

# Between Shades of Gray



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF RUTA SEPETYS

Ruta Sepetys was raised in Michigan and attended Hillsdale College, where she initially planned to study opera, but instead graduated with a degree in International Finance. In 1994 Sepetys started her own entertainment management company, Sepetys Entertainment Group, Inc., which has represented Grammy-award winning artists. Sepetys' father is a Lithuanian immigrant, and her heritage inspired her first novel, *Between Shades of Gray*. The novel is considered to be a "crossover" novel, since both adults and teenagers read it widely. Sepetys has been granted many awards for her commitment to preserving the memory of the Baltic genocides, including the Cross of the Knight of the Order by the President of Lithuania. She has since written two more novels: *Out of the Easy* and *Salt to the Sea*. She currently lives in a tree house in Tennessee.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*Between Shades of Gray* is set during World War II, and concerns the genocide of the Baltic people. In 1940, the USSR (the Soviet Union) annexed the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, and systematically deported citizens deemed "enemies" of the state. When the Nazis invaded the Baltic states in 1941, many of the deportees saw them as liberators, though Hitler then implemented the Holocaust onto the states and slaughtered hundreds of thousands of Jews. Since the USSR was part of the Allies during WWII, the deportees were not liberated when Nazi concentration camps were freed in 1945. In fact, more mass deportations were carried out between 1944-52 due to the continued rise of the USSR. Prisoners were not sent home until 1956, and were forced to remain silent about their struggles in public for fear of retribution by the state. *Between Shades of Gray* seeks to rectify the lack of widespread knowledge of the Baltic genocide by illustrating the suffering of the Baltic people in the wake of the fall of the USSR.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Other works related to *Between Shades of Gray* include young men and women coming of age during the genocides of World War II. Most famously, *The Diary of Anne Frank* is the published diary of a German Jewish girl living in hiding in Amsterdam with her family during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. The diary is a touching and revealing work that shows a curious and talented writer who tragically died shortly before liberation. Like *Between Shades of Gray*, it puts a very real and human face

to the millions of people murdered during the war. Similarly, *Never Fall Down* by Patricia McCormick is based on the true story of Arn Chorn-Pond, a young boy who fights to survive in the Cambodian labor camps of the Khmer Rouge. Sepetys herself has also written two more novels: *Out of the Easy*, about a young woman named Josie Moraine living in the French Quarter of New Orleans during the 1950s, and *Salt to the Sea*, about refugees escaping East Prussia towards the end of World War II.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Between Shades of Gray*
- **When Written:** Mid-late 2000s
- **Where Written:** United States
- **When Published:** 2011
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Young Adult Fiction
- **Genre:** Historical Fiction, Young Adult Novel
- **Setting:** Lithuania and Siberia
- **Climax:** Towards the very end of the novel, Lina, Jonas, and the rest of the surviving deportees are facing a winter without adequate food or shelter. Nikolai Kretszky, an NKVD soldier who has spent much of the last year torturing Lina and the deportees, has a change of heart and defects from the camp to notify those who can help of the horrors happening to the Baltic people. A rescue team arrives, including a Dr. Samodurov, who nurses those on the brink of death back to health.
- **Antagonist:** The NKVD, Josef Stalin's Communist Regime
- **Point of View:** First person, from Lina's perspective

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Literary score.** The musician Galvin Mikhail has composed a piano soundtrack to accompany the novel.

**From YA to politics.** In March 2013, Sepetys became the first American author of young adult novels to present at the European Parliament, where she spoke of the relationship between totalitarianism in the Baltic region and the importance of historical fiction.



### PLOT SUMMARY

In June of 1941, fifteen-year-old Lina Vilkas is arrested by the Soviet Secret Police, the NKVD, from her home in Kaunas, Lithuania. She is arrested alongside her mother, Elena, and ten-year-old brother Jonas. Her father Kostas has been arrested

earlier, and they don't know where he is.

The family is given very little time to pack before they are loaded onto a bus full of other arrested civilians. They are then placed onto trains, where they remain in squalor with very little food for six weeks. Among them are schoolteachers, librarians, stamp collectors, and even a young mother and her newborn child. Lina meets a boy her age on the train named Andrius, with whom she initially has a rocky relationship, though over time they develop feelings for each other. Lina and Jonas find Kostas in another train car, and he encourages them to have strength despite their struggles.

They are then separated, and Lina, Jonas, and Elena, along with the rest of their train car, end up in Siberia, where the NKVD attempt to sell them to local villagers as slaves. They are not bought, and are instead brought to a collective Communist labor camp, where they are forced to do backbreaking work while subsisting on only three hundred grams of bread a day. The Vilkases are forced to live in a shack with an Altaian woman named Ulyushka, who is rude and demands rent. Lina is a talented and avid artist, and **draws** the things she sees every day in the hopes that they will one day make their way to Kostas, so that the family can be reunited once more.

In the camp, the NKVD continue to torture the deportees. Mrs. Arvydas, Andrius' mother, is forced to sleep with the guards in exchange for her and Andrius' life. Jonas almost dies from scurvy, and Andrius saves him by stealing a can of tomatoes from the NKVD officers. The NKVD try to force the deportees to sign a document sentencing them to twenty-five years of hard labor for their crimes against the state, but many of the deportees resist. Lina and her family are among them, and they are often punished for their resistance.

After several months in the camps, a list is drawn up with the names of deportees to be moved to another location. The Vilkases are on the list, but Andrius and his mother are not. Having expressed their mutual feelings for each other, the Lina and Andrius are sad, but promise to find each other in the future. Lina and the other relocated deportees are put on trucks, and then barges, and after several weeks they arrive in Trofimovsk, in the Arctic Circle, very close to the North Pole. The conditions here are even bleaker than in the previous camp, and the deportees are essentially left to fend for themselves in the wilderness while the NKVD live in relative luxury. The polar night sets in—180 days of darkness—and snowstorms begin in September. People die from the harsh conditions. Lina learns that her family was deported because her parents helped her cousin Joana's family repatriate to Germany. Elena learns from a cruel officer that Kostas has died in prison, and Elena soon becomes sick and dies. Lina is left to take care of herself and Jonas alone. Jonas and other children begin to succumb to scurvy again. Miraculously, a doctor from the Soviet tribunal comes to the camp just in time, and brings medicine and supplies, saving their lives. Lina's story ends when

she sees sunlight on the horizon, and she knows they have successfully survived the winter despite the best efforts of the NKVD to have them perish.

In an epilogue, construction workers in Kaunas in 1995 find letters and drawings Lina has buried in 1954. She married Andrius, and buried the documents so that people would eventually learn of the Baltic genocide, long hidden by the Soviet Union. It is her hope that her story helps to ensure no such tragedy ever happens again.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Lina Vilkas** – Lina Vilkas is fifteen years old when she and her family are deported from their comfortable middle class home in Lithuania in 1941. Her father Kostas, a professor at the local university, is accused of the anti-Soviet activity of aiding in the repatriation of relatives back to Germany, thus branding the entire family criminals. Though young, Lina already knows that her passion in life is for **drawing**, and she is preparing to enter art school when she is ripped away from the only life she has ever known. Despite the hardships she endures upon deportation, she never ceases to stop her drawing. For Lina, drawing is a way to process the world, and is her best mode of expression. She is devoted to saving her family members, and risks her life multiple times throughout the novel in attempts to save her mother Elena and brother Jonas. She continues to document the horrors of the Baltic genocide through her drawings at the risk of certain death, and hopes to pass along the drawings to Kostas so that he may find out where she has been relocated. The entire novel is written from Lina's first-person point of view, and the epilogue reveals that the work has been created from her preserved drawings and writings discovered decades later.

**Elena Vilkas** – Elena Vilkas is Lina's mother, and is still a woman in the prime of her life when she is deported from her home in Lithuania. Though she is a homemaker and relies on Kostas' income from the university to support the family, Elena was sent to Moscow for her schooling and is considered highly educated. Elena's intelligence is revealed throughout the novel: she is shrewd in her handling of the NKVD guards, furthered by her fluency in Russian, and is intensely kind and caring towards the other passengers. More than once, she saves the lives of her children and of other deportees by bargaining with the guards using valuables she has hidden in the lining of her coat. Ultimately, Elena perishes due to her own generosity—during the polar winter in Siberia, she gives away most of her bread rations, leading to physical weakness, illness, and her untimely death. Her family, the other deportees, and even one of the NKVD guards, Nikolai Kretszky, mourn her deeply. It is ultimately the loss of Elena that leads Kretszky to understand

the gravity of the genocide and defect from the camp to alert others of the horrors occurring.

