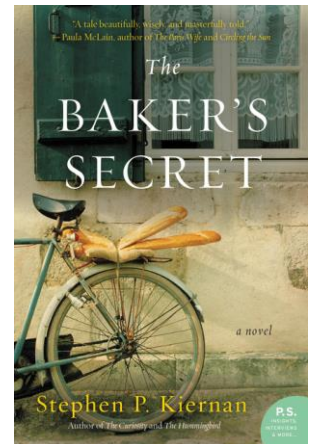


## The Baker's Secret

William Morrow Paperbacks

By Stephen P. Kiernan  
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### Introduction

“A tale beautifully, wisely, and masterfully told.” —Paula McLain, author of *The Paris Wife* and *Circling the Sun*

From the multiple-award-winning, critically acclaimed author of *The Hummingbird* and *The Curiosity* comes a dazzling novel of World War II—a shimmering tale of courage, determination, optimism, and the resilience of the human spirit, set in a small Normandy village on the eve of D-Day.

On June 5, 1944, as dawn rises over a small town on the Normandy coast of France, Emmanuelle is making the bread that has sustained her fellow villagers in the dark days since the Germans invaded her country.

Only twenty-two, Emma learned to bake at the side of a master, Ezra Kuchen, the village baker since before she was born. Apprenticed to Ezra at thirteen, Emma watched with shame and anger as her kind mentor was forced to wear the six-pointed yellow star on his clothing. She was likewise powerless to help when they pulled Ezra from his shop at gunpoint, the first of many villagers stolen away and never seen again.

In the years that her sleepy coastal village has suffered under the enemy, Emma has silently, stealthily fought back. Each day, she receives an extra ration of flour to bake a dozen baguettes for the occupying troops. And each day, she mixes that precious flour with ground straw to create enough dough for two extra loaves—contraband bread she shares with the hungry villagers. Under the cold, watchful eyes of armed soldiers, she builds a clandestine network of barter and trade that she and the villagers use to thwart their occupiers.

But her gift to the village is more than these few crusty loaves. Emma gives the people a taste of hope—the faith that one day the Allies will arrive to save them.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Consider the epigraph from French essayist Jean Guéhenno: “Men are not made for war. But neither are they made for slavery.” How does this apply to the characters in *The Baker's Secret*?
2. Kiernan writes, “In a time of humiliation, the only dignified answer is cunning.” Do you agree? And how does this statement relate to Emma? In what ways does Emma “answer” the time in which she lives?

3. What do you make of Michelle and her relationship with the occupying Lieutenant? Do you think her fellow villagers treat her fairly?
  4. In Chapter 9, Emma starts to suspect that “the single animating energy of Vergers was want.” Is this true? And if so, does everyone in Vergers want the same thing?
  5. The village’s covert network of exchange, which starts with Emma procuring lightbulbs and ends with fuel for the fisherman, centers entirely on Emma. Why do you think Yves—and all of the other villagers for that matter—entrust Emma with this delicate, dangerous task?
  6. Early in the novel we see that Guillaume, as a veterinarian, understands more than anyone else what it means to take a life. When an occupying soldier assaults Emma in Chapter 15, Guillaume intervenes and almost kills him. Was Guillaume wise to let the soldier go? What would you have done in his position?
  7. Emma often expresses impatience for the Monsignor’s appeals to faith and religion, yet late in the novel he says Emma has deep faith, as revealed by her deeds. What is your opinion of the Monsignor, and the role of religion in Vergers in general?
  8. Whenever any mention of the Allies is made, Emma says, “They will never come.” Does she address this refrain more to herself, or the villagers? Why won’t she validate the hope some villagers feel when she effectively provides hope in the form of bread each day?
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