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THE NIGHTINGALE
by Kristin Hannah

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ST. MARTIN’S PRESS
A Conversation with Kristin Hannah

Do you have any personal experience with the Second World War—relatives living in France, or anywhere in Europe, during that time? Family or friends who went to fight abroad? What inspired you to write about this chapter in history?

I do not have any personal experience with World War II. Maybe that’s why I love the stories of women who joined the Resistance during the war. They are powerful, compelling stories of ordinary women who became heroes, some at great personal cost.

I first came across the idea for The Nightingale years ago, when I was researching World War II Russia. When I read about an otherwise ordinary young Belgian woman who created an escape line for downed airmen, I was mesmerized by her courage and resilience. Her story was the inspiration for Isabelle, but there were dozens of women who had equally compelling stories of courage and heroism and tragedy. I knew I had to write a novel about the many women who became spies and couriers and risked their lives to save others during the war. And then there were the women who hid Jewish children in their homes. These courageous women put themselves directly in harm’s way. Many of them paid a terrible price for their heroism. As a mother, I found these stories impossible to ignore. And like so much of women’s history, the stories are largely ignored or overshadowed or forgotten.

Can you take readers into the process of writing this novel? What challenges did you face in terms of plotting and structure, for example?

Absolutely, the biggest challenge in writing this novel was weaving together the fictional and non-fictional worlds. Because the novel covers the entire war, it meant that every single scene had to be built upon what was actually happening, and to be honest, ad-
hering to the factual timeline was a constant battle. I literally couldn’t write a sentence or a paragraph or a scene without consulting research material. On top of that, I wrote the first draft before going to France, so I couldn’t really own the landscape in my head; I couldn’t envision it. I couldn’t describe a tree or a road without researching it first. And then there was the burden of accurately capturing the sacrifice and heroism shown by the women of the Resistance. I thought about that all the time. These men and women had sacrificed so much for love and honor and duty; they’d risked their lives and their children’s lives to save others. I wanted to honor them and get their stories right.

*Do you have a favorite scene from The Nightingale—a setting or incident that’s especially meaningful to you?*

Honestly, there are so many parts and passages of this book that I love, but if I had to pick just one, I would say the scene where Isabelle and Gaëtan see each other again after the end of the war. I tend to be known for writing emotional books that make people cry, but I don’t often have that reaction to my work. I’m too focused on the individual sentences to feel the power of the whole, but that scene made me cry every time I read it—and I read it a lot.

*Is there any material that you wrote that never made it to the final draft? Can you tell us about it?*

Ha! I wrote hundreds of pages that no one will ever read. Both Isabelle and Vianne gave me trouble in this book. Neither was easy to find and both went through several transformations through the writing of the novel. In one version, they were best friends and only a year apart in age, in another version, Isabelle fell in love with a downed airman. I always had the baseline of the story, and since it was set against the panorama of the war in France, I knew the basic
plot and structure from the beginning, but finding the characters took more time. I had to spend so much time on the history and the timeline and the truth of the war, it ended up being a constant challenge to create real characters, who felt absolutely true, without lapsing into stereotypical heroes and villains. That was something I didn’t want to do.

I knew what I had to say in this book. I wanted to explore and celebrate the bravery and courage of ordinary women in extraordinary times. It just took me a lot of time, and several drafts, to find out exactly who my ordinary women were. And then, I think, both of them turned out to be stronger and braver and more extraordinary than I’d imagined.

*How did you approach the research into this setting and era? To what extent did you stick to the facts in writing *The Nightingale*? In what ways, if any, did you take artistic liberty?*

I was terrified, plain and simple. I had never attempted a novel of such scope and importance. Everything about it was a risk: France. World War II. A sweeping historical epic told in an intimate way. A novel of war about women.

But sometimes a story sneaks up on you, hits you hard, and dares you to look away. That was the case with *The Nightingale.* In truth, I did everything I could not to write this novel. But when research on World War II led me to the young Belgian woman who had created an escape route out of Nazi-occupied France, I was hooked.

