

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Kristin Hannah is an award-winning and bestselling author of more than 20 novels including the international blockbuster, *The Nightingale*, *Winter Garden*, *Night Road*, and *Firefly Lane*.

Her novel, *The Nightingale*, has been published in 43 languages and is currently in movie production at TriStar Pictures, which also optioned her novel, *The Great Alone*. Her novel, *Home Front* has been optioned for film by 1492 Films (produced the Oscar-nominated *The Help*) with Chris Columbus attached to direct.

Kristin is a former-lawyer-turned-writer who lives in the Pacific Northwest with her husband. Her novel, *Firefly Lane*, became a runaway bestseller in 2009, a touchstone novel that brought women together, and *The Nightingale*, in 2015 was voted a best book of the year by Amazon, BuzzFeed, iTunes, *Library Journal*, *Paste*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Week*. Additionally, the novel won the coveted Goodreads and People's Choice Awards. The audiobook of *The Nightingale* won the Audiobook of the Year Award in the fiction category.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Did you find the end of Elsa and her family's journey satisfying? Where do you think Ant and Loreda ended up? How do you see Loreda's life being like her mother's? How will it be different?
2. Life was very different for unmarried young women in earlier generations. Expectations for their future were sharply defined. How is Elsa shaped by these expectations and her failure to meet them? Do you think it would have been the same for her in New York City? Did you feel compressed by expectation when you were growing up? Do you think these societal mores were designed to keep women "in their place"? How difficult is it to defy both family and society in a small town?
3. Literature is, quite honestly, the opening of a door. Through that door, Elsa saw whole other lives, other futures. What books influenced you when you were growing up? Did any novel and/or character change your perception of either yourself or the world? Did you identify with Elsa and her journey throughout this book? In what way?

4. In 1920s America, there was significant prejudice against Italians; we see that prejudice in Elsa's own family. What does Rafe represent to Elsa on the night they meet? Is it simply sex and loneliness? Or do you think there's something deeper involved? Another small defiance against her parents' small-mindedness? What does it say about Elsa that she went with Rafe so willingly?
5. "My land tells its story if you listen. The story of our family. We plant, we tend, we harvest. I make wine from grape cuttings that I brought here from Sicily, and the wine I make reminds me of my father. It binds us, one to another, as it has for generations. Now it will bind you to us." (51) How are people connected to the land that they occupy? What about the land they farm? Describe that unique and complicated connection.
6. Motherhood changes Elsa in almost every way. What does she learn by becoming a mother? What does she learn about motherhood from Rose? How does motherhood strengthen a woman? How does it weaken her? How does Elsa remain "herself" after giving birth? How does she change?
7. The adolescent years can be especially difficult on mothers and daughters. Did you dislike Loreda during these years? Did you understand her?
8. There is a strong thread running through this novel about man's connection to the land. During the Dust Bowl, while many families went West in search of work and a better life, most of them stayed behind on their parched farms. Why do you think that is?
9. What do you think about Rafe? Was he as trapped by his family's expectations as Elsa had been by her own? Did you expect him to leave?
10. Why does Rafe leave and what is he chasing out west? Do you have sympathy for how broken he felt by the poverty and hardship? Should Elsa have agreed to go with him? How does Elsa aim to fill his void, and why does she believe she loves him even after the abandonment?
11. Life in California is not at all what the migrants expected, what advertisements had led them to believe? The locals treat them badly and are afraid of them. Why is that? How does the treatment of migrants in California during the Great Depression mirror the treatment of immigrants today? How is it the same? How is it different?
12. In the 1930s, communism and socialism were on the rise, partially in response to the grinding poverty, joblessness, and despair. The Communists claimed that "communism is the new Americanism." Can you understand why people believed in that? What do we know now that people didn't know then? How do you think these perceptions have changed over time?
13. "Courage is fear you ignore." Discuss this. How do Elsa's and Loreda's actions embody this idea? Fighting for any kind of social equality or radical change often requires great personal sacrifice.
14. Fighting for any kind of social equality or radical change often requires great personal sacrifice. How does Elsa represent the courage it takes to stand up and make trouble and be counted?

BOOK REVIEWS

Booklist

With this emotionally charged epic of Dust Bowl-era Texas and its dramatic aftermath, the prolific Hannah has added another outstanding novel to her popular repertoire. In 1921, Elsa Wolcott is a tall, bookish woman of 25 whose soul is stifled by her superficial parents. By 1934, after marrying Rafe Martinelli, a young Italian Catholic who was the first man to show her affection, Elsa is a mother of two who has found a home on her beloved in-laws' farm. Severe drought and terrible dust storms affect everyone in this proud family, and they are all forced to make tough choices. This wide-ranging saga ticks all the boxes for deeply satisfying historical fiction. Elsa is an achingly real character whose sense of self-worth slowly emerges through trying circumstances, and her shifting relationship with her rebellious daughter, Loreda, is particularly moving. Hannah brings the impact of the environmental devastation on the Great Plains down to a personal level with ample period-appropriate details and reactions, showing how people's love for their land made them reluctant to leave. The storytelling is propulsive, and the contemporary relevance of the novel's themes—among them, how outsiders are unfairly blamed for economic inequalities—provides additional depth in this rich, rewarding read about family ties, perseverance, and women's friendships and fortitude. HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY: Hannah is a consistent best-seller, and this sharply relevant tale of a past catastrophic time will exert a particularly strong magnetic force. -- Sarah Johnson (Reviewed 10/15/2020) (*Booklist*, vol 117, number 4 , p32)

