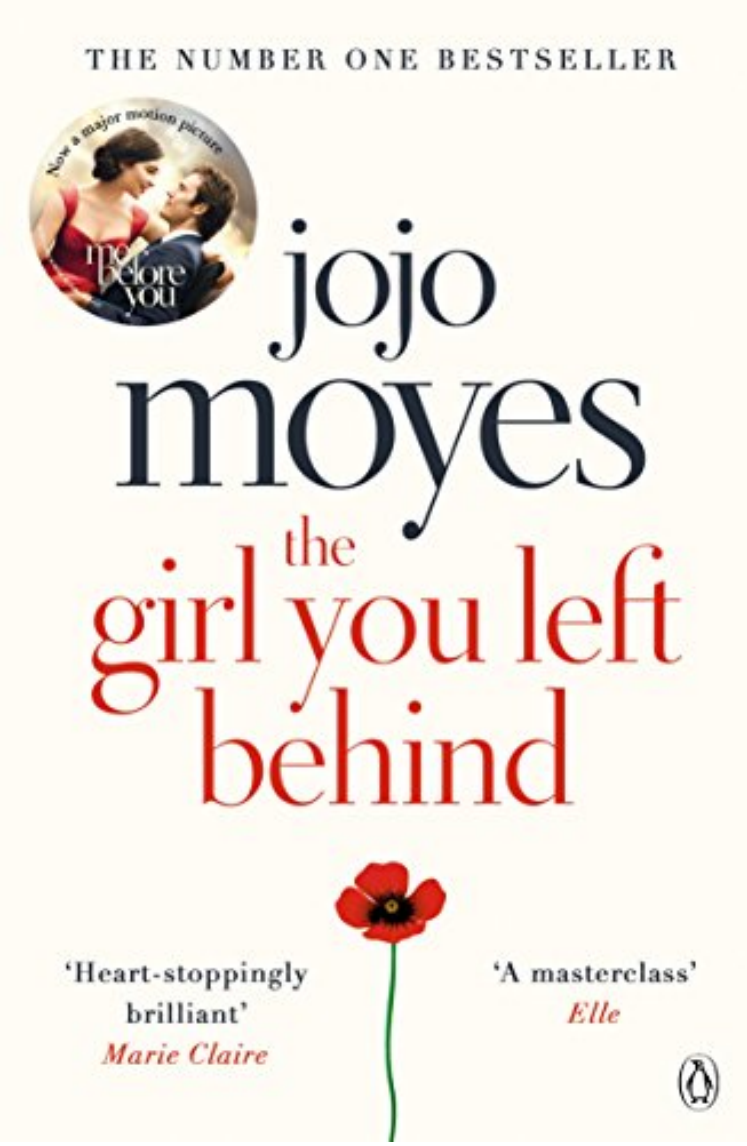
The Girl You Left Behind



Par Jojo Moyes
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[Free and download] The Girl You Left Behind

Par Jojo Moyes : The Girl You Left Behind before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Girl You Left Behind:

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurA hauntingly romantic and utterly irresistible weepy from the author of the international bestsellers Me Before You and After You.What happened to the girl you left behind?France, 1916. Sophie Lefevre must keep her family safe whilst her adored husband Edouard fights at the front. When she is ordered to serve the German officers who descend on her hotel each evening, her home becomes riven by fierce tensions. And from the moment the new Kommandant sets eyes on Sophie's portrait - painted by Edouard - a dangerous obsession is born, which will lead Sophie to make a dark and terrible decision.Almost a century later, and Sophie's portrait hangs in the home of Liv Halston, a wedding gift from her young husband before he died. A chance encounter reveals the painting's true worth, and its troubled history. A

history that is about to resurface and turn Liv's life upside down all over again . . .In The Girl You Left Behind two young women, separated by a century, are united in their determination to fight for what they love most - whatever the cost. Praise for The Girl You Left Behind:'Moyes is the queen of the classy weepy and this won't disappoint. A masterclass in storytelling that fans of Me Before You will adore' Elle'Another heart-stoppingly brilliant novel from Jojo Moyes' Closer'Wonderfully well-written and completely engrossing, with exquisitely drawn characters in a brilliantly plotted narrative. It will make you think long after you turn the final page' Daily MailExtraitACKNOWLEDGMENTSThis book owes a great deal to Helen McPhails excellent book The Long Silence: Civilian Life Under the German Occupation of Northern France, 19141918, about a largely unrecorded (at least in this country) corner of First World War history.I would also like to thank Jeremy Scott, partner at Lipman Karas, for his generous expert help on the issue of restitution, and for answering my many questions with patience. I have had to tweak certain legal points and procedures for the sake of the plot, and any errors or deviations from actual practice are, of course, my own.Thanks to my publishers at Pamela Dorman Books, most pertinently Pamela Dorman, but also Clare Ferraro, Carolyn Coleburn, Nancy Sheppard, Julie Miesionczek, Kiki Koroshetz, Louise Braverman, Rebecca Lang, Meredith Burks, Roseanne Serra, Kathryn Court, Dick Heffernan, and Norman Lidofsky, as well as the whole team at Penguin USA. 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Too many to mention here.Most thanks, as ever, to Jim Moyes, and Lizzie and Brian Sanders, and to my family, Saskia, Harry, and Lockieand to Charles Arthur, proofreader, plot tweaker, and long-suffering writers ear. Now you know what its like....PART ONE1ST. PRONNEOctober 1916I was dreaming of food. Crisp baguettes, the flesh of the bread a virginal white, still steaming from the oven, and ripe cheese, its borders creeping toward the edge of the plate. Grapes and plums, stacked high in bowls, dusky and fragrant, their scent filling the air. I was about to reach out and take one, when my sister stopped me. Get off, I murmured. Im hungry.Sophie. Wake up.I could taste that cheese. I was going to have a mouthful of Reblochon, smear it on a hunk of that warm bread, then pop a grape into my mouth. I could already taste the intense sweetness, smell the rich aroma.But there it was, my sisters hand on my wrist, stopping me. The plates were disappearing, the scents fading. I reached out to them but they began to pop, like soap bubbles.Sophie.What?They have Aurlien!I turned onto my side and blinked. My sister was wearing a cotton bonnet, as I was, to keep warm. Her face, even in the feeble light of her candle, was leached of color, her eyes wide with shock. They have Aurlien. Downstairs.My mind began to clear. From below us came the sound of men shouting, their voices bouncing off the stone courtyard, the hens squawking in their coop. In the thick dark, the air vibrated with some terrible purpose. I sat upright in bed, dragging my gown around me, struggling to light the candle on my bedside table.I stumbled past her to the window and stared down into the courtyard at the soldiers, illuminated by the headlights of their vehicle, and my younger brother, his arms around his head, trying to avoid the rifle butts that landed blows on him.Whats happening?They know about the pig.What?Monsieur Suel must have informed on us. I heard them shouting from my room. They say theyll take Aurlien if he doesnt tell them where it is.He will say nothing, I said.We flinched as we heard our brother cry out. I hardly recognized my sister then: She looked twenty years older than her twenty-four years. I knew her fear was mirrored in my own face. This was what we had dreaded.They have a Kommandant with them. If they find it, Hlne whispered, her voice cracking with panic, theyll arrest us all. You know what took place in Arras. Theyll make an example of us. What will happen to the children?My mind raced, fear that my brother might speak out making me stupid. I wrapped a shawl around my shoulders and tiptoed to the window, peering out at the courtyard. The presence of a Kommandant suggested these were not just drunken soldiers looking to take out their frustrations with a few threats and knocks: We were in trouble.They will find it, Sophie. It will take them minutes. And then... Hlnes voice rose, lifted by panic.My thoughts turned black. I closed my eyes. And then I opened them. Go downstairs, I said. Plead ignorance. Ask him what Aurlien has done wrong. Talk to him, distract him. Just give me some time before