I began as I always do: with research. It’s really the research—in any novel—that informs the story. First I find out what *has* happened, and then I begin to extrapolate what could happen, and then I create a world that makes sense to me, an imaginary world
firmly planted in truth. In this story, of course, the research was a daunting task. There was simply so much to know and understand. I started with the historical background of the war in Europe and then began to narrow my focus. My best information always comes from memoirs—in this case, memoirs of women in the Resistance, and downed airman who had escaped, and women who hid and rescued Jewish children.

As far as complete accuracy and artistic license, of course I took a few liberties—it’s fiction, after all—but I did it all with an eye toward telling a story that felt as true as possible.

_In your research of WWII, what was the most interesting/surprising/shocking thing you learned?_

I was continually amazed and awed at the risks ordinary French women took to keep their children safe and help strangers and preserve their way of life. And for women, it is rarely just our own life we are risking; it is our children’s lives. In the midst of such great horror, it must have been beyond terrifying to reach out to help someone.

_What do you hope readers will learn from your own novel?_

As I researched this book, I found myself consumed by a single, haunting question, as relevant today as it was seventy years ago: When would I, as a wife and mother, risk my life—and more important, my child’s life—to save a stranger? That question is the very heart of _The Nightingale._

I hope readers will ask themselves that same question: What would I do?
This is how I imagined Carriveau to look—
the town close to where Vianne and her family lived.

I chose a lovely inn in the ancient town of
Brantôme to become one of Isabelle’s safe houses.
The River Dronne in Brantôme

You could see the Eiffel Tower from Isabelle and Vianne’s father’s window.
This is the view from the safe house.

The beach at Saint-Jean-de-Luz
Recommended Reading

As you can imagine, it took a lot of research to pull this novel together. For months, I read a steady stream of nonfiction, memoirs, and historical treatises. Here are a few of my favorites. These books will give you more information about the brave men and women of the Resistance, the rescuing of downed airmen, and hidden children in World War II France.


Dear Readers,

I truly believe in book groups. What’s better than busy women and men taking an evening—or an afternoon—to gather together and talk about life and love and family…and books? What’s not to love about this?

In recent years, I’ve been able to “talk” to book groups via speakerphone during their meetings. What a blast! For so long, I wrote books and never really met anyone who had read them. It is such a joy to talk to readers from all over the country. We talk about anything and everything—my books, other books, best friends, kids, sisters. You name it, we’ll discuss it. So if you belong to a book group and you’ve chosen The Nightingale as your pick, please come on over to the Web site and set up a conversation with me. I can’t promise to fulfill all the requests, but I will certainly do my best. And don’t forget to join me on my blog and/or Facebook. I love talking to readers. The more the merrier!

Thanks!

Kristin Hannah
1. *The Nightingale* opens with an intriguing statement that lays out one of the major themes of the book: “If I have learned anything in this long life of mine, it is this: In love we find out who we want to be; in war we find out who we are.” What do you think the narrator means by this? Is love the ideal and war the reality? How does war change the way these characters love? How does love influence their actions in the war? On a personal level, has love affected your life choices? Have those choices affected who and how you love?

2. Take a moment to talk about the narrative structure of *The Nightingale*. Why do you think Kristin Hannah chose to keep the narrator’s identity a secret in the beginning and end of the novel? Were you surprised by who it turned out to be? Did you go back and reread the beginning of the novel once you finished? Were you satisfied when you discovered who was narrating the novel?

3. Many characters chose to construct a secret identity in *The Nightingale*. How did pretending to be someone else determine each character’s fate, for better or worse? And what about those who had no choice, like Ari and Julien?

