

The Lost Vintage

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Introduction

Sweetbitter meets *The Nightingale* in this page-turning novel about a woman who returns to her family's ancestral vineyard in Burgundy and unexpectedly uncovers a lost diary, an unknown relative, and a secret her family has been keeping since World War II.

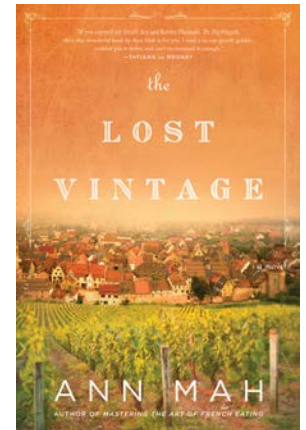
To become one of only a few hundred certified wine experts in the world, Kate must pass the notoriously difficult Master of Wine examination. She's failed twice before; her third attempt will be her last chance. Suddenly finding herself without a job and with the test a few months away, she travels to Burgundy to spend the fall at the vineyard estate that has belonged to her family for generations. There she can bolster her shaky knowledge of Burgundian vintages and reconnect with her cousin Nico and his wife, Heather, who now oversee day-to-day management of the grapes. The one person Kate hopes to avoid is Jean-Luc, a talented young winemaker and her first love.

At the vineyard house, Kate is eager to help her cousin clean out the enormous basement that is filled with generations of discarded and forgotten belongings. Deep inside the cellar, behind a large armoire, she discovers a hidden room containing a cot, some Resistance pamphlets, and an enormous cache of valuable wine. Piqued by the secret space, Kate begins to dig into her family's history—a search that takes her back to the dark days of World War II and introduces her to a relative she never knew existed, a great-half aunt who was a teenager during the Nazi occupation.

As she learns more about her family, the line between resistance and collaboration blurs, driving Kate to find the answers to two crucial questions: Who, exactly, did her family aid during the difficult years of the war? And what happened to six valuable bottles of wine that seem to be missing from the cellar's collection?

Questions for Discussion

1. At one point in the book, Uncle Philippe confronts Kate about her investigating and tells her to stop looking into H el ene and the family's history. Though Kate refuses to do so, do you think Uncle Philippe had a point? Are there ever circumstances when it is best to let the past lie?
2. How might Kate's life have been different if she'd stayed in France all those years ago? How did her years away affect her in positive and negative ways?
3. What do Madame's actions say about her character? Did you find her sympathetic?
4. What do we owe the past? At the end of the book, Heather is determined to teach her family about H el ene and the family's deeds during World War II. Is it our duty to pass on family history to the next generation?



5. *The Lost Vintage* shows that though there were many French résistants acting during the war, there were also many French people who essentially supported the Nazis through complicity, often for survival's sake. As Rose says at one point, "It's much safer to do nothing." Do you think these actions are wartime phenomena, or are there ways in which we can show courage or remain complicit in a similar way in day to day life?
6. Walker and Jean-Luc emerge as Kate's opposing love interests in the book. In what ways are they similar, and in what ways are they different? What do they stand for in Kate's life?
7. Over the course of the book, Jean-Luc transforms from a man attached to his vineyard and its obligations to one who is willing to give it all up for Kate. What prompted this change? How does his decision compare with Heather's decision to stay in France and Kate's decision to return to the States?
8. How would your experience of the book been different if H el ene's diary wasn't included and merely shared by proxy through Kate? How did H el ene's diary add to the narrative?
9. The similarities in appearance between Kate and H el ene are striking from the moment the first photos of H el ene are found. In what other ways are Kate and H el ene similar and different? What is it about them that connects them throughout the mystery?
10. Were you surprised by where Uncle Albert, Uncle Beno t, and H el ene end up ultimately? How were their futures affected by the war, and what do their ultimate fates say about them?