they come into the house.What are you going to do?I gripped my sisters arm. Go. But tell them nothing, you understand? Deny everything.My sister hesitated, then ran toward the corridor, her nightgown billowing behind her. Im not sure I had ever felt as alone as I did in those few seconds, fear gripping my throat and the weight of my familys fate upon me. I ran into Fathers study and scrabbled in the drawers of the great desk, hurling its contentsold pens, scraps of paper, pieces from broken clocks, and ancient billsonto the floor, thanking God when I finally found what I was searching for. Then I ran downstairs, opened the cellar door, and skipped down the cold stone stairs, so surefooted now in the dark that I barely needed the fluttering glow of the candle. I lifted the heavy latch to the back cellar, which had once been stacked to the roof with beer kegs and good wine, slid one of the empty barrels aside, and opened the door of the old cast-iron bread oven.The piglet, still only half grown, blinked sleepily. It lifted itself to its feet, peered out at me from its bed of straw, and grunted. Surely Ive told you about the pig? We liberated it during the requisition of Monsieur Girards farm. Like a gift from God, it had strayed into the chaos, meandering away from the piglets being loaded into the back of a German truck, and was swiftly swallowed by the bulky skirts of Grandma Poilne. Weve been fattening it on acorns and scraps for weeks, in the hope of raising it to a size great enough for us all to have some meat. The thought of that crisp skin, that moist pork, has kept the inhabitants of Le Coq Rouge going for the past month.Outside I heard my brother yelp again, then my sisters voice, rapid and urgent, cut short by the harsh tones of a German officer. The pig looked at me with intelligent, understanding eyes, as if it already knew its fate.Im so sorry, mon petit, I whispered, but this really is the only way. And I brought down my hand.I was outside in a matter of moments. I had woken Mimi, telling her only that she must come but to stay silentthe child has seen so much these last months that she obeys without question. She glanced up at me holding her baby brother, slid out of bed, and placed a hand in mine.The air was crisp with the approach of winter, the smell of woodsmoke lingering in the air from our brief fire earlier in the evening. I saw the Kommandant through the stone archway of the back door and hesitated. It was not Herr Becker, whom we knew and despised. This was a slimmer man, clean-shaven, impassive, watchful. Even in the dark I thought I could detect intelligence, rather than brutish ignorance, in his manner, which made me afraid.This new Kommandant was gazing speculatively up at our windows, perhaps considering whether this building might provide a more suitable billet than the Fourrier farm, where the senior German officers slept. I suspect he knew that our elevated aspect would give him a vantage point across the town. There were stables for horses and ten bedrooms, from the days when our home was the towns thriving hotel.Hlne was on the cobbles, shielding Aurlien with her arms.One of his men had raised his rifle, but the Kommandant lifted his hand. Stand up, he ordered them. Hlne scrambled backward, away from him. I glimpsed her face, taut with fear.I felt Mimis hand tighten round mine as she saw her mother, and I gave hers a squeeze, even though my heart was in my mouth. And I strode out. What in Gods name is going on? My voice rang out in the yard.The Kommandant glanced toward me, surprised by my tone: a young woman walking through the arched entrance to the farmyard, a thumb-sucking child at her skirts, another swaddled and clutched to her chest. My night bonnet sat slightly askew, my white cotton nightgown so worn now that it barely registered as fabric against my skin. I prayed that he could not hear the almost audible thumping of my heart.I addressed him directly: And for what supposed misdemeanor have your men come to punish us now?I guessed he had not heard a woman speak to him in this way since his last leave home. The silence that fell upon the courtyard was steeped in shock. My brother and sister, on the ground, twisted round, the better to see me, only too aware of where such insubordination might leave us all.You are...?Madame Lefvre.I could see he was checking for the presence of my wedding ring. He neednt have bothered: Like most women in our area, I had long since sold it for food.Madame. We have information that you are harboring illegal livestock. His French was passable, suggesting previous postings in the occupied territory, his voice calm. This was not a man who felt threatened by the unexpected.Livestock?A reliable source tells us that you are keeping a pig on the premises. You will be aware that, under the directive, the penalty for withholding livestock from the administration is imprisonment.I held his gaze. And I know exactly who would inform you of such a thing. Its Monsieur Suel, non? My cheeks were flushed with color; my hair, twisted into a long plait that hung over my shoulder, felt electrified. It prickled at the nape of my neck.The Kommandant turned to one of his minions. The mans glance sideways told him this was true.Monsieur Suel, Herr Kommandant, comes here at least twice a month attempting to persuade us that in the absence of our husbands we are in need of his particular brand of comfort. Because we have chosen not to avail ourselves of his supposed kindness, he repays us with rumors and a threat to our lives.The authorities would not act unless the source was credible.I would argue, Herr Kommandant, that this visit

suggests otherwise.The look he gave me was impenetrable. He turned on his heel and walked toward the house door. I followed him, half tripping over my skirts in my attempt to keep up. I knew the mere act of speaking so boldly to him might be considered a crime. And yet, at that moment, I was no longer afraid.Look at us, Kommandant. Do we look as though we are feasting on beef, on roast lamb, on filet of pork? He turned, his eyes flicking toward my bony wrists, just visible at the sleeves of my gown. I had lost two inches from my waist in the last year alone. Are we grotesquely plump with the bounty of our hotel? We have three hens left of two dozen. Three hens that we have the pleasure of keeping and feeding so that your men might take the eggs. We, meanwhile, live on what the German authorities deem to be a dietdecreasing rations of meat and flour, and bread made from grit and bran so poor we would not use it to feed livestock.He was in the back hallway, his heels echoing on the flagstones. He hesitated, then walked through to the bar and barked an order. A soldier appeared from nowhere and handed him a lamp.We have no milk to feed our babies, our children weep with hunger, we become ill from lack of nutrition. And still you come here in the middle of the night to terrify two women and brutalize an innocent boy, to beat us and threaten us, because you heard a rumor from an immoral man that we were feasting?My hands were shaking. He saw the baby squirm, and I realized I was so tense that I was holding it too tightly. I stepped back, adjusted the shawl, crooned to it. Then I lifted my head. I could not hide the bitterness and anger in my voice.Search our home, then, Kommandant. Turn it upside down and destroy what little has not already been destroyed. Search all the outbuildings, too, those that your men have not already stripped for their own wants. When you find this mythical pig, I hope your men dine well on it.I held his gaze for just a moment longer than he might have expected. Through the window I could make out my sister wiping Aurliens wounds with her skirts, trying to stem the blood. Three German soldiers stood over them.My eyes were used to the dark now, and I saw that the Kommandant was wrong-footed. His men, their eyes uncertain, were waiting for him to give the orders. He could instruct them to strip our house to the beams and arrest us all to pay for my extraordinary outburst. But I knew he was thinking of Suel, whether he might have been misled. He did not look the kind of man to relish the possibility of being seen to be wrong.When douard and I used to play poker, he had laughed and said I was an impossible opponent, as my face never revealed my true feelings. I told myself to remember those words now: This was the most important game I would ever play. We stared at each other, the Kommandant and I. I felt, briefly, the whole world still around us: I could hear the distant rumble of the guns at the front, my sisters coughing, the scrabbling of our poor, scrawny hens disturbed in their coop. It faded until just he and I faced each other, each gambling on the truth. I swear I could hear my very heart beating.What is this?What?He held up the lamp, and it was dimly illuminated in pale gold light: the portrait douard had painted of me when we were first married. There I was, in that first year, my hair thick and lustrous around my shoulders, my skin clear and blooming, gazing out with the self-possession of the adored. I had brought it down from its hiding place several weeks before, telling my sister I was damned if the Germans would decide what I should look at in my own home.He lifted the lamp a little higher so that he could see it more clearly. Do not put it there, Sophie, Hlne had warned. It will invite trouble.When he finally turned to me, it was as if he had had to tear his eyes from it. He looked at my face, then back at the painting. My husband painted it. I dont know why I felt the need to tell him that.Perhaps it was the certainty of my righteous indignation. Perhaps it was the obvious difference between the girl in the picture and the girl who stood before him. Perhaps it was the weeping blond child who stood at my feet. It is possible that even Kommandants, two years into this occupation, have become weary of harassing us for petty misdemeanors.He looked at the painting a moment longer, then at his feet.I think we have made ourselves clear, madame. Our conversation is not finished. But I will not disturb you further tonight.He caught the flash of surprise on my face, barely suppressed, and I saw that it satisfied something in him. It was perhaps enough for him to know I had believed myself doomed. He was smart, this man, and subtle. I would have to be wary.Men.His soldiers turned, blindly obedient as ever, and walked out toward their vehicle, their uniforms silhouetted against the headlights. I followed him and stood just outside the door. The last I heard of his voice was the order to the driver to make for the town.We waited as the military vehicle traveled back down the road, its headlights feeling their way along the pitted surface. Hlne had begun to shake. Aurlien stood awkwardly beside me, holding Mimis hand, embarrassed by his childish tears. I waited for the last sounds of the engine to die away. Are you hurt, Aurlien? I touched his head. Flesh wounds. And bruises. What kind of men attacked an unarmed boy?He flinched. It didnt hurt, he said. They didnt frighten me.I thought he would arrest you, my sister said. I thought he would arrest us all. I was afraid when she looked like that, as if she were teetering on the edge of some vast abyss. She wiped her eyes and forced a smile as

