conversation turns briefly back to pleasantries, though Julia longs to tell William that, every night for two and a half years, she has thought of him and his mother. William then confesses that he wishes he had accepted Julia's offer to visit Beaune-la-Rolande with him, as it was "too much to bear alone." He says that he also returned to the rue de Saintonge apartment, hoping to see Julia, and when the door was opened by a stranger he felt she had "let [him] down." Julia recoils, and William apologizes for being insensitive.

It's difficult to know what to make of Julia's unspoken admission that she thinks of William and Sarah every night. In all likelihood, it is an indication that Julia is in love with William—however, Julia's conflation of William and Sarah does seem to suggest that Julia's romantic interest in William springs from some kind of psychological urge to feel close to Sarah. This section is also important because it shows that Julia is no longer afraid to stand up for herself, as she refuses to allow William to make her feel guilty, maintaining that she "never let [him] down." This represents a dramatic transformation in Julia's character, and suggests that any romantic future Julia might have with William would perhaps be healthier than her relationship with Bertrand, because she now has a stronger sense of self.

Julia relaxes, again experiencing the distinct, quiet comfort of William's company. William discusses his children and asks about Julia's baby. He is under the impression that the baby's name is Lucy (when Julia entered the café, William asked young Sarah her name and she responded with the name of her toy giraffe, Lucy). When Julia explains that her daughter is named Sarah, William buries his face in his hands. Finally, he raises his "wrecked, beautiful" face and allows Julia to see the emotion in his eyes. Julia feels that "he want[s] [her] to see it all, the beauty and ache of his life […] his thanks, his gratitude, his pain." Julia takes William's **hand** and, closing her eyes, presses it to her face, which soon becomes wet with tears of her own. The two of them sit this way for "a long time," until they feel their "eyes [can] meet again, without the tears."

Like her namesake, young Sarah's name is not revealed for several chapters—until now (she is initially referred to as "the baby"). The fact that Julia names her daughter after Sarah Starzynski means that there is now living proof of the profound impact that Sarah's story had on Julia. The ambiguous yet sensual ending of the novel suggests that, despite the fact that they are both in relationships, Julia and William will, indeed, have a romantic future together, which will be all the richer for their shared bond with the incredible Sarah.

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