**Jonas Vilkas** – Jonas, Lina’s brother, is ten years old when he is deported. Sweet and caring in his nature, Jonas’ purity is exemplified from the start of the novel, when he dresses neatly for school as the NKVD arrive at the home and demand that the family get ready to leave. The absence of Kostas weighs heavily on Jonas, as he is now the only male present in the family. Though he wants to protect Elena and Lina, his youth and naïveté make it difficult and often frustrate him. Jonas looks up to Andrius, who is older and assumes a paternal role for the young boy. Though Lina worries that Andrius is a bad influence for Jonas (the two rip pages out of Lina’s copy of a **Dickens novel** in order to smoke cigarettes), Elena is relieved that Jonas has a male figure to give him strength and comfort. Jonas is forced to grow up very quickly over the course of the novel due to the extreme hardships he undertakes, becoming a valuable and resourceful member of the group of deportees. Despite his emotional strength, the physical difficulties of the camps take their toll on his young body, and he nearly succumbs to scurvy twice. He is ultimately saved by the timely intervention of Dr. Samodurov.

**Kostas Vilkas** – Kostas is Lina and Jonas’ father, and a professor at the local university. Though he is only seen in one episode throughout the novel, Lina often reminisces of good times she had with her father, who was loving and supportive of her artistic talents. Elena, Lina, and Jonas grieve deeply over their separation from Kostas, as able-bodied men were sent to different locations from women, children, and the infirm. Kostas’ brief words to Lina when she discovers him through the hole in a train car give her hope and inspiration throughout the most difficult of times in the labor camps. Kostas and his colleagues engaged in secret meetings where they discussed the impending political climate due to the Soviet annexation of the Baltic states. These meetings reveal Kostas’ commitment to freedom and revolution against totalitarianism. However, when Lina exhibits similarly negative sentiments towards the Soviets, Kostas becomes angry and implores her to keep her opinions to herself for her own safety. Despite his revolutionary politics, Kostas’ commitment is first and foremost to the safety of his family.

**Joana Vilkas** – Joana is Lina’s elder cousin and best friend. Though Joana is not present in the novel, Lina recalls her blissful summers with her cousin and the letters the two exchanged. Joana is studying to be a doctor, and Lina learns throughout the course of the novel that Kostas was imprisoned—and thus Lina, Jonas, and Elena deported—due to the fact that he helped Joana and her family repatriate to Germany, where Joana’s mother is from. Lina thus feels conflicted towards the memories of Joana, since she was someone who Lina once looked up to but who now seems to be reaping the benefits of Lina’s family’s misery. Joana represents

the person Lina wanted to grow up to be, and the person she hopes to become if she survives the labor camps.

**Andrius Arvydas** – Andrius is the son of a military officer, and similar in age to Lina. The two teenagers meet on the train towards Siberia. Andrius’ mother, who has spared her son from being imprisoned with the other able-bodied men by claiming he is mentally disabled, accompanies Andrius on the train. Though Andrius searches for his father in the other train cars, he fears that the NKVD has killed him. He is fiercely protective of his mother, and often helps Lina’s family procure food and shelter. Andrius and Lina have an immediate connection, though the trauma of the camps pushes them apart at times. Andrius takes Jonas under his wing, offering protection and guidance that comforts Lina and her mother. Though Andrius and Lina are separated after Lina and her family are moved from the first camp, Lina’s letter in the epilogue shows that the two survived, reconnected, and eventually married.

**Mrs. Arvydas** – Andrius’ mother is the attractive wife of a Lithuanian officer who is believed to be dead. She and her son are extremely protective of each other, and Mrs. Arvydas agrees to sleep with NKVD officers so that they do not kill Andrius. Though this keeps the mother and son well fed, clothed, and sheltered, his mother’s sacrifice takes a deep toll on Andrius. Like Elena, Mrs. Arvydas would do absolutely anything to save her family members.

**Mr. Stalas (The Bald Man)** – Better known to Lina as “the bald man,” Mr. Stalas is a postman who is placed in the same train car as the Vilkases when they are deported. He is an extremely pessimistic person, and throws himself from the train car in an attempt to commit suicide. He only succeeds in mangling his leg, which he uses as an excuse to lament and avoid work for the rest of the novel. Lina has an intense dislike for Mr. Stalas, as he says crude things that only succeed in frightening the deportee children. Yet despite his rude nature, Lina’s mother Elena is kind to Mr. Stalas and frequently brings him food. He reveals later on in the novel that he is Jewish, which likely contributes to his pessimistic attitude, since Jews were one of the main groups targeted during World War II. Mr. Stalas functions as a foil to the little hope that the deportees inspire in each other, and often serves to bring together members of the deportees in retaliation to his flippant remarks. However, he unfortunately also often acts as a rude awakening to the reality of the grim situation of the Baltic genocide.

**Miss Grybas** – Miss Grybas is a strict teacher from the school that Lina and Jonas attend. She takes charge of engaging the children so that they have something to think about apart from the horror of their situation. Like Elena, she is characterized by her strength and willingness to help others, and refuses to sign a contract condemning herself and other deportees to 25 years of hard labor.

**Ona** – A young woman who is thrown onto the train car just moments after giving birth. Her newborn child dies on the train,

and Ona goes crazy with grief. She attacks an officer who tries to control her in her anguish, and she is promptly shot in the head and left to die in the grass alongside the train tracks.

**Janina** – A young girl who is deported along with her family. Janina loses her doll, and often pretends that the doll's ghost speaks to her. She, like Jonas, develops scurvy and is only saved at the very last moment by Dr. Samodurov's intervention. Terrified that she and her child will die in the camps, Janina's mother has a moment of panic and nearly strangles her daughter.

**Nikolai Kretszky** – A blonde NKVD soldier who seems to take pleasure in torturing Lina, Elena, and the other deportees. Under circumstances Lina does not fully understand, Elena manages to strike up a friendship with Kretszky. When Elena dies, Kretszky expresses remorse at her loss, recalling how he felt when he lost his own mother. He ultimately defects from the class and alerts higher-ranking officials in the Soviet Union of the horrors in the camps, bringing relief that, although it does not immediately release the prisoners, at least saves them from imminent death.

**Komorov (The Commander)** – The commander of the NKVD unit that deports the Vilkases. He is the personification of evil in Lina's mind. Komorov shoots Ona, demands that the deportees sign paperwork agreeing to their criminal charges and sentencing them to 25 years of hard labor, and tortures with sleep deprivation those who do not sign. When Lina's talent for **drawing** is discovered, he demands that she draw a portrait of him. Though Lina longs to draw him as she sees him—with snakes crawling out of his skull—she draws a flattering portrait to save her own life.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Mrs. Rimas** – A librarian who, like Miss Grybas, helps to engage the children of the deportees. Like Elena, she has been separated from her husband and does not know where he is. She remains with the Vilkases in both labor camps, and often helps the family in times of need, particularly in Elena's last days.

**Ivanov** – A “brown-toothed” NKVD guard who sadistically enjoys torturing the prisoners.

**Dr. Samodurov** – A doctor who comes and saves the lives of weak deportees after Kretszky defects from the camp and alerts superiors to the horrible conditions in Siberia. Sepetys notes in her “Afterwards” that he is based on a real life person.

**Ulyushka** – The Altaian woman the Vilkases are forced to live with in their first labor camp. Though she is often mean, stingy, and demands arbitrary amounts of goods for rent, when the Vilkases are sent to a new camp, she loads their baggage with gifts of food for the journey.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### MORALITY, INTEGRITY, AND SACRIFICE

*Between Shades of Gray* takes its title from the complex nuances of morality that Lina, the teenage protagonist and narrator, experiences and must grapple with during her years of imprisonment in the harsh Soviet labor camps of Siberia during World War II. In 1940,

**Josef Stalin**, the leader of the Soviet Union, annexed Lithuania to make it part of the Soviet Union. Lina and her family are Lithuanians, and shortly after the annexation she, her mother Elena, her ten-year-old brother Jonas, and her father Kostas are deported from their comfortable middle-class lifestyle in Lithuania due to accusations that they hold anti-Soviet sentiments. Men are separated from their families during the deportations, and Elena eventually learns from a soldier that Kostas has likely perished in the Krasnoyarsk prison.