4. The sisters Isabelle and Vianne respond to the war in very different ways. Isabelle reacts with anger and defiance, risking her life to join the resistance against Nazi occupation. Vianne proceeds with caution and fear, avoiding conflicts for the sake of her children. Who do you admire—or relate to, or sympathize with—more, Vianne or Isabelle? Discuss your reasons. You may choose to share your own stories and experiences as well.
5. The book captures many of the era's attitudes about men and women. Isabelle, for example, is told that women do not go to war. Vianne is confused by her new wartime role as provider. Their father, Julien, is cold and distant, unwilling to fulfill his parental duties after his wife dies. Have gender roles changed much since World War II? Have women always been strong in the face of adversity, but not recognized for their efforts? Vianne says that “men tell stories… women get on with it.” Do you agree with her?

6. Isabelle’s niece, Sophie, admires her aunt’s courage: “Tante Isabelle says it’s better to be bold than meek. She says if you jump off a cliff at least you’ll fly before you fall.” Do you agree? Is it better to take a risk and fail than never try at all? Do you think you could have acted as heroically as Isabelle under such horrifying circumstances? Who is more heroic in your mind—Isabelle or Vianne?

7. Perhaps one of the most chilling moments in the book is when Vianne provides Captain Beck with a list: Jews. Communists. Homosexuals. Freemasons. Jehovah’s Witnesses. We know now how wrong it was to provide this list, but can you understand why Vianne did it? What do you think you would have done?

8. Each of the sisters experiences love in a different way. Vianne’s love is that of a mature woman, a wife and a mother devoted to her family; Isabelle’s love is youthful and impulsive, more of a girlish dream than a reality. How did Isabelle’s feelings of abandonment shape her personality and her life? How did Vianne’s maternal love lead to acts of heroism, saving the lives of Jewish children? How did love—and war—bring these two sisters closer together?
9. Take a moment to talk about Beck. Is he a sympathetic character? Did you believe he was a good man, or was he just trying to seduce Vianne. Did he deserve his fate?

10. When Isabelle works with Anouk and other women of the French resistance, she notices “the wordless bond of women.” What does she mean? Do you agree that women who come from different backgrounds but share a common path can create a silent bond with other women? Why do you think this is so?

11. Vianne recalls her husband, Antoine, telling her that “we choose to see miracles.” What does he mean by this? Is it his way of telling his wife he knows the truth about their son’s biological father? Or is it his way of looking at life, of coping with the terrible events they’ve lived through? Is seeing the beauty in the world an active choice? Is it possible to find miracles in our lives, if we look for them?

12. Discuss the scene in which Ari is taken away. What do you believe is the right answer in this situation—if there is one? What would you have done in Vianne’s position?

13. Do you think Julien had a right to know who his real father was? Would you have made the same decision Vianne did?

14. Finally, a show of hands: Who cried—or at least got a little choked up—while reading this book? Which scenes moved you the most? Which character’s fate would you say was the most tragic? The most poignant? The most harrowing? Did the book give you a better understanding of life under Nazi occupation during World War II? Did it move you, inspire you, haunt you? And finally, what will you remember most about The Nightingale?
Kristin Hannah’s inspirations for WWII tale ‘The Nightingale’

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Bainbridge Island author Kristin Hannah’s new novel “The Nightingale” is being praised as one of this spring’s picks for readers. She talks about her inspiration for her harrowing novel of two sisters in occupied France.

By Melinda Bargreen, Special to The Seattle Times

You write and write. And then you wait and hope.

Bainbridge Island novelist Kristin Hannah knows that routine very well, after 21 books spanning the categories of romance, women’s fiction and mainstream fiction. Now her newest novel, “The Nightingale” (St. Martin’s Press, 438 pp., $27.99), is out in the real and virtual bookstores, about a year after she finished writing it in the longhand cursive that has been her practice ever since she became an author more than a quarter-century ago.

Publishers Weekly made “The Nightingale” one of its top 10 literary fiction picks for the spring, and Amazon named it a top book for February. It’s number 4 this week on the Publishers Weekly hardbound nonfiction list.