she crouched to hug her daughter. Silly Germans. They gave us all a fright, didnt they? Silly Maman for being frightened.The child watched her mother, silent and solemn. Sometimes I wondered if I would ever see Mimi laugh again.Im sorry. Im all right now, she went on. Lets all go inside. Mimi, we have a little milk I will warm for you. She wiped her hands on her bloodied gown and held her hands toward me for the baby. You want me to take Jean?I had started to tremble convulsively, as if I had only just realized how afraid I should have been. My legs felt watery, their strength seeping into the cobblestones. I felt a desperate urge to sit down. Yes, I said. I suppose you should.My sister reached out, then gave a small cry. Nestling in the blankets, swaddled neatly so that it was barely exposed to the night air, was the pink, hairy snout of the piglet.Jean is asleep upstairs, I said. I thrust a hand at the wall to keep myself upright.Aurlien looked over her shoulder. They all stared at it.Mon Dieu.Is it dead?Chloroformed. I remembered Papa had a bottle in his study, from his butterfly-collecting days. I think it will wake up. But were going to have to find somewhere else to keep it, for when they return. And you know they will return.Aurlien smiled then, a rare, slow smile of delight. Hlne stooped to show Mimi the comatose little pig, and they grinned. Hlne kept touching its snout, clamping a hand over her face, as if she couldnt believe what she was holding.You held the pig before them? They came here and you held it out in front of their noses? And then you told them off for coming here? Her voice was incredulous.In front of their snouts, said Aurlien, who seemed suddenly to have recovered some of his swagger. Hah! You held it in front of their snouts!I sat down on the cobbles and began to laugh. I laughed until my skin grew chilled, and I didnt know whether I was laughing or weeping. My brother, perhaps afraid I was becoming hysterical, took my hand and rested against me. He was fourteen, sometimes bristling like a man, sometimes childlike in his need for reassurance.Hlne was still deep in thought. If I had known... , she said. How did you become so brave, Sophie? My little sister! Who made you like this? You were a mouse when we were children. A mouse!I wasnt sure I knew the answer.And then, as we finally walked back into the house, as Hlne busied herself with the milk pan and Aurlien began to wash his poor, battered face, I stood before the portrait.That girl, the girl douard had married, looked back with an expression I no longer recognized. He had seen it in me long before anyone else did: It speaks of knowledge, that smileof satisfaction gained and given. It speaks of pride. When his Parisian friends had found his love of mea shopgirlinexplicable, he had just smiled, because he could already see this in me.I never knew if he understood that I found it only because of him.I stood and gazed at her, and, for a few seconds, I remembered how it had felt to be that girl, free of hunger, of fear, consumed only by idle thoughts of what private moments I might spend with douard. She reminded me that the world is capable of beauty, and that there were once thingsart, joy, lovethat filled my world, instead of fear and nettle soup and curfews. I saw him in my expression. And then I realized what I had just done. He had reminded me of my own strength, of how much I had left in me with which to fight.When you return, douard, I swear I will once again be the girl you painted.2The story of the pig-baby had reached most of St. Pronne by lunchtime. The bar of Le Coq Rouge saw a constant stream of customers, even though we had little to offer other than chicory coffee; beer supplies were sporadic, and we had only a few ruinously expensive bottles of wine. It was astonishing how many people called just to wish us good day.And you tore a strip off him? Told him to go away? Old Ren, chuckling into his mustache, was clutching the back of a chair and weeping tears of laughter. He had asked to hear the story four times now, and with every telling Aurlien had embellished it a little more, until he was fighting off the Kommandant with a saber, while I cried Der Kaiser ist Scheiss!I exchanged a small smile with Hlne, who was sweeping the floor of the caf. I didnt mind. There had been little enough to celebrate in our town lately.We must be careful, Hlne said, as Ren left, lifting his hat in salute. We watched him, convulsed with renewed mirth as he passed the post office, pausing to wipe his eyes. This story is spreading too far.Nobody will say anything. Everyone hates the Boche. I shrugged. Besides, they all want a piece of pork. Theyre hardly going to inform on us before their food arrives.The pig had been moved discreetly next door in the early hours of the morning. Some months ago Aurlien, chopping up old beer barrels for firewood, had discovered that the only thing separating the labyrinthine wine cellar from that of the neighbors, the Fouberts, was a single-skin brick wall. We had carefully removed several of the bricks, with the Fouberts cooperation, and this had become an escape route of last resort. When the Fouberts had harbored a young Englishman, and the Germans had arrived unannounced at their door at dusk, Madame Foubert had pleaded incomprehension at the officers instructions, giving the young man just enough time to sneak down to the cellar and through into our side. They had taken her house to pieces, even looked around the cellar, but in the dim light not one had noticed that the mortar in the wall was suspiciously gappy.This was the story of our lives: minor insurrections; tiny victories; a brief chance to ridicule our oppressors; little