Publisher's Weekly

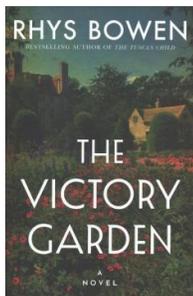
Hannah (*The Great Alone*) brings Dust Bowl migration to life in this riveting story of love, courage, and sacrifice. In 1934 Texas, after four years of drought, the Martinelli farm is no longer thriving, but Elsa is attached to the land and her in-laws, and she works tirelessly and cares for her children, 12-year-old Loreda and seven-year-old Anthony. Her husband, Rafe, has become distant and something of a hard drinker, and after he abandons them, Elsa reluctantly leaves with her children for California with the promise of steady work. Her dreams of a better future are interrupted by the discrimination they face in the unwelcoming town of Welty, where they are forced to live in a migrant camp and work for extremely low wages picking cotton. When Elsa's meager wages are further reduced and she has the opportunity to join striking workers, she must decide whether to face the dangers of standing up for herself and her fellow workers. Hannah combines gritty realism with emotionally rich characters and lyrical prose that rings brightly and true from the first line ("Hope is a coin I carry: an American penny, given to me by a man I came to love"). In Elsa, a woman who fiercely defends her principles and those she loves, Hannah brilliantly revives the ghost of Tom Joad. (Feb.) --Staff (Reviewed 11/09/2020) (*Publishers Weekly*, vol 267, issue 45, p)

Kirkus Reviews

The miseries of the Depression and Dust Bowl years shape the destiny of a Texas family. "Hope is a coin I carry: an American penny, given to me by a man I came to love. There were times in my journey when I felt as if that penny and the hope it represented were the only things that kept me going." We meet Elsa Wolcott in Dalhart, Texas, in 1921, on the eve of her 25th birthday, and wind up with her in California in 1936 in a saga of almost unrelieved woe. Despised by her shallow parents and sisters for being sickly and unattractive—"too tall, too thin, too pale, too unsure of herself"—Elsa escapes their cruelty when a single night of abandon leads to pregnancy and forced marriage to the son of Italian immigrant farmers. Though she finds some joy working the land, tending the animals, and learning her way around Mama Rose's kitchen, her marriage is never happy, the pleasures of early motherhood are brief, and soon the disastrous droughts of the 1930s drive all the farmers of the area to despair and starvation. Elsa's search for a better life for her children takes them out west to California, where things turn

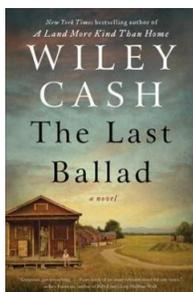
out to be even worse. While she never overcomes her low self-esteem about her looks, Elsa displays an iron core of character and courage as she faces dust storms, floods, hunger riots, homelessness, poverty, the misery of migrant labor, bigotry, union busting, violent goons, and more. The pedantic aims of the novel are hard to ignore as Hannah embodies her history lesson in what feels like a series of sepia-toned postcards depicting melodramatic scenes and clichéd emotions. For devoted Hannah fans in search of a good cry. (*Kirkus Reviews*, December 1, 2020)

READALIKES



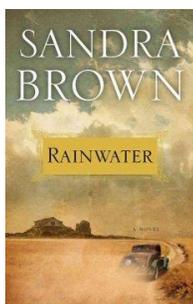
***The Victory Garden* by Rhys Bowen**

Engaged to an Australian pilot during World War I, Emily volunteers to tend the neglected grounds of a Devonshire estate where she finds inspiration and support in an herbalist's long-forgotten journals.



***The Last Ballad* by Wiley Cash**

Inspired by actual events, a tale set in the Appalachian foothills of 1929 North Carolina follows the struggles of an ordinary woman to reclaim her dignity and rights in a labor mill, where she earns a paltry salary before risking her family and future to join a union.



***Rainwater* by Sandra Brown**

In a time of drought and economic depression in 1934, Ella Barron runs her boardinghouse in Texas while caring for her son, Solly, and responds to the calm influence of one of her boarders, David Rainwater, while facing the tension and uncertainty around her.

OTHER MATERIALS

A discussion guide is available to download from the publisher using this link:
<https://kristinhannah.com/books/the-four-winds/the-four-winds-book-clubs/>