“It’s getting a lot of great word-of-mouth now,” Hannah reports of “The Nightingale,” “and there has been some movie buzz. My job was done a long time ago — now it’s up to others to think and plan and work. There are certainly some great women’s roles here to work with.”

Indeed there are. “The Nightingale,” which focuses on two strong but vulnerable sisters in occupied France during World War II, offers juicy opportunities for actresses. There’s passionate love, abject terror, alienation, determination, brutal domination, self-sacrifice, and decision after terrible decision to be made.

And there’s France, too: Hannah has collected photographs of some of the French locations that inspired her during the researching and writing process. (You can check them out on her website at kristinhannah.com).

The subject of “The Nightingale” was an outgrowth of research Hannah had done for her earlier novel “Winter Garden,” when she came across information about a Resistance heroine — the 19-year-old Belgian woman Andrée de Jongh. This brave teenager, inspired in turn by the earlier World War I heroine Edith Cavell, established the Comet Escape Line, a secret network of people who risked their lives to help Allied servicemen escape over the Pyrenees to Spain.

De Jongh’s story inspired Hannah to conduct further research into the French Resistance, finding stories about women who had put themselves and their children in peril by hiding Jewish families. And de Jongh became the model for Isabelle, the younger sister, who, as “the Nightingale,” personally led downed Allied pilots over the mountains to safety.
“I went to France to follow Isabelle’s route,” Hannah says. “I didn’t hike all the way over the Pyrenees, but I went up quite a ways. And unlike the novel, I did consume a lot of great food and wine!”

Isabelle and her sister Viann (“I think I made that name up — it’s a beautiful name”) undergo such privations and such frigid temperatures that other readers (like myself) may find themselves heading off to the kitchen for a nice hot coffee and a restorative snack. The dangers experienced by Hannah’s characters even made the author grip her pen and murmur “No, no, no” at crucial points.

The plot is one to make both author and reader ask some crucial questions. As Hannah puts it: “What would I be willing to do? Would I endanger my family by helping others? History has shown us so often that the majority of people look away. I wanted to show what could happen when they didn’t look away.”

The sisterly relationship between Viann and Isabelle is a tricky one, and Hannah wrote many drafts with different age spans and backgrounds before making the women “as real as they could be.” At about 300 pages into the novel, Hannah reached what she calls a turning point: “I thought, this could be the best thing I’ve ever done. I told my editor that I needed another year. I felt the magic in this story.

“Now, after 21 books, I have never seen advance buzz like this. I’ve been embraced as I never have been embraced before. The book is really striking a chord with people. All I can do is be grateful … and cross my fingers.”

Melinda Bargreen: mbargreen@aol.com. Melinda Bargreen has been writing about music for local and national publications for four decades; she also is a composer, and the author of "50 Years of Seattle Opera." Her new book, "Classical Seattle," is due out this fall from the University of Washington Press.

Interview with Kristin Hannah

February, 2015

It would seem Kristin Hannah did everything she could to not become a writer. She began her career at an advertising agency, then worked as a lawyer before fate, in the form of forced bed rest, pushed her to finish her first novel. Twenty-two novels later, the New York Times bestselling author tells the stories of ordinary women and the struggles that surround everything, from motherhood and fraught family dynamics to war.

Her latest novel, and her most epic undertaking yet, is the one she professed doing everything she could to not write. But the true story of a heroic young woman who led Allied soldiers out of occupied France was too compelling to forget, and soon Hannah was a year into her historical research. The Nightingale centers on Isabelle and Viann at the onset of World War II; the sisters face years of brutal challenges and heartbreaking choices before each finds her own path to bravery.

Interviewer Regan Stephens spoke with Kristin Hannah about the many faces of heroism, telling women's stories, and her obligatory research trip to France.

Goodreads: You came up with the idea for The Nightingale while reading about a Belgian woman who created an escape route out of Nazi-occupied France. Can you elaborate on your inspiration and talk about why you were drawn to the stories of World War II?

