

Reading Guide

The Girl from The Savoy

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Introduction

After Wisconsin graduate student Mildred Fish marries brilliant German economist Arvid Harnack, she accompanies him to his German homeland, where a promising future awaits. In the thriving intellectual culture of 1930s Berlin, the newlyweds create a rich new life filled with love, friendships, and rewarding work—but the rise of a malevolent new political faction inexorably changes their fate.

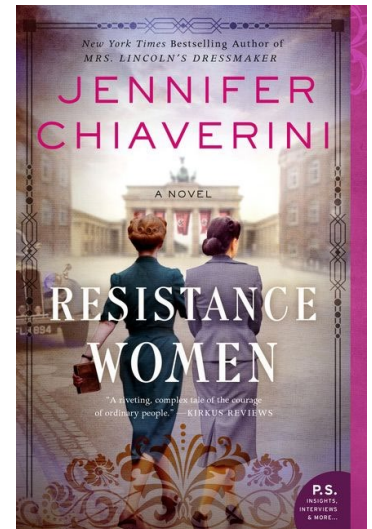
As Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party wield violence and lies to seize power, Mildred, Arvid, and their friends resolve to resist. Mildred gathers intelligence for her American contacts, including Martha Dodd, the vivacious and very modern daughter of the US ambassador. Her German friends, aspiring author Greta Kuckoff and literature student Sara Weitz, risk their lives to collect information from journalists, military officers, and officials within the highest levels of the Nazi regime.

For years, Mildred's network stealthily fights to bring down the Third Reich from within. But when Nazi radio operatives detect an errant Russian signal, the Harnack resistance cell is exposed, with fatal consequences.

Inspired by actual events, *Resistance Women* is an enthralling, unforgettable story of ordinary people determined to resist the rise of evil, sacrificing their own lives and liberty to fight injustice and defend the oppressed.

Questions for Discussion

1. Had you heard of Mildred Fish Harnack or the Red Orchestra before reading *Resistance Women*? What role do novels have in our understanding of history? Did *Resistance Women* change your perception of World War II or Nazi Germany?
2. From Mildred's and Greta's humble beginnings to Sara's and Martha's more privileged upbringings, *Resistance Women* tells the story of women from very different backgrounds. Discuss how their unique personalities contributed to the resistance fight. Which woman's story resonated with you the most?



3. In response to Mildred saying that she is no longer surprised by the fighting between the Communist Reds and the Nazi Browns, Arvid responds, “Darling, you must never become accustomed to the extraordinary and outrageous. If you do, little by little, you’ll learn to accept anything.” Do you agree? In what ways does Mildred take his advice to heart? What examples of this accepting of the outrageous have you seen in your own life?
4. Kinder, Küche, Kirche (children, kitchen, church)—the traditional vision of women as purely domestic—is mentioned more than once by Mildred and her comrades. The slogan dates from the eighteenth century but reappeared in Hitler’s Germany. Why do you think the Nazis chose to glorify homemaking and childrearing in their vision of the Reich? How did that idealized vision of housewives contrast with what women were actually doing in Germany during the war years?
5. When forced to decide whether to help translate Hitler’s manifesto into English, Greta ultimately decides to work on the translation. Was that the right decision? What was her motivation for doing the work?
6. Despite having a young child, Greta and Adam still chose to take part in the Red Orchestra. Would you have done the same?
7. What did you make of Sarah’s relationship with Dieter? What do you think her life would have been like had she chosen to stay with him and get married?
8. Mildred goes home to the US at one point, but chooses to return to Germany, to Arvid and the work of resistance. Was that a foolish decision? A brave one? What would you have done?
9. “Perhaps Germany will serve as a warning,” Arvid says. “May they learn from us to snuff out fascism in America when the first sparks arise and not delay until democracy goes up in flames all around them.” Has America learned that lesson? What factors might cause fascism to rise in America as it did in Nazi Germany? How would Americans combat it?