floating vessels of hope amid a great sea of uncertainty, deprivation, and fear.You met the new Kommandant, then? The mayor was seated at one of the tables near the window. As I brought him some coffee, he motioned to me to sit down. More than anyone elses, his life, I often thought, had been intolerable since the occupation: He had spent his time in a constant state of negotiation with the Germans to grant the town what it needed, but periodically they had taken him hostage to force recalcitrant townspeople to do their bidding.It was not a formal introduction, I said, placing the cup in front of him.He tilted his head toward me, his voice low. Herr Becker has been sent back to Germany to run one of the reprisal camps. Apparently there were inconsistencies in his bookkeeping.Thats no surprise. He is the only man in Occupied France who has doubled in weight in two years. I was joking, but my feelings at his departure were mixed. On the one hand Becker had been harsh, his punishments excessive, born out of insecurity and a fear that his men would not think him strong enough. But he had been too stupidblind to many of the towns acts of resistanceto cultivate any relationships that might have helped his cause.So, what do you think?Of the new Kommandant? I dont know. He could have been worse, I suppose. He didnt pull the house apart, where Becker might have, just to show his strength. ButI wrinkled my nosehes clever. We might have to be extra careful.As ever, Madame Lefvre, your thoughts are in harmony with my own. He smiled at me, but not with his eyes. I remembered when the mayor had been a jolly, blustering man, famous for his bonhomie: Hed had the loudest voice at any town gathering.Anything coming in this week?I believe there will be some bacon. And coffee. Very little butter. I hope to have the exact rations later today. Any news from your husband?Not since August, when I had a postcard. He was near Amiens. He didnt say much. I think of you day and night, the postcard had said, in his beautiful loopy scrawl. You are my lodestar in this world of madness. I had lain awake for two nights worrying after I received it, until Hlne had pointed out that this world of madness might equally apply to a world in which one lived on black bread so hard it required a billhook to cut it, and kept pigs in a bread oven.The last I received from my eldest son came nearly three months ago. They were pushing forward toward Cambrai. Spirits good, he said.I hope they are still good. How is Louisa?Not too bad, thank you. His youngest daughter had been born with a palsy; she failed to thrive, could eat only certain foods, and at eleven was frequently ill. Keeping her well was a preoccupation of our little town. If there was milk or any dried vegetable to be had, a little spare usually found its way to the mayors house.When she is strong again, tell her Mimi was asking after her. Hlne is sewing a doll for her that is to be the exact twin of Mimis own. She asked that they might be sisters.The mayor patted my hand. You girls are too kind. I thank God that you returned here when you could have stayed in the safety of Paris.Pah. There is no guarantee that the Boche wont be marching down the Champs-lyses before long. And besides, I could not leave Hlne alone here.She would not have survived this without you. You have grown into such a fine young woman. Paris was good for you.My husband is good for me.Then God save him. God save us all. The mayor smiled, placed his hat on his head, and stood up to leave.St. Pronne, where the Bessette family had run Le Coq Rouge for generations, had been among the first towns to fall to the Germans in the autumn of 1914. Hlne and I, our parents long dead and our husbands at the Front, had determined to keep the hotel going. We were not alone in taking on mens work: The shops, the local farms, the school were almost entirely run by women aided by old men and boys. By 1915 there were barely any men left in the town.We did good business in the early months, with French soldiers passing through and the British not far behind. Food was still plentiful, music and cheering accompanied the marching troops, and most of us still believed the war would be over within months, at worst. There were a few hints of the horrors taking place a hundred miles away: We gave food to the Belgian refugees who traipsed past, their belongings teetering on wagons; some were still clad in slippers and the clothes they had worn when they had left their homes. Occasionally, if the wind blew from the east, we could just make out the distant boom of the guns. But although we knew that the war was close by, few believed that St. Pronne, our proud little town, could possibly join those that had fallen under German rule.Proof of how wrong we had been had come accompanied by the sound of gunfire on a still, cold, autumn morning, when Madame Fougre and Madame Drin had set out for their daily 6:45 A.M. stroll to the boulangerie and were shot dead as they crossed the square.I had pulled back the curtains at the noise, and it had taken me several moments to comprehend what I saw: the bodies of those two women, widows and friends for most of their seventy-odd years, sprawled on the pavement, head scarves askew, their empty baskets upended at their feet. A sticky red pool spread around them in an almost perfect circle, as if it had come from one entity.The German officers claimed afterward that snipers had shot at them and that they had acted in retaliation. (Apparently they said the same of every village they took.) If they had wanted to prompt insurrection in the town, they could not have done better than their killing of those old women. But the

outrage did not stop there. They set fire to barns and shot down the statue of Mayor Leclerc. Twenty-four hours later they marched in formation down our main street, their Pickelhaube helmets shining in the wintry sunlight, as we stood outside our homes and shops and watched in shocked silence. They ordered the few remaining men outside, so that they could count them.The shopkeepers and stall holders simply shut their shops and stalls and refused to serve them. Most of us had stockpiled food; we knew we could survive. I think we believed they might give up, faced with such intransigence, and march on, to another village. But then Kommandant Becker had decreed that any shopkeeper who failed to open during normal working hours would be shot. One by one the boulangerie, the boucherie, the market stalls, and even Le Coq Rouge reopened. Reluctantly, our little town was prodded back into sullen, mutinous life.Eighteen months on, there was little left to buy. St. Pronne was cut off from its neighbors, deprived of news and dependent on the irregular delivery of aid, which was supplemented by costly black-market provisions when they were available. Sometimes it was hard to believe that Free France knew what we were suffering. The Germans were the only ones who ate well; their horses (our horses) were sleek and fat, and they ate the crushed wheat that should have been used to make our bread. They raided our wine cellars and took the food produced by our farms.And it wasnt just food. Every week someone would get the dreaded knock on the door, and a new list of items would be requisitioned: teaspoons, curtains, dinner plates, saucepans, blankets. Occasionally an officer would inspect first, note what was desirable, and return with a list specifying exactly that. They would write promissory notes that could supposedly be exchanged for money. Not a single person in St. Pronne knew anyone who had actually been paid.What are you doing?Im moving this. I took the portrait and moved it to a quiet corner, less in public gaze.Who is it? Aurlien asked as I rehung it, adjusting it on the wall until it was straight.Its me! I turned to him. Can you not tell?Oh. He squinted. He wasnt trying to insult me: The girl in the painting was very different from the thin, severe woman, gray of complexion and with wary, tired eyes, who stared back at me daily from the looking glass. I tried not to glimpse her too often.Did douard do it?Yes. When we were married.Its lovely, Hlne said, standing back to look at it. But...But what?It is a risk to have it up at all. When the Germans went through Lille they burned art they considered subversive. douards painting is... very different. How do you know they wont destroy it?She worried, Hlne. She worried about douards paintings and our brothers temper; she worried about the letters and diary entries I wrote on scraps of paper and stuffed into holes in the beams. I want it down here, where I can see it. Dont worrythe rest are safe in Paris.She didnt look convinced.I want color, Hlne. I want life. I dont want to look at Napolon or Papas stupid pictures of mournful dogs. And I wont let themI nodded outside to where off-duty German soldiers were smoking by the town fountaindecide what I may look at in my own home.Hlne shook her head, as if I were a fool she might have to indulge. And then she went to serve Madame Louvier and Madame Durant, who, although they had often observed that my chicory coffee tasted as if it had come from the sewer, had arrived to hear the story of the pig-baby.Hlne and I shared a bed that night, flanking Mimi and Jean. Sometimes it was so cold, even in October, that we feared we would find them frozen solid in their nightclothes, so we all huddled up together. It was late, but I knew my sister was awake. The moonlight shone through the gap in the curtains, and I could see just her eyes, wide open, fixed on a distant point. I guessed that she was wondering where her husband was at that very moment, whether he was warm, billeted somewhere like our home, or freezing in a trench, gazing up at the same moon.In the far distance a muffled boom told of some far-off battle.Sophie?Yes? We spoke in the quietest of whispers.Do you ever wonder what it will be like... if they do not come back?I lay there in the darkness.No, I lied. Because I know they will come back. And I do not want the Germans to have gleaned even one more minute of fear from me.I do, she said. Sometimes I forget what he looks like. I gaze at his photograph, and I cant remember anything.Its because you look at it so often. Sometimes I think we wear our photographs out by looking at them.But I cant remember anythinghow he smells, how his voice sounds. I cant remember how he feels beside me. Its as if he never existed. And then I think, What if this is it? What if he never comes back? What if we are to spend the rest of our lives like this, our every move determined by men who hate us? And Im not sure... Im not sure I can....I propped myself up on one elbow and reached over Mimi and Jean to take my sisters hand. Yes, you can, I said. Of course you can. Jean-Michel will come home, and your life will be good. France will be free, and life will be as it was. Better than it was.She lay there in silence. I was shivering now, out from under the blankets, but I dared not move. My sister frightened me when she spoke like this. It was as if there was a whole world of terrors inside her head that she had to battle against twice as hard as the rest of us.Her voice was small, tremulous, as if she were fighting back tears. Do you know, after I married Jean-Michel, I was so happy. I was free for the first time in my life.I knew what she meant: Our father had been

