

The untold story of the home front



SANJIDA SAMIHA

"In love we find out who we want to be. In war we find out who we are."

Seldom do we come across books that, with the power of their words, teleport us to an entirely different realm. We feel so connected with the characters that it takes us a while to dredge up that they are fictional. Even then, we think of them as individuals we know only too well. These books have an ability of pulling the readers right in, making them experience every little event firsthand. To me, *The Nightingale* belongs to that rare category of books.

The story follows two very different sisters, Vianne and Isabelle, during wartime and their hardships trying to survive. Vianne, the older of the two, abides by every rule and younger Isabelle is the rebel. Vianne's idealistic country life is soon disrupted when her husband Antoine gets mobilised and is sent to the front, leaving her behind with their little daughter Sophie. Alone for the first time, the only thing Vianne can think of is keeping Sophie safe and well-fed.

Conversely, Isabelle's outspoken and unruly nature prevents her to bow to the rules set by the Nazis. Refusing to accept France's surrender,

and despite her sister's pleading to stay off the grid, the 19-year old Isabelle, sets out for Paris to fight the Nazis, from within France. Against all odds, she joins an underground group and risks her life to amass as many allies as she can.

Apart from being a fascinating story of the coming of age of two sisters, the book also sheds light on the role of women during the war. Mothers, daughters, sisters, wives - this is a story of their endurance, sacrifice, survival and courage during the darkest part of their lives. These are the women who are forced to house Nazi soldiers, the women who didn't let go of their compassion even in a ruthless world, the women who wish they could fight for their country and the women who covertly do.

There are love stories in *The Nightingale*, but they are very short-lived and don't impede the storyline. The book being a historical fiction, enables the readers to get a good idea of how subtly and deceitfully the Nazis took over the lives of the French people. They gradually caused divisions within communities, breaking countless relations along the way. The author, Kristin Hannah, brings every emotion to life with her elegant penmanship. Remarkably moving and powerful, the book will stay with you a long time after you have put it down.

How the pages of a diary turn as years go by

ZARIN REZWANA

Going through my old belongings, I found a series of half-written princess notebooks that had once been christened as "My Diary". And flipping through the pages, every pivotal turn that I had left way back in time look up at what I am now. Taking a few pages from the life of a typical girl, I saw how the stories unfold.

The first diary, a little pink one, as inspired from a Barbie movie had the best handwriting that could be managed from a grade two student, with tales of her best friends, her favourite cartoons, and her dolls. The diary, to her, is in its actual form, served as a friend she could tell things to. The second grader loved her diary that came with a lock, opened with a heart shaped key, and found excuses to write in it thinking that, like fantasy, a fairy godmother would take her to Neverland.

When in fourth grade, there was a small kink in the armour. The fairy godmother never arrived, and school became a nightmare. The extra careful writer made sure that there was nothing to be crossed out; everyone was talking about how she would soon become a lady, and how feminine she would have to be. But, everything faded as the words that led up to the events of *borof pani* after school was dismissed.

Grade six, and the name of one blue-

eyed, blonde British guy made her blush. The pages filled in with dreams of meeting the guy, but then, she had more friends to talk to. The diary spent days and nights in a corner, until there was a rant about how the teacher had given her detention after catching her entire circle passing chits, claiming how bored they all were in history class, and the competitions were far more fun than knowing what Lenin had done.

They called her a board exam candidate in eighth, and asked her to focus on textbooks. Friendships started to break; confused who she should look up to, the pages remained quiet about the people that were once so close. There were talks around, everyone talked about everyone else, and nothing was as it seemed. As love entered the scene, a point of heartbreak got its spotlight too, and words were smeared. Who said heartbreaks did not leave marks?

Class ten, documents ready, passes arrived, notes and revision, and she despised writing anything - too tired of words already, the entries started after an exam went bad, and there was no one else to tell that to. A small voice that wanted to become a child again was muffled by expectations of becoming someone who would create a change in the drift.

The last entry at the end of school was

at the end of a notebook. Goodbyes made sure everyone was at the same pace, with old stories etched like carvings. The pages now await a new chapter, led by the ones before it.

Zarin Rezwana is just a weird potato trying to be a French fry. Send help or send ketchup to riditah4@gmail.com