Kristin Hannah: I wrote a book several years ago called Winter Garden, which was partly set in World War II Russia, and that was the first time I had really jumped into the research of World War II. I was reading memoirs about women in war, and one of the stories I came across was about Andrée de Jongh. Like you said, she was a 19-year-old Belgian girl, and she and her father really started the escape route that went over the Pyrenees to get the downed airmen out. I was so struck by this story. Given her age, and given the fact that I had never read this story before, I thought, "This is so powerful and amazing, and I feel like I should know this." I filed it away under "That's an amazing story, don't forget that."

And I couldn't forget it. I wrote several books after that, but her story stayed with me. And finally I thought, "I need to do a little more research. I'll go a little deeper and see if this story continues to haunt me." Once I got into it and read the fullness of it, her story very much inspired the
character of Isabelle. Andrée and her dad started this escape route, and she personally led hundreds of downed airmen over this route and was caught, in actually much the same place Isabelle was caught in The Nightingale. She was sent to a concentration camp and survived. I believe she spent the rest of her life helping others in the Belgian Congo.

That was all incredibly heroic, and I thought "OK, I'm all in." I started doing deeper research and reading stories of the women of France and the women and men of the French Resistance. I realized this story could be bigger than that. What I really wanted to talk about was the daily heroics of the ordinary Frenchwomen in this terrible town. And as always I'm drawn to the stories of mothers protecting their children, and so that led me to Viann. My thought was, "I wish I could be Isabelle, the spy and the courier who saved all these people's lives at great risk." But really what I probably would have been doing was just trying to save my child and other children. It becomes the story of women in war, period. Our stories and our bravery are not acknowledged and talked about as much when it's over. Perhaps that's because women just come home and go back to their families and their ordinary lives and don't talk about it too much.

I don't want people to forget the heroism of ordinary people and the prices they were paying. The question of the novel that kept coming back to me was, "When would I do this? When would you be willing to risk your child's life as well as your own?"

GR: Is this a typical part of your writing process? Do you often write a novel with one central question in mind?

KH: Every novel I write has a theme, and every novel has, on some level, a question that I'm interested in exploring. It's often an ethical question. For example, I wrote a book called Night Road that was about being a mother of senior high school-age kids and the specter of teen drinking and driving. How do you handle that as a mother? What's the best way? I had recently sent my son off to college, and I was consumed with thoughts of "Did I do this correctly? What should I have done?" If other women asked me for advice—"how did you survive this year?"—I want to have an answer. That's what led me to write that novel. So the answer is, often, but not always. But I do always try to raise an ethical question that affects, or could affect, ordinary women.

GR: Could you talk more about your research for this novel? How do you capture a time that's unlike anything we've seen in present-day America?

KH: The research starts for me in the same way. There's a question or issue or story or situation that intrigues me enough that I'm willing to spend the next year or two of my life on it. I think it's
important, and I think it's something that needs to be explored. With WWII France of course, it was a much bigger topic than I'd ever taken on before. First of all, there are people alive who lived through it and who would know if I'm right or wrong. There are a lot of people who, if they're not scholars, are seriously committed to reading these stories. And given my sense that the women's stories had been forgotten, it was very important to me that I get it right. And so you sort of begin with the global research: What was going on in the world? What were the politics? What were the social mores? What was happening? Who were the people who lived in the world, and how did they think and feel and act?

And then I pared that down and went from the world to Europe to France. Then I studied France specifically very intensely, and then I focused on the memoirs, the people who have written down their stories. There were a lot of fascinating and compelling memoirs by women. Actually the hardest part of the novel was to take all that information, all that research, and distill it down and create characters who felt real. Characters who weren't just moving through history but were real, live three-dimensional characters you can relate to. The first couple of drafts of the novel were really just getting the historical event and historical timeline accurate. Then trying to, draft after draft, create the characters who were in the middle of this extraordinarily dangerous and difficult time but were still ordinary people with ordinary issues. There was one part in the book where I realized, with sisters, you could be in the middle of the war and still argue about unimportant things because you're sisters. And those were the kind of moments I wanted to capture.