The circumstances behind the family's deportation, which Lina only learns about later in the novel, illustrate the complexities of morality with which she must struggle. For much of the novel, Lina believes that she and her family were deported because of her father's close relationship with the local university (an institution the Soviets distrusted). But she eventually learns that her father had in fact actively helped targeted individuals of the Soviet regime escape to neighboring nations, and that it was for these actions that he and his family were deported. Lina's father helped others to escape, but at the expense of his and his family's lives. Even more specifically: while Lina, Jonas, and Elena starve in Siberia, and her father languishes in a prison, Lina's cousin and best friend Joana's family safely escaped to Germany through Kostas's help. Lina can't help but find it unbearably unfair that that her own family's kindness leads to their persecution, but Elena's mother teaches Lina and Jonas that it is their duty to help those around them to the best of their ability—even if it means sacrificing their own survival.

Throughout the novel, there are many additional instances of complex issues of morality that arise almost constantly for prisoners in the labor camps. Often, characters are faced with the choice of preserving their integrity or preserving their lives. For instance, the NKVD, the secret police under Stalin's Communist regime, demand that Lina, her family, and the rest of the deportees sign documents accepting their status as criminals. Though limited freedom is granted to those who accept the charges, a handful of deportees, such as Lina and her

family, refuse to falsely incriminate themselves even if doing so would ease their burden. Further questions of morality and sacrifice are shown in the case of Mrs. Arvydas, the wife of a member of the Lithuanian military, and her son Andrius. Mrs. Arvydas' husband is presumed to be dead, and without his protection, the NKVD threaten to kill Andrius if Mrs. Arvydas does not sleep with them. She and Andrius are thus kept clean and well-fed, much to the resentment of the other starving deportees. Still, despite the Arvydas' relatively comfortable positions in the camp, the other deportees have no wish to subject themselves to such whims of the guards in order to procure food and shelter. Ultimately, through its portrayal of the prison camps and the difficult moral choices that the prisoners must make to balance maintaining their self-worth and managing to physically survive, *Between Shades of Gray* shows that morality becomes fluid in matters of life and death.



## STRENGTH AND IDENTITY

In sending deportees such as Lina's family to the labor camps, the Soviets desire to not only break them physically but also mentally and spiritually – to transform them from resisting Lithuanians (and people of other nationalities) into conforming Soviets. The excruciating work in brutal conditions are obvious means of weakening the deportees' physical strength and spirit, and the deportation to the isolated camps so far from their homes is in itself part of an effort to strip the deportees of their national identities. However, Lina and her fellow deportees from Lithuania resist Soviet assimilation by holding fast to their shared past, and their shared identity as Lithuanians. They share photos and stories of their families, keep holiday traditions alive, and remind one another about who they are and where they have come from. Lina derives strength from the memories of her life in Lithuania, shown throughout the text in italicized flashbacks from her previously comfortable life. Though the memories of warm baths and sumptuous meals are sometimes painful given the cold of the Siberian tundra and meager bread rations, they remind Lina that there is good in the world, and that she may one day return to such happiness. And through those memories and the collective effort of the Lithuanians to remain Lithuanians, the novel shows how maintaining an identity, as an individual and as part of a group, can give a person strength. More broadly, the novel shows how the brutal conditions of the camps also threaten to strip away prisoners' basic humanity by forcing them into constant zero-sum decisions, where they must act to save themselves by disregarding others or else put themselves at risk by helping others. It is an act of resistance, then, when Lina and the other deportees actively attempt to identify with one another and show kindness to those who are weak or ill. Lina's mother, Elena, is one character who is exemplary in her compassion for others, as she regularly deprives herself of food and clothing to assist younger or

weaker people, ultimately at the cost of her own life. And yet, the novel presents such actions not just as acts of resistance but as sources of strength. Strength in the novel is ultimately derived through the power of identity with fellow human beings, and so such acts of kindness and unity are personal affirmations of humanity – of a shared humanity beyond even shared nationality – which even the horrors of the labor camp cannot break.



## THE POWER OF ART

Art in the novel is powerful in a variety of ways. Lina is a talented artist, and much of the narrative of *Between Shades of Grey* is structured around her deep connection to **drawing**. Lina connects to the world using her art—she can best express herself using images, and understands her world better when she sees it out on the page.

And, at the same time, art can speak the truth: as it does when Lina is asked to draw the portrait of an NKVD commander and her artistic vision sees snakes sliding from his skull; or in her caricature of **Stalin**; or even in the stick map that a man draws to communicate with a relative about where he has been enslaved. The testament to the power of art's truth is clear in the camp guard's reaction to it: Lina knows that if she were to actually draw the NKVD commander with snakes slithering from his skull it would result in her death; just as her father knows her caricature of Stalin, if seen, would as well; and just as the man who drew the stick map was killed by the guards.

But art is powerful in the novel not just as a tool of truth-telling—it is also life-affirming, and life-giving. Though Lina knows it is wisest to stop her drawing based on the dangers her own art has exposed her to, and especially after the death of the man who drew the stick map, she cannot. For her, to draw is to live, and she does not want to live a life without art. In the novel, art is the flavor of life, necessary for a life worth living beyond the utilitarian needs of food and water and shelter. Though Lina is able to physically persevere through her Soviet enslavement, it is her connection to art—and what it means to both her and the people around her—that give them something to live for beyond the sake of survival.

And finally, as shown in the epilogue of the novel, art both endures and connects: the novel is, in the end, a product of Lina's drawings: She documents her journey through the labor camps using sketches of what she sees and feels, and hopes to have these images passed along to her father to indicate her whereabouts and the fact that she is alive. Ultimately, under circumstances not explained in the narrative, the drawings end up in the soil, dug up forty years later and used as evidence (within the world of the novel) to reveal the otherwise hidden Baltic genocides and to return to the people who suffered that genocide a kind of eternal life in art.



## GENOCIDE

During World War II, extreme atrocities were committed across the globe. *Between Shades of Gray* is the story of the genocide of the Baltic people of Eastern Europe by the Soviet Union, one that is significantly less well known than the genocide of the Jews and other minorities in the Holocaust. Eager to institute Communist rule and reduce dissent in Baltic countries annexed by the Soviet Union during the war, **Josef Stalin** charged dissidents with crimes against the state and sentenced men, women, children, and the elderly to years in labor camps under inhuman conditions. The mass murder of the Baltic people is still not well known, in large part because, unlike the Nazis in Germany, the Soviet Union continued under Stalin's rule after the end of World War II, and former prisoners faced further punishment if they spoke out about their years in the camps.

By writing *Between Shades of Gray*, Ruta Sepetys, the daughter of Lithuanian immigrants, hopes to bring awareness of the plight of the Baltic people during the Second World War—to memorialize their loss but also to capture them as real, living people, and to put them back into the history from which they were swept away.



## WOMEN AND MOTHERS

Though Lina's description of her life in Lithuania depicts traditional gender roles for men and women, such roles are often broken down in the camps. Lina's mother Elena, for example, becomes a matriarch and protector for their group of deportees. Though a homemaker back in Lithuania, she was educated in Moscow as a young woman. This means that she is fluent in Russian as well as Lithuanian, and therefore one of the only deportees who can communicate with the guards. Elena's strength and willingness to stand up to the guards render her an important figure in the community of deportees. Though there are men on their journey and in the camps, all look to Elena for strength and comfort in their difficult times.

In the absence of able-bodied men, women in the labor camp generally become the providers of food and resources for the deportees. Mothers' devotion to their children in the novel is portrayed as almost absolute, as Lina's mother gives up her own food (and life) to protect those around her, and Andrius' mother Mrs. Arvydas does anything and everything to try and protect him: first making sure that the NKVD believed he was mentally disabled (the only way they would allow him to survive because his father had been in the Lithuanian military), and then prostituting herself in exchange for his survival. These mothers are willing not only to protect their own children, but extend their maternal instinct to others as well.

The novel further portrays the power and influence of women and mothers to be universal, able to cut across even the chasm

between Soviet camp guards and their prisoners. For example, Nikolai Kretszky, one of the NKVD guards who tortures the Vilkases most often, breaks down at the loss of his mother in front of Lina, who finds herself comforting the hand that beats her. The respect that children have for their mothers is a love that bonds people across enemy lines. The breakdown of traditional gender norms that view men as strong and women as weak is exemplified in Andrius' admiration and love for Lina. It is Andrius who first tells Lina that she is "Krasivaya," and challenges her to discover the meaning of the Russian word. Lina finally learns it from Kretszky, who uses it to describe Elena: "Beautiful, but strong." The women in the labor camp may no longer be conventionally beautiful because of their lack of food and resources, but their fierce will to live and preserve the lives of others makes them both beautiful and strong.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



## DRAWING

Lina's drawings create an important connection between her life back home in Lithuania and her life in the Communist labor camps of Siberia. As she continues to sketch wherever she can—in the dirt on the train, on handkerchiefs, on scraps of paper—she recalls moments when her drawings brought her praise (such as when she was admitted to an art program) and when they brought her scolding (when her father discovers her caricatures of **Stalin**). Drawing is what maintains constancy in Lina's life, despite her location or situation. Her drawings are also a way for Lina to connect with her father—Lina hopes that by documenting her journey through sketches, the drawings may one day make their way to Kostas such that he can determine where she, Elena, and Jonas have been imprisoned. The artist Edvard Munch, best known for his painting "The Scream," particularly inspires Lina. Like Munch, Lina seeks to use her drawings to convey her emotions and view of the world, rather than a realistic image of what the world looks like. Lina's drawings symbolize her humanity and determination to have hope for the future despite the misery of her current situation.