quick with his belt and sharp with his fists. The town believed him to be the most benign of landlords, a pillar of the community, good old Franois Bessette, always ready with a joke and a glass. But we knew the ferocity of his temper. Our only regret was that our mother had gone before him, before she could have enjoyed a few years out of its shadow.It feels... it feels like we have exchanged one bully for another. Sometimes I suspect I will spend my whole life bent to somebody elses will. You, Sophie, I see you laughing. I see you determined, so brave, putting up paintings, shouting at Germans, and I dont understand where it comes from. I cant remember what it was like not to be afraid.We lay there in silence. I could hear my heart thumping. She believed me fearless. But nothing frightened me as much as my sisters fears. There was a new fragility about her these last months, a new strain around her eyes. I squeezed her hand. She did not squeeze back.Between us, Mimi stirred, throwing an arm over her head. Hlne relinquished my hand, and I could just make out her shape as she moved onto her side and gently tucked her daughters arm back under the covers. Oddly reassured by this gesture, I lay down again, pulling the blankets up to my chin to stop myself from shivering.Pork, I said, into the silence.What?Just think about it. Roast pork, the skin rubbed with salt and oil, cooked until it snaps between your teeth. Think of the soft folds of warm, white fat, the pink meat shredding softly between your fingers, perhaps with compte of apple. That is what we will eat in a matter of weeks, Hlne. Think of how good it will taste.Pork?Yes. Pork. When I feel myself waver, I think of that pig, and its big fat belly. I think of its crisp little ears, its moist haunches. I almost heard her smile.Sophie, youre mad.But think of it, Hlne. Wont it be good? Can you imagine Mimis face with pork fat dribbling down her chin? How it will feel in her little tummy? Can you imagine her pleasure as she tries to remove bits of crackling from between her teeth?She laughed, despite herself. Im not sure she remembers how pork tastes.It wont take much to remind her, I said. Just like it wont take much to remind you of Jean-Michel. One of these days he will walk through the doors, and you will throw your arms around him, and the smell of him, the feel of him holding you around your waist will be as familiar to you as your own body.I could almost hear her thoughts traveling upward then. I had pulled her back. Little victories.Sophie, she said, after a while. Do you miss sex?Every single day, I said. Twice as often as I think about that pig. There was a brief silence, and we broke into giggles. Then, I dont know why, we were laughing so hard we had to clamp our hands over our faces to stop ourselves from waking the children.I knew the Kommandant would return. In the event, it was four days before he did so. It was raining hard, a deluge, so that our few customers sat over empty cups gazing unseeing through the steamed windows. In the snug, Old Ren and Monsieur Pellier played dominoes; Monsieur Pelliers doghe had to pay the Germans a tariff for the privilege of owning itbetween their feet. Many people sat here daily so that they did not have to be alone with their fear.I was just admiring Madame Arnaults hair, newly pinned by my sister, when the glass doors opened and he stepped into the bar, flanked by two officers. The room, which had been a warm fug of chatty companionability, fell abruptly silent. I stepped out from behind the counter and wiped my hands on my apron.Germans did not visit our bar, except for requisitioning. They used the Bar Blanc, at the top of the town, which was larger and possibly friendlier. We had always made it very clear that we were not a convivial space for the occupying force. I wondered what they were going to take from us now. If we had any fewer cups and plates, we would have to ask customers to share.Madame Lefvre.I nodded at him. I could feel my customers eyes on me.It has been decided you will provide meals for some of our officers. There is not enough room in the Bar Blanc for our incoming men to eat comfortably.I could see him clearly for the first time now. He was older than I had thought, in his late forties perhaps, although with fighting men it was hard to tell. They all looked older than they were.Im afraid that will be impossible, Herr Kommandant, I said. We have not served meals at this hotel for more than eighteen months. We have barely enough provisions to feed our small family. We cannot possibly provide meals to the standard that your men will require.I am well aware of that. There will be sufficient supplies delivered from early next week. I will expect you to turn out meals suitable for officers. I understand this hotel was once a fine establishment. Im sure it lies within your capabilities.I heard my sisters intake of breath behind me, and I knew she felt as I did. The visceral dread of having Germans in our little hotel was tempered by the thought that for months had overridden all others: food. There would be leftovers, bones with which to make stock. There would be cooking smells, stolen mouthfuls, extra rations, slices of meat and cheese to be secretly pared off.But still. I am not sure our bar will be suitable for you, Herr Kommandant. We are stripped of comforts here.I will be the judge of where my men will be comfortable. I would like to see your rooms also. I may billet some of my men up here.I heard Old Ren mutter, Sacrebleu!You are welcome to see the rooms, Herr Kommandant. But you will find that your predecessors have left us with little. The beds, the blankets, the curtains, even the

copper piping that fed the basins, they are already in German possession.I knew I risked angering him: I had made clear in a packed bar that the Kommandant was ignorant of the actions of his own men, that his intelligence, as far as it stretched to our town, was faulty. But it was vital that my own townspeople saw me as obstinate and mulish. To have Germans in our bar would make Hlne and me the target of gossip, of malicious rumor. It was important that we were seen to do all we could to deter them.Again, madame, I will be the judge of whether your rooms are suitable. Please show me. He motioned to his men to remain in the bar. It would be completely silent until after they had left.I straightened my shoulders and walked slowly out into the hallway, reaching for the keys as I did so. I felt the eyes of the whole room on me as I left, my skirts swishing around my legs, the heavy steps of the German behind me. I unlocked the door to the main corridor (I kept everything locked; it was not unknown for French thieves to steal what had not already been requisitioned by the Germans).This part of the building smelled musty and damp; it had been months since I was here. We walked up the stairs in silence. I was grateful that he remained several steps behind me. I paused at the top, waiting for him to step into the corridor, then unlocked the first room.There had been a time when merely to see our hotel like this had reduced me to tears. The Red Room had once been the pride of Le Coq Rouge: the bedroom where my sister and I had spent our wedding nights; the room where the mayor would put up visiting dignitaries. It had housed a vast four-poster bed draped in bloodred tapestries, and its generous window overlooked our formal gardens. The carpet was from Italy, the furniture from a chteau in Gascogne, the coverlet a deep red silk from China. It had held a gilt chandelier and a huge marble fireplace, where the fire was lit each morning by a chambermaid and kept alight until night.I opened the door, standing back so that the German might enter. The room was empty but for a chair that stood on three legs in the corner. The floorboards had been stripped of their carpet and were gray, thick with dust. The bed was long gone, with the curtains among the first things stolen when the Germans had taken our town. The marble fireplace had been ripped from the wall, for what reason, I do not know: It was not as if it could be used elsewhere. I think Becker had simply wanted to demoralize us, to remove all things of beauty.He took a step into the room.Be careful where you walk, I said. He glanced down, then saw it: the corner of the room where they had attempted to remove the floorboards for firewood last spring. The house had been too well built, its boards nailed too securely, and they had given up after several hours when they had removed just three long planks. The hole, a gaping O of protest, exposed the beams beneath.The Kommandant stood for a minute, staring at the floor. He lifted his head and gazed around him. I had never been alone in a room with a German, and my heart was thumping. I could smell the faint hint of tobacco on him, see the rain splashes on his uniform. I watched the back of his neckand eased my keys between my fingers, ready to hit him with my armored fist should he suddenly attack me. I would not be the first woman who had had to fight for her honor.But he turned back to me. Are they all as bad? he said.No, I replied. The others are worse.He looked at me for such a long time that I almost colored. But I refused to let that man intimidate me. I stared back at him, at his cropped graying hair, his translucent blue eyes studying me from under his peaked cap. My chin remained lifted, my expression blank.Finally he turned and walked past me, down the stairs and into the back hallway. He stopped abruptly, peered up at my portrait, and blinked twice, as if he were only now registering that I had moved it.I will have someone inform you of when to expect the first delivery of food, he said. He went briskly through the doorway and back to the bar.3You should have said no. Madame Durant poked a bony finger into my shoulder. I jumped. She wore a white frilled bonnet, and a faded blue crocheted cape was pinned around her shoulders. Those who complained about a lack of news now that we were not allowed newspapers had evidently never crossed my neighbors path.What?Feeding the Germans. You should have said no.It was a freezing morning, and I had wrapped my scarf high around my face. I tugged it down to respond to her. I should have said no? And you will say no when they decide to occupy your house, will you, madame?You and your sister are younger than I am. You have the strength to fight them.Unfortunately I lack the firearms of a battalion. What do you suggest I do? Barricade us all in? Throw cups and saucers at them?She continued to berate me as I opened the door for her. The bakery no longer smelled like a bakery. It was still warm inside, but the scent of baguettes and croissants had long since disappeared. This small fact made me sad every time I crossed the threshold.I swear I do not know what this country is coming to. If your father could have seen Germans in his hotel... Madame Louvier had evidently been well briefed. She shook her head in disapproval as I approached the counter.He would have done exactly the same thing.Monsieur Armand, the baker, shushed them. You cannot criticize Madame Lefvre! We are all their puppets now. Madame Durant, do you criticize me for baking their bread?I just think its unpatriotic to do their bidding.Easy to say when youre not the one facing a bullet.So, more of them are