**GR:** You've shared photos from Paris on your website—did you visit specifically to research for this novel?

**KH:** Interestingly enough I've written something like 20 novels, and I had done World War II Russia before, and I had never found myself in a situation where I felt that I absolutely needed to see these places, feel this country, and know more about it than I could get from research. And fortunately it was France! My husband and I did a one-month research trip. It was fabulous! We basically followed Isabelle's route.

**GR:** Were there things you thought you would include prior to your trip that didn't work, or vice versa?

**KH:** There were huge amounts of what the Resistance did, and how they fought and where they fought, that was absolutely fascinating and worth having in the novel, but I was really careful because I wanted it to feel real and ordinary. I didn't want Isabelle to become a superhero, effectively, who was in every corner of the war. I really had to pare it down and focus on these two women and what they did in the war. And they are representative of a lot of other women,
but there were a lot of other amazing stories that I couldn’t include.

**GR:** You wrote, "In truth, I did everything I could not to write this novel." Why is that?

**KH:** It comes back to the epic scope of it. I knew that it was a really big undertaking. I knew that it would take me a full year of research and many drafts. And I had this fear that I couldn't get it on paper the way that I had it in my head. It was just a large undertaking. Ultimately I couldn't walk away from this story.

**GR:** Many of your novels, including *The Nightingale*, are emotional reads. Is it personally draining for you?

**KH:** It's interesting, I hear that a lot. Don't read my books on airplanes or any place you're going to be seen. I don't actually intend to make people cry. I don't intend to write sad situations, but I do write about ordinary women, in usually what is the worst year or time or experience of their life. And I create characters who feel real enough to be with your friends, so when bad things happen to them, it's emotional for the reader. And in the book we're talking about the big kahuna of bad things. The challenge in this book was to not have it be depressing. I was constantly trying to balance the dark times with the more ordinary, uplifting times. It's a big part of why I structured the book with the old woman going back. I always knew going in that I wanted to end this book with the moment of the woman standing in front of the families of the men who had been saved. I thought it was so powerful and uplifting. But of course it's also sad.

**GR:** Goodreads member Sari asks, "What was your most difficult book to write? What made it so challenging?"

**KH:** *The Nightingale* is the most difficult book I've ever written. And again the challenge was balancing the scope with the individual. Making it a story that a. you hadn't read before, and b. touched you as a human being and made you see something that you've read about a lot of times in a new way.

**GR:** The two heroines of *The Nightingale*—sisters—are very different characters. One strives to be brave, and the other is seemingly anxious and meek. Why was this juxtaposition important to the story?

**KH:** For two reasons: One was the whole idea of sisters doing things differently, so there was the conflict of judgment between the two sisters. That gave me a really nice human layer and allowed them to function as individuals and sisters. The other reason was that I really wanted to show that there isn't just one way to be a hero. Not everyone becomes a hero in the same way.
or at the same time or for the same reasons.

**GR:** How do you create your characters? Is it difficult to fill in the small details of a personality when you're writing about characters who lived 70 years ago?

**KH:** Honestly, I didn't feel that in the creation of characters there was much difference between a historical novel or a contemporary novel. In other words, people are still people. The motivating factors might be different, the social mores might be different, the pressures on them might be different, but I still believe that people are people. It's no different than if I'm creating an apple orchard in Wenatchee in 1999 versus a farmer's wife in France in 1949. They still are people trying to survive in the world they're living in. You just try to get as many truth points as you can, and make sure their actions and reactions match the time period and their mind-set.

**GR:** Goodreads member Fran Allen asks, "Will you do a sequel to any other of your books? I'd love to have more time to spend with your characters."