## FAMILY PHOTOS

Lina brings photos of her family among her meager possessions when she is deported, as do many of the other deportees. Images of family members give the deportees strength and comfort throughout the treachery of their journey. When they come together to celebrate Christmas, they share the photos and stories of their families.

Though the NKVD seeks to break the spirits of the deportees by branding them criminals, starving them, and giving them no shelter or supplies, the photos remind them who they are living for and who they were before they were deported. The photos provide important memories of the humanity and good in the world that exists beyond the camp, thus giving the deportees something to live for beyond merely the sake of survival.



## ANDRIUS' STONE

While on a bucket run during the train journey, Andrius finds an oval stone full of quartz and other minerals. Stripped of all their worldly possessions, including jewelry and other ornaments, the deportees ooh and ah over the beautiful object. Andrius gives the stone to Lina, who derives strength from a beautiful object given to her by someone she admires. Lina in turn passes it to Jonas for comfort when he is ill. When he recovers, Jonas gives it back to Andrius, declaring it a lucky object. When Andrius and Lina are separated, Andrius slips it into Lina's pocket as a permanent gift. Lina continues to cherish the stone as a memory of her feelings for Andrius, and for a potential future life they may share together. The stone represents Lina's faith in her ability to get through her present afflictions, in order to live a better life in the future.



## JOSEF STALIN

Though Stalin is never actually seen or heard from throughout the novel, his presence nevertheless looms behind every scene. It is Josef Stalin who annexes Lithuania as part of the Soviet Union, and it is he who orders the NKVD to deport anyone considered to have committed "anti-Soviet" activities. This is how Lina, her family, and the rest of the deportees come to essentially become slaves to the Soviet state. Out of all the characters, Lina in particular is vocal about her hatred towards the new leader who has caused the destruction of both her country and her life. Stalin becomes the looming evil behind the tangible torture committed by the guards. His inescapable presence throughout the novel is what makes his representation even more oppressive, since Lina derives all her misery from his rise to power and every subsequent misfortune that befalls the Vilkases. Furthermore, the epilogue points out that unlike with the fall of the Nazis after the Holocaust, the Soviet Union continued to maintain power after the end of World War II, thus rendering all former prisoners of the camps silent. The suffocating presence of Stalin, Communism, and the Soviet Union is what pushes Lina to document her deportation.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Speak edition of *Between Shades of Gray* published in 2012.

### Chapter 2 Quotes

"Promise me that if anyone tries to help you, you will ignore them. We will resolve this ourselves. We must not pull family or friends into this confusion, do you understand? Even if someone calls out to you, you must not respond."

**Related Characters:** Elena Vilkas (speaker), Lina Vilkas

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 6

#### Explanation and Analysis

As Lina sits writing a letter to her cousin Joana on June 14, 1941, NKVD officers barge into her home and demand that she, her brother Jonas, and her mother Elena pack up their things and leave with them. They are being arrested by the Soviet Union's secret police, the NKVD. Stalin has recently annexed Lithuania, and is rounding up those who have expressed dissent against the state. Lina's father, Kostas, the provost of the local university, has already been arrested.

In this quote, Elena, Lina's mother, urges her not to speak to anyone she sees in the streets while they are being marched away by the NKVD. This is so they do not accidentally entangle anyone else in what Elena dubs a "confusion," or the reason why they have been arrested, which is not clear at the moment. Even though it might be tempting to accept advice, resources, or help from people they might see, that alone could be grounds for arrest by the NKVD, since it would be seen as helping criminals. From now on, the family must fend for itself.

"But what did you do?" I asked him.

"Nothing, Lina. Have you finished your homework?"  
"But you must have done something to deserve free bread," I pressed.

"I don't deserve anything. You stand for what is right, Lina, without the expectation of gratitude or reward. Now, off to your homework."

**Related Characters:** Kostas Vilkas (speaker), Lina Vilkas

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 9

### Explanation and Analysis

Lina has flashback memories throughout the novel, and this is the first of many. In this memory, she recalls one time when she went to the bakery to get a loaf of bread. The woman behind the counter insisted that she take it for free, to thank her for the “kindness” Lina’s father had shown her and others. Here, Lina asks her father what he did, but he won’t tell her, citing the fact that one should not expect something in return when one does a good deed.

At this point Lina does not realize that Kostas has been helping people in the community escape from the clutches of the NKVD. The woman likely has family or friends whom Kostas helped, and that is why she wants to show him a small gesture of gratitude by giving his family bread. Lina later learns that Kostas has been charged with “accessory,” meaning that he was found to have helped people leave the country before the Soviets could arrest them. Kostas knows that this will put him and his family in grave danger, but is determined to do what he can to resist Stalin’s malicious reign.

mercilessness of the NKVD. They will not stop at anything to subjugate and imprison people whom they believe to be dissidents towards the state, no matter who or what they are. Ona’s infant child is branded as a thief and a prostitute before it is even born. This shows that their violence is not just brutal, but that it is largely arbitrary, making the deportees feel even more helpless in the clutches of the NKVD. Ona’s infant will become a symbol for children arrested by the NKVD who are not even given a chance at life before they are branded as criminals and left to die on the trains and in the camps.

## Chapter 6 Quotes

“Sir,” said Jonas, leaning around me. He held out his little ruler from school. The old woman who had gasped at my nightgown began to cry.

**Related Characters:** Lina Vilkas, Jonas Vilkas (speaker), Mr. Stalas (The Bald Man)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 22

### Explanation and Analysis

On the truck, the passengers quickly realize that there will be no chance for the NKVD to help the bald man with his leg injuries. This becomes overwhelmingly evident when they rip Ona and her newborn child out of the hospital, despite the doctor’s desperate pleas to leave the baby, since there is no chance that it will survive. In this quote, ten-year-old Jonas, who is still very sweet and naïve, offers up his school ruler to use as a splint for the bald man’s broken leg. An old woman on the truck, shocked by the innocence of this boy who has also been branded as a criminal, begins to weep.

Despite the horror and squalor that the deportees will find themselves in for years, they will also exhibit extreme acts of kindness towards one another throughout their struggles. Jonas, who from the start is marked by a sweet disposition, is eager to help in any way he can, despite his young age and small stature. The adults on the bus are shocked by the fact that the NKVD would target small children like Jonas and even a newborn baby—a mark of the NKVD’s refusal to show any kind of mercy or rationality in rounding up people they deem not worthy to be a part of the Soviet Union.

## Chapter 4 Quotes

The truck stopped in front of the hospital. Everyone seemed relieved that they would tend to the bald man’s injuries. But they did not. They were waiting. A woman who was also on the list was giving birth to a baby. As soon as the umbilical cord was cut, they would both be thrown into the truck.

**Related Characters:** Lina Vilkas (speaker), Mr. Stalas (The Bald Man), Ona

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 15

### Explanation and Analysis

After they are arrested, Elena, Jonas, and Lina are thrown into a truck that spends hours rounding up people around Kaunas who are also being arrested by the NKVD. The bald man throws himself from the truck in an attempt to commit suicide, but only succeeds in breaking his leg. In this quote, the passengers on the truck hope that they have arrived at a hospital so that he can receive treatment. Instead, they learn that a woman who is currently in labor and her newborn infant will soon join them.

This quote is the first evidence of the absolute

## Chapter 7 Quotes

“Mother continued to speak in Russian and pulled a pocket watch from her coat. I knew that watch. It was her father’s and had his name engraved in the soft gold on the back. The officer snatched the watch, let go of Jonas, and started yelling at the people next to us.”

Have you ever wondered what a human life is worth? That morning, my brother’s was worth a pocket watch.

**Related Characters:** Lina Vilkas (speaker), Jonas Vilkas, Elena Vilkas

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 26

### Explanation and Analysis

After all of those arrested in Kaunas are loaded onto the truck, the NKVD drive the deportees to a train station where they are forced off the truck. The NKVD then begin to separate families, but Elena is desperate to keep herself, Lina, and Jonas together. She begins to pull valuables out of her coat lining, but the NKVD officer doesn’t seem satisfied by her bribes. In this quote, he finally accepts a beautiful pocket watch that belonged to Elena’s father in exchange for Jonas’ life. Here, Lina is horrified that the officer believes her brother’s life is worth a watch, but also relieved that the bribe worked.