coming here? More of them pushing their way into our storerooms, eating our food, stealing our animals. I swear, I do not know how we will survive this winter.As we always have, Madame Durant. With stoicism and good humor, praying that our Lord, if not our brave boys, will give the Boche a royal kick up their backsides. Monsieur Armand winked at me. Now, ladies, what would you like? We have week-old black bread, five-day-old black bread, and some black bread of indeterminate age, guaranteed free of weevils.There are days I would consider a weevil a welcome hors doeuvre, Madame Louvier said mournfully.Then I will save a jam jar full for you, my dear madame. Believe me, there are many days in which we receive generous helpings in our flour. Weevil cake, weevil pie, weevil profiteroles: Thanks to German generosity, we can supply them all. We laughed. It was impossible not to. Monsieur Armand managed to raise a smile even on the direst of days.Madame Louvier took her bread and put it into her basket with distaste. Monsieur Armand took no offense; he saw that expression a hundred times a day. The bread was black, square, and sticky. It gave off a musty smell, as if it were moldering from the moment it left the oven. It was so solid that the older women frequently had to request the help of the young simply to cut it. For a moment we did not notice the door open. But then the shop abruptly fell silent. I turned to see Liliane Bthune walk in. Though her head was up, she failed to meet a single persons eye. Her face was fuller than most, her clear skin rouged and powdered. She uttered a general bonjour and reached into her bag. Two loaves, please.She smelled of expensive scent, and her hair was swept up in curls. In a town where most women were too exhausted or too empty-handed to do anything but the minimum of personal grooming, she stood out like a glittering jewel. But it was her coat that drew my eye. I could not stop staring at it. It was jet black, made of the finest astrakhan lambskin and as thick as a fur rug. It had the soft sheen of something new and expensive, and the collar rose around her face as if her long neck were emerging from black treacle. I saw the older women register it, their expressions hardening as their gaze traveled down its length.One for you, one for your German? Madame Durant muttered.I said two loaves, please. She turned to Madame Durant. One for me. One for my daughter.For once Monsieur Armand did not smile. He reached under the counter, his eyes never leaving her face, and with his two meaty fists he slammed two loaves onto its surface. He did not wrap them.Liliane held out a note, but he didnt take it from her hand. He waited the few seconds it took her to place it on the counter, and then he picked it up gingerly, as if it might infect him. He reached into his till and threw two coins down in change, even as she held out her hand.She looked at him, and then at the counter where the coins lay. Keep them, she said. And, with a furious glance at us, she snatched up the bread, and swept out of the shop.How she has the nerve... Madame Durant was never happier than when she was outraged by somebody elses behavior. I suppose she has to eat, like everyone else, I said.Every night she goes to the Fourrier farm. Every night. You see her cross the town, scuttling like a thief.She has two new coats, Madame Louvier said. The other one is green. A brand-new green wool coat. From Paris.And shoes. Of kid leather. Of course, she dare not wear them out in the day. She knows she would get lynched.She wont, that one. Not with the Germans looking out for her.Still, when they leave, itll be another story, eh?I wouldnt want to be in her shoes, kid leather or not.I do hate to see her strutting about, rubbing her good fortune in everybodys faces. Who does she think she is?Monsieur Armand watched the young woman crossing the square. Suddenly he smiled. I wouldnt worry, ladies. Not everything goes her way.We looked at him.Can you keep a secret?I dont know why he bothered asking. Those two old women could barely stay silent for ten seconds at a time.What?Lets just say some of us make sure Miss Fancy Pants gets special treatment she wasnt expecting.I dont understand.Her loaves live under the counter by themselves. They contain some special ingredients. Ingredients that I promise you go into none of my other loaves.The old womens eyes widened. I dared not ask what the baker meant, but the glint in his eye suggested several possibilities, none of which I wanted to dwell upon.Non!Monsieur Armand! They were scandalized, but they began to cackle.I felt sick then. I didnt like Liliane Bthune, or what she was doing, but this revolted me. IveIve got to go. Hlne needs... I reached for my bread. Their laughter still ringing in my ears, I ran for the relative safety of the hotel.The food came the following Friday. First the eggs, two dozen, delivered by a young German corporal, who brought them in covered with a white sheet, as if he were delivering contraband. Then bread, white and fresh, in three baskets. I had gone off bread a little since that day in the boulangerie, but to hold fresh loaves, crusty and warm, left me almost drunk with desire. I had to send Aurlien upstairs, I was so afraid he would be unable to resist the temptation to break off a mouthful.Next, six hens, their feathers still on, and a crate containing cabbage, onions, carrots, and wild garlic. After this came jars of preserved tomatoes, rice, and apples. Milk, coffee, three fat pats of butter, flour, sugar. Bottles and bottles of wine from the south. Hlne and I accepted each delivery in silence. The

Germans handed us forms, upon which each amount had been carefully noted. There would be no easy stealing: A form requested that we note the exact amounts used for each recipe. They also asked that we place any scraps in a pail for collection to feed livestock. When I saw that I wanted to spit.We are doing this for tonight? I asked the last corporal.He shrugged. I pointed at the clock. Today? I gestured at the food. Kuchen?Ja, he said, nodding enthusiastically. Sie kommen. Acht Uhr.Eight oclock, Hlne said, from behind me. They want to eat at eight oclock.Our own supper had been a slice of black bread, spread thinly with jam and accompanied by some boiled beetroot. To have to roast chickens, to fill our kitchen with the scents of garlic and tomato, with apple tart, felt like a form of torture. I was afraid, that first evening, even to lick my fingers, although the sight of them, dripping with tomato juice or sticky with apple, was sorely tempting. There were several times, as I rolled pastry or peeled apples, that I almost fainted with longing. We had to shoo Mimi, Aurlien, and little Jean upstairs, from where we heard occasional howls of protest.I did not want to cook the Germans a fine meal. But I was too afraid not to. At some point, I told myself, as I pulled the roasting chickens from the oven and basted them with sizzling juice, perhaps I might enjoy the sight of this food. Perhaps I might relish the chance to see it again, to smell it. But that night I could not. By the time the doorbell rang, notifying us of the officers arrival, my stomach clawed and my skin sweated with hunger. I hated the Germans with an intensity I have never felt before or since.Madame. The Kommandant was the first to enter. He removed his rain-spattered cap and motioned to his officers to do the same.I stood, wiping my hands on my apron, unsure how to react. Herr Kommandant. I kept my face expressionless.The room was warm: The Germans had sent three baskets of logs so that we might make up a fire. The men were divesting themselves of scarves and hats, sniffing the air, already grinning with anticipation. The scent of the chicken, roasted in a garlic and tomato sauce, had thoroughly infused the air. We will eat immediately, he said, glancing toward the kitchen.As you wish, I said. I will fetch the wine.Aurlien had opened several bottles in the kitchen. He came out scowling now, two in his hands. The torture this evening had inflicted on us had upset him in particular. I was afraid, given the recent beating, and his youth and impulsive nature, that he would get himself into trouble. I swept the bottles from his hands. Go and tell Hlne she must serve the dinner.ButGo! I scolded him. I walked around the bar, pouring wine. I did not look at any of them as I placed the glasses on the tables, even though I felt their eyes on me. Yes, look at me, I told them silently. Another scrawny Frenchwoman, starved into submission by you. I hope my appearance rots your appetites.My sister brought out the first plates to murmurs of appreciation. Within minutes the men were tucking in, their cutlery clattering against the china, exclaiming in their own language. I walked backward and forward with loaded plates, trying not to breathe in the delicious scents, trying not to look at the roasted meat, glistening besides the bright vegetables.At last, they were all served. Hlne and I stood together behind the bar, as the Kommandant made some lengthy toast in German. I cannot tell you how it felt then to hear those voices in our home, to see them eating the food we had so carefully prepared, relaxing and laughing and drinking. I am strengthening these men, I thought miserably, while my beloved douard may be weak with hunger. And this thought, perhaps with my own hunger and exhaustion, made me feel a brief despair. A small sob escaped my throat. Hlnes hand reached for mine. She squeezed it. Go to the kitchen, she murmured.IGo to the kitchen. I will join you when I have refilled their glasses.Just this once, I did as my sister said.They ate for an hour. She and I sat in silence in the kitchen, lost in exhaustion and the confusion of our thoughts. Every time we heard a swell of laughter or a hearty exclamation, we looked up. It was so hard to know what any of it meant.Mesdames. The Kommandant appeared at the kitchen door. We scrambled to our feet. The meal was excellent. I hope you can maintain this standard.I looked at the floor.Madame Lefvre.Reluctantly, I raised my eyes.You are pale. Are you ill?We are quite well. I swallowed. I felt his eyes on me like a burn. Beside me, Hlne twisted her fingers together, reddened as they were from the unaccustomed hot water.Madame, have you and your sister eaten?I thought it was a test. I thought he was checking whether we had followed those infernal forms to the letter. I thought he might weigh the leftovers, to ensure we had not sneaked a piece of apple peel into our mouths.We have not touched one grain of rice, Herr Kommandant. I almost spat it at him. Hunger will do that to you.He blinked. Then you should. You cannot cook well if you do not eat. What is left?I couldnt move. Hlne motioned to the roasting tray on the stove. There were four quarters of a chicken there, keeping warm in case the men wanted second helpings.Then sit down. Eat here.I could not believe this wasnt a trap.That is an order, he said. He was almost smiling, but I didnt think it was funny. Really. Go on.Would... would it be possible to feed something to the children? It is a long time since they had any meat.He frowned a little, as if in incomprehension. I hated him. I hated the sound of my voice, begging a German for scraps of food. Oh,