**KH:** That is a question that I have gotten my entire career in every single book I've written. Everyone wants a sequel to everything. I think it's because I create these characters you invest in, and people want to know what happens next. But when I finish a novel, by and large, I have said everything I have to say about those characters. In my mind the sequel is "and they lived happily ever after" [laughs] because they worked for it. I never say never. But sequels and series, as much as I love to read them, are not the kinds of stories that appeal to me [as a writer].

**GR:** The story jumps between the present and the past. What purpose did this serve?

**KH:** I sat down to write a purely historical novel. I had no intention of writing a contemporary framing for it at all. I had done all my research. I had everything ready to go. I was ready to sit down and open the book in France in 1939, and the next thing I knew, I was writing in the voice of an old woman looking back on her life. And I thought, "First of all, who is she?" Because I didn't know, I had not planned that at all. I loved her voice so much, I just allowed myself to follow it. And what it did for me as an author was allow me to move through the war. If you've read Nightingale, you know I'm pretty much interested in every single moment that happens to my characters. But when you're talking about five years and a war, this would have been a 1,200-page novel. The framing allowed me to step back and talk about what happened in the present and then go back to a different time in the war. And so for an author, that was really great. And additionally, I did not decide who the old woman was until I wrote the final scene.

**GR:** Wow, really?
KH: Yes! It kept me interested, and I wrote it as if it could be both of the sisters. Actually, a third one. I considered Rachel as well. I wasn't sure who this woman was. When I decided who it was, I went back and edited everything to make sure that it was her. That part of it was really fun and intriguing.

GR: For me, it was fascinating to think of the elderly heroine in modern-day America, so far removed from the atrocities of WWII. I loved to hear her story in both the present and the past.

KH: You’ll find that a theme in my books is trying to know your mother deeply and know her story. I lost my mom when I was 26. I am keenly aware that your mother has stories that you're often too busy to listen to when you should. I find that a compelling element. Here’s this woman, and her son believes he knows her. The fact is he doesn’t know the most important facets of her life because we protect our children from anything that is ugly or dark or we fear will put us in a bad light.

GR: Goodreads member Tabatha asks, "Your books always tend to lead me in a different direction than I anticipate. Do you find you generally stick to a plot you have decided on? Or do you sometimes end up with a different story than anticipated?"

KH: I always end up with the story I intended to tell. I just didn't know that was the story when I started. I do change a lot. There were many versions in which Isabelle and Viann were different. There was a version where they were best friends, a version where they were twins, a version where they were very close in age. So it's a constant recalibration of how to tell the best story and say what I have to say in a way that is universal and original and fresh. The answer is: I always know close to where I'm going, I generally know where I'm going to end up, but I take a lot of different paths to get there. There's a lot of throwing away. Hundreds of pages thrown away.

GR: Can you describe your writing process? Do you have any sort of ritual you follow?

KH: No, I'm not a ritual gal. I'm a former lawyer—I'm research- and planning-intensive. I try to write a certain number of pages a day, and then every 200 pages I essentially pick what's working and start over and throw away what’s not working. I reimagine the story and follow it in a new way.
**GR:** Have you read anything you’ve really enjoyed lately?

**KH:** My favorite book of the last year is, not surprisingly, *The Goldfinch*. I thought Donna Tartt’s novel was amazing. It’s actually a fast read, it's really compelling. I also loved *All the Light We Cannot See*. I just read that recently. Another set in France during World War II. I really enjoyed [Anthony Doerr]’s perspective.

**GR:** What authors or books have influenced you?

**KH:** You might be surprised, but I'm often inspired by Stephen King. He is an amazing storyteller. I follow him into all kinds of weird nooks and dark places, and I always love his characters. I love the way he writes. A very influential book I read recently is *The Shadow of the Wind* by Carlos Ruiz Zafón. That was a phenomenal book.

**GR:** Are you working on your next book now?

**KH:** I am! I'm 200 pages into my next book. I know what it's starting out as, but I don't know what it's going to be.

http://www.goodreads.com/interviews/show/1009.Kristin_Hannah