As instructed by Stalin, the NKVD treat the Lithuanian deportees as if they are “fascist pigs,” and truly seek to put them in situations not even fit for livestock. Elena has clearly foreseen the possibility of an arrest, and sews valuables and money into the lining of her coat so that she may use them as bribes and currency. There is no telling what would happen to a young boy separated from his mother and at the mercy of the NKVD. Lina feels conflicted over the fact that Elena gave a watch in exchange for Jonas—she is happy that it worked, but would like to believe her brother is worth so much more. In the NKVD camps, the guards attempt to break down the deportees so that they believe their lives are worthless.

## Chapter 11 Quotes

“You’re very brave to have come. You must all stay together. I know you’ll take good care of your sister and mother while I am away.”

“I will, Papa, I promise,” said Jonas. “When will we see you?” Papa paused. “I don’t know. Hopefully soon.”

I clutched the bundle of clothes. Tears began dropping down my cheeks.

“Don’t cry, Lina. Courage,” said Papa. “You can help me.”

“Do you understand?” My father looked at Andrius, hesitant.

“You can help me find you,” he whispered. “I’ll know it’s you...just like you know Munch. But you must be very careful.”

**Related Characters:** Jonas Vilkas, Lina Vilkas, Kostas Vilkas (speaker), Andrius Arvydas, Elena Vilkas

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 44

### Explanation and Analysis

When a train full of men pulls into the station next to Lina’s train, Jonas wakes her and Andrius in the night so that they can go look for their fathers. After much searching, Lina and Jonas eventually find Kostas. He speaks to them through the bathroom hole, and they can see that his face is badly bruised. He gives them food and goods to pass to Elena. In this quote, he urges his children to have courage for his sake so that they may be resilient and persevere. He also hints to Lina that she can use her drawing skills to make distinctive drawings, so that he can trace them back to her and reunite the family.

This is the first and last time that Lina sees Kostas in the novel, outside of memories of him. Kostas and Lina have a very special bond, and he is very supportive of her artistic talent. Elena and Kostas are equal pillars of knowledge and strength in the Vilkas family, and though the two children are grateful for their mother’s presence, they all greatly miss Kostas and wish he were around to support the family as well. Lina will spend much of the novel drawing symbols and markers of what she is going through and where she has been, in the hopes that they will find their way to Kostas and that they will be reunited again some day. These brief words of encouragement follow Lina for years.

## Chapter 22 Quotes

“The man who wound his watch approached me. ‘Do you have a handkerchief I could borrow?’ he asked. I nodded and quickly handed him the hankie, neatly folded to conceal my writing...The man patted his brow with the handkerchief before putting it in his pocket. Pass it along, I thought, imagining the hankie traveling hand to hand until it reached Papa.”

**Related Characters:** Lina Vilkas (speaker), Kostas Vilkas

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 83

### Explanation and Analysis

After traveling for six weeks in squalor on the train, the deportees are instructed to leave the train cars and exit onto a field. They have no idea where they are, but enjoy the feeling of stretching their legs. In this quote, the man on the train who agreed to pass along Lina's drawings so that they might reach her father surreptitiously asks her for a handkerchief, and simply does not give it back—suggesting that he will ensure that men keep “lending” it to other men in the hopes that it eventually reaches the camp where Kostas is, and can help Lina and Kostas find each other someday.

In the desperation of the NKVD prison camps, deportees like Lina can only hold onto the hope that they will one day reunite with their loved ones. Though it is extremely unlikely that a handkerchief could make its way across Europe to reunite a father and daughter, it is the only chance Lina has, and her survival depends on her ability to become resilient through her hope. Lina refuses to let the NKVD, Stalin, and the Soviet Union rip her family apart, and she will do whatever it takes to ensure she sees her father again someday.

## Chapter 27 Quotes

“Hey, there was blond hair under all that dirt,” said Andrius, reaching out and grabbing a strand of my hair. I shrank back and looked away. Mother put her arm around me.

**Related Characters:** Andrius Arvydas (speaker), Lina Vilkas

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 100

### Explanation and Analysis

After they are hauled off of the trucks and fail to be sold to Siberians, the group of deportees is brought to bathhouses where they wash for the first time in weeks. The women are forced to undress in front of the NKVD guards, who leer at them. One guard gropes Lina's breast, and Elena violently pushes him away. In this quote, Andrius playfully compliments Lina's appearance now that she has been cleaned, but she flinches from his touch instinctively, since the last man who reached out to touch her did so without consent.

Sexual assault and rape are often used against women in times of war. As a young girl, Lina is particularly vulnerable, and Elena will do anything to protect her daughter from the violence of the guards. Even though Lina finds Andrius kind and attractive, sexual assault can cause PTSD in victims, and Lina flinches from his touch despite the fact that she knows and feels safe with him. Lina doesn't tell Jonas what happened because she doesn't want to upset him, and because she is still not sure how to process the assault. Elena knows right away why Lina flinches, however, and she is there to comfort her and silently tell her that she has support.

## Chapter 30 Quotes

“Jonas,” said Mother, stroking my brother’s face. “I can’t trust them. Stalin has told the NKVD that Lithuanians are the enemy. The commander and the guards look at us as beneath them. Do you understand?”

**Related Characters:** Lina Vilkas, Elena Vilkas (speaker), Jonas Vilkas

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 115

### Explanation and Analysis

Once they arrive at the labor camp, the NKVD order Elena to go speak to the commander in the barracks. They do not let Jonas and Lina inside the building with her. When Elena emerges, she takes them back to the shack before telling them that the NKVD asked her to help translate Lithuanian into Russian for them. They also wanted her to spy on other deportees for them. In exchange, they promised her preferential treatment.

In this quote, Elena explains to Jonas that it is doubtful that

the NKVD would have actually given her extra food or other resources in exchange for acting as a traitor to her own people. She is a prisoner under the NKVD for a reason, and that reason is that they see her a “fascist pig,” less than human, as decreed by Stalin. This wouldn’t change if she put aside her morals to work for them—it would only make her feel worse about her current situation. Here, Elena teaches Lina and Jonas a valuable lesson about preserving their dignity and keeping their heads high, even in the face of incredible adversity.

## Chapter 33 Quotes

“Because they threatened to kill me unless she slept with them. And if they get tired of her, they still might kill me. So how would you feel, Lina, if your mother felt she had to prostitute herself to save your life?”

**Related Characters:** Lina Vilkas, Elena Vilkas (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 124

### Explanation and Analysis

At the labor camps, the guards put the women to work digging a pit. They don’t give them proper shovels—many of them are missing handles—and it is very difficult to dig in the frozen ground. They are given occasional water breaks, but no food beyond their daily bread ration. It is hard, back-breaking labor. During their water break, the women go relieve themselves in the woods by squatting in a circle. One woman asks Elena to “pass the talcum powder,” causing the women to burst into laughter. In this quote, Elena points out the NKVD can’t take away their sense of humor at least.

The deportees cling to the little joys in life that humans derive from one another—kindness, stories, and jokes—since these are intangible things that even Stalin cannot institute into collective labor camps. Despite the sadness of their journey, the women become friends with each other, and are able to share a laugh in even the bleakest of situations. Lina’s story of the genocide of the Baltic people therefore shows both the most beautiful side of humanity—the deportees’ kindness and generosity—and the ugliest side of humanity—the NKVD’s merciless torture.

## Chapter 39 Quotes

“Because they threatened to kill me unless she slept with them. And if they get tired of her, they still might kill me. So how would you feel, Lina, if your mother felt she had to prostitute herself to save your life?”

**Related Characters:** Andrius Arvydas (speaker), Mrs. Arvydas, Lina Vilkas

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 159

### Explanation and Analysis

One day, Lina sees Mrs. Arvydas serving drinks to the NKVD through the window of the barracks. She realizes that Andrius and Mrs. Arvydas are working for the NKVD. She confronts Andrius about it and, in this quote, he flies into a rage and tells her the truth: the NKVD threatened to kill Andrius if Mrs. Arvydas didn’t agree to sleep with them. Here Andrius reveals that his life is still in danger should the NKVD ever change their minds.