douard, I thought silently. If you could hear me now.Feed your children and yourselves, he said shortly. And he turned and left the room.We sat there in silence, his words ringing in our ears. Then Hlne grabbed her skirts and ran up the stairs, taking them two at a time. I hadnt seen her move so fast in months.Seconds later, she reappeared, with Jean in her arms, still in his nightshirt, Aurlien and Mimi before her.Is it true? Aurlien said. He was staring at the chicken, his mouth hanging open.I could only nod.We fell upon that unlucky bird. I wish I could tell you that my sister and I were ladylike, that we picked delicately, as the Parisians do, that we paused to chat and wipe our mouths between bites. But we were like savages. We tore at the flesh, scooped handfuls of rice, ate with our mouths open, picking wildly at the bits that fell onto the table. I no longer cared whether this was some trick on the Kommandants part. I have never tasted anything as good as that chicken. The garlic and tomatoes filled my mouth with long-forgotten pleasure, my nostrils with scents I could have inhaled forever. We emitted little sounds of delight as we ate, primal and uninhibited, each locked into our own private world of satisfaction. Baby Jean laughed and covered his face with juice. Mimi chewed pieces of chicken skin, sucking the grease from her fingers with noisy relish. Hlne and I ate without speaking, always ensuring the little ones had enough.When there was nothing left, when every bone had been sucked of its meat, the trays emptied of each last grain of rice, we sat and stared at each other. We could hear the chatter from the bar of the Germans becoming noisier, as they consumed their wine, and occasional bursts of their laughter. I wiped my mouth with my hands.We must tell no one, I said, rinsing them. I felt like a drunk who had suddenly become sober. This may never happen again. And we must behave as if it did not happen once. If anyone finds out that we ate the Germans food, we will be considered traitors.We gazed at Mimi and Aurlien then, trying to impart to them the seriousness of what we were saying. Aurlien nodded. Mimi, too. I think they would have agreed to speak German forever in those moments. Hlne grabbed a dishcloth, wetted it, and set about removing traces of the meal from the faces of the two youngest. Aurlien, she said, take them to bed. We will clear up.He was not infected by my misgivings. He was smiling. His thin, adolescent shoulders had dropped for the first time in months, and I swear, watching as he picked up Jean, I thought he would have whistled if he could. No one, I warned him.I know, he said, in the tone of a fourteen-year-old who knows everything. Little Jean was already slumping, heavy lidded, on his shoulder, his first full meal in months exhausting him. They disappeared back up the stairs. The sound of their laughter as they reached the top made my heart ache.It was past eleven oclock when the Germans left. We had been under a curfew for almost a year; when the nights drew in, if we had no candles or acetylene lamps, Hlne and I had acquired the habit of going to bed. The bar shut at six, had done so since the occupation, and we hadnt been up so late for months. We were exhausted. Our stomachs gurgled with the shock of rich food after months of near starvation. I saw my sister slump as she scrubbed the roasting pans. I did not feel quite as tired, and my brain flickered with the memory of the chicken: It was as if long-dead nerves had been sparked into life. I could still taste and smell it. It burned in my mind like a tiny, glowing treasure.Some time before the kitchen was clean again I sent Hlne upstairs. She pushed her hair back from her face. She had been so beautiful, my sister. When I looked at how the war had aged her, I thought of my own face and wondered what my husband would make of me.I dont like to leave you alone with them, she said.I shook my head. I wasnt afraid: The mood was peaceable. It is hard to rouse men who have eaten well. They had been drinking, but the bottles allowed for maybe three glasses each, not enough to provoke them to misbehavior. My father had given us precious little, God knew, but he had taught us when to be afraid. I could watch a stranger and know from a tightening of their jaw, a faint narrowing of the eyes, the exact point at which internal tension would lead to a flash of violence. Besides, I suspected the Kommandant would not tolerate such.I stayed in the kitchen, clearing up, until the sound of chairs being pushed back alerted me to the fact that they were leaving. I walked through to the bar.You may close up now, the Kommandant said. I tried not to bristle visibly. My men wish to convey to you their gratitude for an excellent meal.I glanced at them. I gave a slight nod. I did not wish to be seen as grateful for the compliments of Germans.He did not seem to expect a response. He placed his cap on his head, and I reached into my pocket and handed him the chits from the food. He glanced at them and thrust them back at me, a little irritably. I do not handle such things. Give them to the men who deliver the food tomorrow.Dsole, I said, but I had known this full well. Some mischievous part of me had wished to reduce him, if only briefly, to the status of support corps.I stood there as they gathered their coats and hats, some of them replacing chairs, with a vestige of gentlemanly behavior, others careless, as if it were their right to treat any place as if it were their home. So this was it, I thought. We were to spend the rest of the war cooking for Germans.I wondered briefly if we should have cooked badly, taken less trouble. But Maman had always impressed on