Though Lina and Elena have fortunately not been raped by the guards, Lina was groped by the guard at the bathhouse, and Elena was once accosted by many guards and saved at the very last moment by Kretszky. Like Elena, Mrs. Arvydas would do anything to protect her children, and she is willing to prostitute herself if it means saving Andrius’ life. However, they all know of the arbitrary nature of the NKVD’s decisions—one day, they might decide they don’t want to keep up their end of the bargain anymore, and kill them both. Though Andrius and Mrs. Arvydas live lives that are relatively more comfortable compared to the other deportees, no one would want to trade places with them. Lina is horrified at this revelation, and disgusted with herself for jumping to conclusions.

## Chapter 41 Quotes

“My art teacher had said that if you breathed deeply and imagined something, you could be there. You could see it, feel it. During our standoffs with the NKVD, I learned to do that. I clung to my rusted dreams during the times of silence. It was at gunpoint that I fell into every hope and allowed myself to wish from the deepest part of my heart. Komorov thought he was torturing us. But we were escaping into a stillness within ourselves. We found strength here.”

**Related Characters:** Lina Vilkas (speaker), Komorov (The Commander)

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 163

### Explanation and Analysis

Every other night for months, the NKVD wake the deportees in the middle of the night and try to force them to sign documents confessing their “guilt” and agreeing to 25 years of forced labor. Though many deportees do give in and sign the documents—which allows them special privileges in the present, such as going into the nearby town—Lina, Elena, and Jonas do not. In this quote, Lina reveals that she finds a way to meditate and free her mind while she is sitting in quiet, civil disobedience with a gun pointed at her head. It is in these near-death experiences that she finds the most peace within herself, and is most at peace with her situation.

Many deportees refuse to sign, despite the NKVD’s fervent attempts to coerce them into doing so, because then they would be “admitting” to the Soviet Union that they are criminals, and become complicit in their imprisonment. None of them have actually done anything wrong, and as long as they are still under the guard of the NKVD anyway, they see no reason to give up their lives, family, friends, and their dignity, too. Though people call those who end up signing “traitors,” Lina also understands that other people need to make peace with themselves in different ways. Lina channels the teachings of her art teacher in order to endure these difficult times.

## Chapter 42 Quotes

 Jonas was learning Russian much quicker than I was. He could understand a fair amount of conversation and could even use slang. I constantly asked him to translate. I hated the sound of the Russian language.

**Related Characters:** Lina Vilkas (speaker), Jonas Vilkas

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 169

### Explanation and Analysis

In the labor camps, Jonas acclimates to life there much better than Lina does. He works for women who make boots and other supplies out of animal skins, and they come to adore him and his sweet disposition. Jonas is also able to

pick up words and phrases of Russian, and begins to learn the language from the women he is working for. Lina constantly asks Jonas to translate, because she is resistant to learning the language of the people she hates.

Lina has always been strong-willed, and refuses to normalize life in the camps. She is deeply patriotic to Lithuania, and clings to her language the way she clings to her memories of home. Although she rationally knows it would be safer for her and her family if she learned the language and could overhear what the NKVD are saying, and potentially bargain with them if need be, she stubbornly refuses to learn out of spite and defiance. To Lina, everything about the NKVD—their names, appearance, and language—stands for evil. They are each just a cog in Stalin’s wheel, and she will resist everything about them to the very best of her ability.

## Chapter 47 Quotes

 “For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping.

My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass.”

**Related Characters:** Jonas Vilkas (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 189

### Explanation and Analysis

There is a village near the labor camp with a post office, and those who have signed the documents are allowed to go visit there. Those who have not signed bribe people to send letters for them. One day, Mrs. Rimas receives a letter from her husband. It is in code so that its true meaning is not deciphered by the NKVD. It says that he is in summer camp, which is as described in Psalm 102. Jonas then reads aloud the psalm—and as seen in this excerpt, it is about extreme suffering and starvation.

The deportees are horrified by the arrival of the letter. Though most of them have not had contact with their families, this letter becomes representative of what they might be going through—starvation and suffering, just like they are enduring in the labor camp. They now know that the Soviets are secretly detaining and torturing people all over, in secret locations that the rest of the world knows nothing about. They long for more news of the war, as invasions means there is a chance Stalin can be overthrown and their locations and plight might be exposed to the rest

of the world.

## Chapter 51 Quotes

¶¶ I grabbed our family photo and stuffed it up my dress. I would hide it on the way to the kolkhoz office. Kretszky didn't notice. He stood motionless, holding his rifle, staring at all the photographs.

**Related Characters:** Lina Vilkas (speaker), Nikolai Kretszky

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 208

### Explanation and Analysis

For weeks the deportees plan a Christmas Eve celebration, called a *Kucios*. In traditional Lithuanian manner, they get together, bringing the little bits of food they have scrimped and saved. They leave one empty spot on the floor to represent those who are not present but who are missed, and put photographs of their family members there. The NKVD interrupt the celebration to order them to the office, hoping to intimidate them into signing the documents. Lina frantically grabs her photograph—it is irreplaceable. In this quote, Kretszky is silent and motionless when he sees the photographs.

Though most of the NKVD officers unwaveringly act as if the deportees really are less than human, Kretszky begins to show signs throughout the novel that he regrets his actions and his place in the NKVD. Here, he is clearly given pause by the sentiment shown by the deportees who greatly miss their family members. As we later learn, Kretszky has had a difficult upbringing: his mother died when he was young, and his stepmother hated him. He longs to help his relatives in Poland, which has been invaded by Germany. Seeing all the deportees miss their relatives makes their plight much more human and much more real to Kretszky, who begins to deeply regret what he has done to them.

## Chapter 57 Quotes

¶¶ I hated that Mother shared with Ulyushka. She had tried to throw Jonas out into the snow when he was sick. She didn't think twice about stealing from us. She never shared her food. She ate egg after egg, right in front of us. Yet Mother insisted on sharing with her.

**Related Characters:** Lina Vilkas (speaker), Elena Vilkas, Jonas Vilkas, Ulyushka

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 225

### Explanation and Analysis

After Lina completes the portrait for the commander, she goes to the kitchen of the NKVD barracks to get the bread and potatoes she is owed. Instead of the officers just handing it to her, they instead throw food, cans, and garbage out onto Lina and Jonas. A can hits Lina on the head and causes a gash. Lina and Jonas bring the food back to Elena as fast as they can, before they are accused of stealing it. In this quote, Elena forces them to share with Ulyushka, despite how much Lina hates her.

Elena consistently teaches Lina and Jonas that it is important to be kind to everyone, no matter how rude they are to her. She operates under the assumption that everyone needs and deserves a helping hand, and Elena recognizes that Ulyushka, too, is suffering hardships under Stalin and the NKVD. Having been ousted from her own home, she imagines it must be difficult to be forced to share her home with complete strangers. Even though Elena does not expect anything in return from Ulyushka, the woman does ultimately repay Elena's kindness by giving her lots of food and a thick animal hide when the family is relocated.

## Chapter 62 Quotes

¶¶ "Look at me," whispered Andrius, moving close. "I'll see you," he said. "Just think about that. Just think about me bringing you your drawings. Picture it, because I'll be there."

**Related Characters:** Andrius Arvydas (speaker), Lina Vilkas

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 248

### Explanation and Analysis

One day Andrius comes into Lina's shack, warning her, Jonas, and Elena that they are on an NKVD list to be relocated. Andrius and his mother, however, are not. Lina and her family do not know where they are being sent or why they are on this list, but they assume it is because they have not signed the documents. Wherever they are going, it is unlikely to be any better than the labor camp. The NKVD

come in the morning, while it is still dark, and call names. In this quote, Andrius says goodbye to Lina, and promises her he will keep her drawings safe. He also promises her that they will see each other again some day.

The romance between Lina and Andrius is proof that despite the NKVD's best efforts, they cannot remove the humanity and the spirit of the deportees. Even though they treat them like animals, they are real human beings whose true love and sacrifice come to light in the worst of conditions. Lina and Andrius fall in love not despite, but perhaps because of the horrors they face together. As Lina goes off into the great unknown, Andrius puts his own life in danger by harboring her drawings, which contain potentially dangerous and subversive images. The idea of seeing Andrius again is something that gets Lina through the worst of times, and the thought of Lina likely helps Andrius through many hardships as well. One of the small miracles of the novel is that, in the end, they do reunite, and get married.

## Chapter 64 Quotes

 "The Jews are the scapegoat for all of Germany's problems," said the bald man. "Hitler's convinced racial purity is the answer. It's too complicated for children to understand."

**Related Characters:** Mr. Stalas (The Bald Man) (speaker), Jonas Vilkas, Janina

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 257

### Explanation and Analysis

After the deportees are relocated, they are put on trains again. No one knows where they are going, but many hope and speculate they are going to America. While on the train, Janina asks the bald man if it is true he is a Jew. The bald man says he is, and Janina asks whether he thinks Hitler is killing the Jews. The bald man replies that he knows Hitler is killing the Jews. In this quote, he explains that Germany uses the Jews as a "scapegoat," or symbol of blame for all of Germany's problems. Hitler is convinced that Germany's problems will go away if he achieves "racial purity."

Though the novel is set in World War II, the isolation of the deportees means that there are only little bits and pieces of news about what is happening in the rest of the world. The revelation that the bald man is a Jew might help to explain his sour disposition—even though he is miserable on the journey and in the camps, he likely has relatives who are in

equal or worse states than he is. Here, he also holds an opinion that many of the other adults in the novel perhaps wrongly hold: that things are too difficult for children to understand. Even though Lina, Jonas, Andrius, and Janina are all still children, they have been forced to mature far beyond their years. The adults still want to protect them, but they likely deserve to know all the facts about the true political situation when they ask for them to be explained.

## Chapter 66 Quotes

 Mother grabbed my arm. Pain shot up into my shoulder. She spoke through clenched teeth. "We don't know. Do you hear me? We don't know what he is. He's a boy. He's just a boy." Mother let go of my arm. "And I'm not lying with him," she spat at Jonas. "How dare you imply such a thing."

**Related Characters:** Lina Vilkas, Elena Vilkas (speaker), Nikolai Kretzky, Jonas Vilkas

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 264

### Explanation and Analysis

While traveling to their new location, Lina and Jonas notice Elena speaking often to Kretzky, and that she refers to him as "Nikolai." Jonas becomes angry, as he fears that Elena has been subjected to the same fate as Mrs. Arvydas, and that she must prostitute herself to save their lives. Lina hates Kretzky, and is angry that her mother, always kind, would even have compassion for him. In this quote, Elena is shocked and angry at her children's accusations. She asserts that Kretzky is "just a boy," and that she would never, ever sleep with him.

Much of Elena's strength has come from her love of Kostas, and her desire to be with him again, to make her family whole. She is a very kind but extremely principled woman, and would never stoop to do something she felt compromised her morals. Yet her children also know she would do anything to save them. Later on, Elena explains to Lina that Kretzky saved her when she was nearly raped by a number of NKVD officers. Even though Kretzky has power over the deportees, as Elena points out, he's just a confused young man who has been swept up into the brute force of the Soviet Union's secret police. Elena is right to maintain a bond, however tenuous, with one of her prison guards, and she is shocked and angry when her children suggest that her intentions are anything but pure.

## Chapter 69 Quotes

“I can’t do this! I won’t die here. I will not let a fox eat us!”

Suddenly the woman grabbed Janina by the throat. A thick gurgle came from Janina’s windpipe.

Mother threw herself on Janina’s mother and pried her fingers from her daughter’s neck. Janina caught her breath and began to sob.

**Related Characters:** Lina Vilkas (speaker), Elena Vilkas, Janina

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 274

### Explanation and Analysis

When the deportees are told to leave the barge, they find themselves in an even more barren tundra than the one they had been in in the labor camp. They are in the Arctic Circle, almost in the North Pole. Unlike the shacks they were previously made to share with the Altaians, here there is no such infrastructure, and the NKVD basically make them fend for themselves in the wild while they build buildings of comparative luxury for the officers. In her desperation over the bleakness of these conditions, Janina’s mother goes mad with fear and tries to take her and Janina’s death into her own hands.

Though a mother’s attempt to kill her daughter may seem like one of the cruellest acts thus far, in context it pales in comparison to the horrors committed by the NKVD every day since the deportees’ arrest. In her manic state, Janina’s mother wants to take control of her and her daughters’ fate by taking it away from the NKVD and into her own hands. She doesn’t want herself and Janina to fall victim to the freezing cold temperatures, rampant diseases, or cruel whims of the NKVD officers. Yet Elena, determined to protect every one of the deportees, luckily wrestles Janina’s mother off of her daughter in time to save them both. She is determined that no one fall victim to the NKVD until it is absolutely too late to save them. Still, her promise that “everything will be fine” falls on somewhat deaf ears in this new, barren tundra.

## Chapter 73 Quotes

Joana’s freedom had cost me mine.

**Related Characters:** Lina Vilkas (speaker), Joana Vilkas

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 291

### Explanation and Analysis

After the snowstorm, the deportees are immediately sent back to work. They are forced to walk three kilometers in the deep snow to find firewood. On the trek, the bald man demands to wear Lina’s mittens, telling her that he will tell her a secret in exchange. Curious, she complies, and the bald man tells her that her father was arrested because he helped his brother, Petras, and his family repatriate back to his wife’s native Germany. In this quote, Lina realizes that because Kostas helped his brother’s family (including Joana) escape, the NKVD now imprisons her.

Throughout the novel Lina thinks of Joana, whom she has long looked up to, and wishes she were around to talk to. Now, the bald man’s revelations make Lina feel suddenly bitter towards her cousin—because her father helped them escape before finding a new location for his own family, Lina might die, helpless, at the very edge of the world. Though Lina admires her parents’ selflessness and compassion for others, here she thinks it has gone so far: they have essentially sacrificed their own family to help another. When Lina confronts Elena about why she kept this fact from her, Elena tells her she wanted to protect her, but since Lina has been forced to endure the same trials and tribulations as Elena, she feels that she deserves to know the entire situation surrounding her arrest and the upheaval of her entire life.

## Chapter 82 Quotes

“No, I saw it. She was pretty. Krasivaya.”

No. Not that word. I was supposed to learn it on my own. Not from Kretszky.

“It means beautiful, but with strength,” he slurred. “Unique.”

**Related Characters:** Nikolai Kretszky (speaker), Andrius Arvydas, Elena Vilkas, Lina Vilkas

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 324

### Explanation and Analysis

After Elena dies, Lina is the sole provider for herself and Jonas. One day, she sneaks behind the NKVD barracks to try and steal some firewood—but Kretszky is there, and he is drunk. Though Lina is afraid he is going to report her for stealing the wood, he reveals that he is sad about the loss of Elena, and he tells Lina about the death of his own mother

when he was young. In this quote, he tells Lina that he thought Elena was special—“krasivaya.” This is the same word that Andrius tells Lina he believes applies to her, but that he wants her to find the translation for herself. Lina, who hates Kreszky with a passion, is horrified that she finds out what the word means from him.

In the novel, the traditional patriarchal gender roles are flipped when the men are separated from the women, children, and infirm, and the women are allowed to show their true strength and resilience. This kind of strength is suppressed in domestic life, where women are generally expected to carry out certain duties and keep their opinions to themselves. Indeed, Kostas’ protective view that Lina should not have opinions about the Soviet Union is a part of this suppression, however good his intentions are. Ironically, in the prisons of the NKVD in the Siberian tundra, Lina and Elena are allowed to let their true strength and inner beauty flourish without internal patriarchal suppression. Even Kreszky, an NKVD officer who has meted out his own fair share of torture, sees that both women have an astounding inner strength that helped them to survive. Though Elena has passed, Lina carries on her strength and grace—her *krasivaya*.

## Chapter 84 Quotes

“Dr. Samodurov, how did you find us?” I asked him. “Nikolai Kreszky,” was all he said.

**Related Characters:** Dr. Samodurov (speaker), Nikolai Kreszky, Lina Vilkas

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 334

### Explanation and Analysis

Dr. Samodurov is shocked to find the deportees in the state of squalor that they are living in. He enlists the help of the relatively strong deportees to help prepare food and supplies to nurse the sick back to health. Even the bald man chips in, and insists that Janina and Jonas are the first to be treated. Dr. Samodurov calls in warm clothing and shoes to help them get through the rest of winter. Eventually, after ten days, he must leave to go help the next camp. In this quote, Lina asks him how he knew to come help them. All he will say is, “Nikolai Kreszky.”

Kreszky’s behavior leaves hints throughout the novel that he is beginning to regret complying with the torturous acts of the NKVD. He takes pause when he sees the

photographs of the deportees’ families, saves Elena from gang rape, mourns for her death, occasionally looks the other way when he sees Lina stealing the resources she desperately needs, and eventually defects from camp to report the horrors inside. Though Lina is confused and angry with herself for comforting Kreszky when he is drunk and crying about both the death of his own mother and of Elena, it is this small act of respect and compassion that inspires Kreszky to leave the camp and thus saves many lives. As Elena has always taught Lina, it is important to lend a hand of kindness, even to those who don’t seem as if they want or deserve it. Ultimately, it is this lesson that helps Lina and Jonas survive, even if Elena’s selflessness arguably leads to her own death.