us that to cook poorly was a kind of sin in itself. And however immoral we had been, however traitorous, I knew that we would all remember the night of the roasted chicken. The thought that there might be more made me feel a little giddy.It was then that I realized he was still looking at the painting.I was gripped by a sudden fear, remembering my sisters words. The painting did look subversive, its colors too bright in the faded little bar, the glowing girl willful in her confidence. She looked, I saw now, almost as if she were mocking them.He kept staring at it. Behind him, his men had begun to leave, their voices loud and harsh, bouncing across the empty square. I shivered a little every time the door opened.It looks so like you.I was shocked that he could see it. I didnt want to agree. It implied a kind of intimacy, that he could see me in the girl. I swallowed. My knuckles were white where my hands pressed together.Yes. Well, it was a long time ago.Its a little like... Matisse.I was so surprised by this that I spoke before I thought. douard studied under him, at the Acadmie Matisse in Paris.I know of it. Have you come across an artist called Hans Purrmann? I must have startedI saw his gaze flick toward me. I am a great admirer of his work.Hans Purrmann. The Acadmie Matisse. To hear these words from the mouth of a German Kommandant unbalanced me.I wanted him gone then. I didnt want him to mention those names. Those memories were mine, little gifts that I could bring out to comfort myself on the days when I felt overwhelmed by life as it was; I did not want my happiest days polluted by the casual observations of a German.Herr Kommandant, I must clear up. If you will excuse me. I began stacking plates, collecting the glasses. But he didnt move. I felt his eyes rest on the painting as if they rested on me.It is a long time since I had any discussion about art. He spoke as if to the painting. Finally he placed his hands behind his back, and turned to me. We will see you tomorrow.I couldnt look at him as he passed. Herr Kommandant, I said, my hands full.Good night, madame.When I finally made it upstairs Hlne was asleep facedown on top of our coverlet, still wearing the clothes she had cooked in. I loosened her corset, took off her shoes, and pulled the covers over her. Then I climbed into bed, my thoughts humming and spinning toward the dawn.4PARIS, 1912Mademoiselle!I glanced up from the display of gloves and closed the glass case over them, the sound swallowed by the huge atrium that made up La Femme Marchs central shopping area.Mademoiselle! Here! Can you help me?I would have noticed him even if he hadnt been shouting. He was tall and heavyset, with wavy hair that fell around his ears, at odds with the clipped styles of most of the gentlemen who came through our doors. His features were thick and generous, the kind my father would have dismissed as paysan. The man looked, I thought, like a cross between a Roman emperor and a Russian bear.As I walked over to him, he gestured toward the scarves. But his eyes remained on me. In fact, they stayed on me so long that I glanced behind me, concerned that Madame Bourdain, my supervisor, might have noticed. I need you to choose me a scarf, he said.What kind of scarf, monsieur?A womans scarf.May I ask her coloring? Or whether she prefers a particular fabric?He was still staring. Madame Bourdain was busy serving a woman in a peacock-feather hat. If she had looked up from her position at the face creams, she would have noticed that my ears had turned pink. Whatever suits you, he said, adding, She has your coloring.I sorted carefully through the silk scarves, my skin growing ever warmer, and freed one of my favorites: a fine, featherlight length of fabric in a deep opalescent blue. This color suits nearly everybody, I said.Yes... yes. Hold it up, he demanded. Against you. Here. He gestured toward his collarbone. I glanced at Madame Bourdain. There were strict guidelines as to the level of familiarity for such exchanges, and I wasnt sure whether holding a scarf to my exposed neck fell within them. But the man was waiting. I hesitated, then brought it up to my cheek. He studied me for so long that the whole of the ground floor seemed to disappear.Thats the one. Beautiful. There! he exclaimed, reaching into his coat for his wallet. You have made my purchase easy.He grinned, and I found myself smiling back. Perhaps it was simply relief that he had stopped staring at me.Im not sure I I was folding the scarf in tissue paper, then ducked my head as my supervisor approached.Your assistant has done sterling work, madame, he boomed. I glanced sideways at her, watching as she tried to reconcile this mans rather scruffy exterior with the command of language that usually came with extreme wealth. You should promote her. She has an eye!We try to ensure that our assistants always offer professional satisfaction, monsieur, she said smoothly. But we hope that the quality of our goods makes every purchase satisfactory. That will be two francs forty.I handed him his parcel, then watched him make his way slowly across the packed floor of Pariss greatest department store. He sniffed the bottled scents, surveyed the brightly colored hats, commented to those serving or even just passing. What would it be like to be married to such a man, I thought absently, someone for whom every moment apparently contained some sensory pleasure? ButI reminded myselfa man who also felt at liberty to stare at shopgirls until they blushed. When he reached the great glass doors he turned and looked directly at me. He lifted his hat for a full three seconds, then disappeared into the Paris morning.I had come to Paris in

the summer of 1910, a year after the death of my mother and a month after my sister had married Jean-Michel Montpellier, a bookkeeper from the neighboring village. I had taken a job at La Femme March, Pariss largest department store, lodging within the stores own large boardinghouse, and had worked my way up from storeroom assistant to shop-floor assistant.I was content in Paris once I had recovered from my initial loneliness, and I earned enough money to wear shoes other than the clogs that marked me out as provincial. I loved the business of being there at 8:45 A.M., when the doors opened and the fine Parisian women strolled in. I loved being free of the shadow my fathers temper had cast over my whole childhood. The drunks and reprobates of the 9th arrondissement held no fears for me. And I loved the store: a vast, teeming cornucopia of beautiful things. Its scents and sights were intoxicating, its ever-changing stock bringing new and beautiful things from the four corners of the world: Italian shoes, English tweeds, Scottish cashmeres, Chinese silks, fashions from America and London. Downstairs, its new food halls offered chocolates from Switzerland, glistening smoked fish, robust, creamy cheeses. A day spent within La Femme Marchs bustling walls meant being privy to a daily glimpse of a wider, more exotic world.I had no wish to marry after all (I did not want to end up like my mother), and the thought of remaining where I was, like Madame Arteuil, the seamstress, or my supervisor, Madame Bourdain, suited me very well indeed.Two days later, I heard his voice again: Shopgirl! Mademoiselle!I was serving a young woman with a pair of fine kid gloves. I nodded at him, and continued my careful wrapping of her purchase.But he didnt wait. I have urgent need of another scarf, he announced. The woman took her gloves from me with an audible tut. If he heard he didnt show it. I thought something red. Something vibrant, fiery. What have you got?I was a little annoyed. Madame Bourdain had impressed on me that this store was a little piece of paradise: The customer must always leave feeling they had found a haven of respite from the busy streets (if one that had elegantly stripped them of their money). I was afraid my lady customer might complain. She swept away with her chin raised.No no no, not those, he said, as I began sorting through my display. Those. He pointed down, within the glass cabinet, to where the expensive ones lay. That one.I brought out the scarf. The deep ruby red of fresh blood, it glowed against my pale hands, like a wound.He smiled to see it. Your neck, mademoiselle. Lift your head a little. Yes. Like that.I felt self-conscious holding up the scarf this time. I knew my supervisor was watching me. You have beautiful coloring, he murmured, reaching into his pockets for the money as I swiftly removed the scarf and began wrapping it in tissue.Im sure your wife will be delighted with her gifts, I said. My skin burned where his gaze had landed.He looked at me then, the skin around his eyes crinkling. Where are your family from, you with that skin? The north? Lille? Belgium?I pretended I hadnt heard him. We were not allowed to discuss personal matters with customers, especially male customers.You know my favorite meal? Moules marinire with Normandy cream. Some onions. A little pastis. Mmm. He pressed his lips to his fingers and held up the parcel that I handed him. bientt, mademoiselle!This time I dared not watch his progress through the store. But from the flush at the back of my neck I knew he had stopped again to look at me. I felt briefly infuriated. In St. Pronne, such behavior would have been unthinkable. In Paris, some days I felt as if I were walking the streets in my undergarments, given how Parisian men felt at liberty to stare.You have an admirer, remarked Paulette (Perfumes), when he arrived again days laterMonsieur Lefvre? Be careful, sniffed Loulou (Bags and Wallets). Marcel in the post room has seen him in Pigalle, chatting to street girls. Hmph. She turned back to her counter.Mademoiselle.I flinched, and spun around.Im sorry. He leaned over the counter, his big hands spanning the glass. I didnt mean to frighten you.I am far from frightened, monsieur.His brown eyes scanned my face with such intensity.Would you like to look at some more scarves?Not today. I wanted... to ask you something.My hand went to my collar.I would like to paint you.What?My name is douard Lefvre. I am an artist. I would very much like to paint you, if you could spare me an hour or two.Revue de pressePraise for THE GIRL YOU LEFT BEHIND:"Vibrant and gripping.People Magazine (***)"Jojo Moyes expertly weaves a bittersweet tale in this irresistible novel, taking careful interest in the dark corners that exist within great love stories, and the trickiness of simple happy endings. A-"Entertainment WeeklyMoyes writes delicious plots, with characters so clearly imagined they leap off the pages in high-definition prose. . . . Clever plot turns make for a satisfying ending . . . Moyes brings fresh strokes to this story about the power of art and love to transcend what imprisons us. Romantics looking for a story set amid the politics of plundered art couldn't do much better than The Girl You Left Behind.USA Today (3 1/2 stars)"Jojo Moyes builds on her strengths in this moving and accomplished new novel. 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