## Chapter 85 Quotes

“I closed my eyes. I felt Andrius moving close. ‘I’ll see you,’ he said.  
“Yes, I will see you,” I whispered. “I will.”  
I reached into my pocket and squeezed the stone.

**Related Characters:** Andrius Arvydas

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 274

### Explanation and Analysis

After Dr. Samodurov leaves, Jonas and Janina eventually begin to heal. Lina is also given new hope that Kostas might be alive, after the doctor tells her that he theorizes Ivanov might have been lying to Elena for sport. Lina then sees a sliver of sunlight on the horizon: the end of the polar night is in sight. They have survived the winter. Furthermore, Lina is given new hope that she might actually see Andrius again. In this quote, she imagines he is with her. She squeezes the stone for comfort, and hopes to see him again someday.

The romance of Lina and Andrius is one of the most touching and human aspects of the novel. Despite the inhumane hardships and suffering they endure, they find beauty in one another, and are able to bond over their admiration of one another’s strength. Before she leaves the first labor camp, Andrius promises Lina that he will see her again one day. He urges her to imagine him returning her drawings to her—they are a kind of collateral for their eventual reunion. The thought of someone to live for gives Lina strength and hope in even the most extreme

conditions, and the thought of Lina likely does the same for Andrius. Their love, and the deportees' continued grace and support for one another, shows that even in the most desperate situations, love and human compassion prevails, despite the desperate attempts of evil to squash these very human traits.

## Epilogue Quotes

 It is my greatest hope that the pages in this jar stir your deepest well of human compassion. I hope they prompt you to do something, to tell someone. Only then can we ensure that this kind of evil is never allowed to repeat itself.

**Related Characters:** Lina Vilkas (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 338

### Explanation and Analysis

In the epilogue, construction workers discover a jar full of writings in 1995 while digging in Kaunas, Lithuania. This

initial letter, written by Lina, explains that these writings describe the horrors of the Baltic genocide. They were buried on July 9, 1954. In this quote, Lina explains that there are horrible descriptions in the letters, but she does not intend to shock or disgust—only to inspire compassion and empathy. She wants the horror elicited in the reader to compel them to go tell someone, to help fight for this to never happen again.

While the plot of the novel ends after Dr. Samodurov leaves the camp, the reader is left unsure as to exactly what happens to Lina. This letter reveals that she eventually married Andrius, and survived the labor camps. One small miracle of the novel is that Lina and Andrius reunite and that Andrius has saved all her drawings and writings. Together, they bury these precious documents so that someday, someone will know what happened, and prevent it from happening again—their suffering will not be in vain. The continued rise of the Soviet Union after World War II meant that survivors of the Baltic genocide, unlike survivors of the Holocaust under defeated Germany, were not allowed to speak about their suffering. Thus, Lina's letters carry extremely important historical significance.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## CHAPTER 1

On June 14, 1941, fifteen-year-old Lina Vilkas settles down to write a letter to her older cousin and best friend, Joana, in her comfortable middle-class home in Lithuania. Suddenly, there is a ferocious knock at the door. It is the NKVD (Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del), the secret police of the Soviet Union. They demand that Lina, her 10-year-old brother Jonas, and her mother Elena leave immediately. Though Elena begs to have until morning to gather their possessions, the officers give them 20 minutes or risk losing their lives.

*In this very first scene, Lina's life is changed forever by a banging at the door—the scene is set as one of comfort and domestic happiness, and then all that is immediately destroyed. Elena's wish to protect her children and her willingness to cleverly negotiate with the NKVD officers is a trait that will persist throughout the novel, and continually save the lives of Lina and Jonas.*



## CHAPTER 2

As Elena frantically packs necessities, Lina tries to come to terms with the fact that she, her mother, and brother are being arrested, and that she has no idea where her father Kostas is. Elena urges Lina to pack quickly and to ignore friends and family members they may pass in town so that the NKVD does not target them as well. Lina packs a **family photo**, wishing that her Grandmother, pictured, were alive to be with her during this difficult time. Lina is upset that she cannot find her sketchbook, but Elena tells her to keep packing and that she can buy a new one.

*Lina has no idea what is going on, and is trying her best to keep up with her mother's directions. She focuses on finding two of the most important things in her life: her sketchbook, and her father. Lina is very close to Kostas, and he is very encouraging of her artistry. Therefore, she is even more confused and distraught by not knowing where both "things" are.*



Jonas, not understanding the gravity of the situation, misconstrues Elena's instructions to get ready to leave. He enters Lina's room dressed and ready for school. Elena, trembling at the sadness of seeing her son's innocence, takes Jonas to his room to pack and leaves Lina to continue by herself. Lina grabs as many writing utensils as she can.

*Jonas is only ten years old, and does not understand the gravity of the situation—that they are being arrested by the Soviets, not getting ready for school. Elena is overwhelmed with sadness at her son's innocence and naivety, traits that will soon disappear.*



A fresh loaf of bread on her desk that Elena has asked her to pack reminds Lina of a conversation she had at the local bakery. This memory is shown using italics and is separate from the rest of the chapter, a format that will continue throughout the novel. When Lina goes to the bakery for a loaf of bread for her family, the woman at the counter refuses to charge her for the food, citing her father's kindness. When Lina asks her parents what Kostas did to deserve such reverence, her father tells Lina that he deserves nothing—that it is often important to commit acts of kindness without expecting anything in return.

*Lina's flashbacks are persistent throughout the novel, and help to flesh out her character through scenes from her life before her arrest. She frequently thinks back to better times in her home in Lithuania, as well as moments that she now sees led up to the family's current predicament. In this memory, we can see that her father has done some people in the community a great kindness—likely at the expense of his own freedom. Elena and Kostas seek to pass on this kind of courage onto their children.*



## CHAPTER 3

Elena packs Jonas a massive suitcase, one that is almost the size of his small body. Lina hears smashing, and runs out of her room to find Elena throwing her favorite glasses and china onto the floor because she “loves them so much.” The NKVD come in to see what the commotion is about, and accuse Elena of destroying Soviet property. She replies primly that it was an accident. When she tries to fix her curls under her hat in the mirror, an officer points a gun at her and calls her a “bourgeois pig.” Elena begs their pardon, an act of politeness that shocks Lina. Lina announces that she has to use the bathroom, and the NKVD officers give her thirty seconds. While looking in the mirror in the bathroom, Lina notes that this would be the last time she would properly see her reflection in over a decade.

Elena smashes all of her fine possessions because she does not want the Soviets to take them and enjoy them, or sell them. She decides to destroy them herself because at least then their loss is her choice, not theirs. We learn that Lina’s family is likely upper middle-class, which is why the Soviets, who practice Communism and (in theory) elevate the laboring class above all others, call them “bourgeois pigs.” In the bathroom, Lina, writing in hindsight, notes that everything about her life is about to change forever.



## CHAPTER 4

The NKVD officers march Lina, Elena, and Jonas out of their home and through the dark night. Lina notices a neighbor, Mrs. Raskunas, peering out the window, but Elena urges Lina to look down and not acknowledge others for their own protection. The officers shout “Davai” at them, meaning “hurry.” They are put on a truck with several other people: Miss Grybas, a spinster teacher from school, the librarian, a hotel owner, and other men Lina has seen Kostas speak to. Lina realizes they are all on the NKVD’s list.

For all of the trouble that the Vilkases are already in, Elena wants to be sure that they don’t drag any neighbors into the mess by fraternizing with them. It may also be that the Vilkases have helped neighbors, or were planning to, so there is a very real chance the NKVD is coming for them next. The array of professions represented shows that the NKVD was largely arbitrary in their targets.



A bald man starts moaning and saying that they are all going to die. Elena insists this is nonsense, but the bald man, convinced, jumps out of the truck in an attempt to commit suicide. The truck stops, and the officers throw the man back into the truck despite his mangled leg. When the truck stops in front of a hospital, the passengers hope it is so that the bald man can receive treatment. However, the stop is only so a woman on the list who is currently giving birth can be thrown onto the truck as soon as the baby’s umbilical cord is cut.

The bald man’s attempt to commit suicide shows the very real and acute danger the deportees are in by having been arrested by the NKVD. The mercilessness they showed in the Vilkas residence is exacerbated even further by their arrest of a woman and her newborn infant. Obviously, an infant cannot commit a crime, showing that the accusations of crimes against the Soviet Union are just an excuse for brutality.



## CHAPTER 5

The truck idles outside the hospital for nearly four hours. Other people, restrained by the NKVD, pass by in the trucks. One man notes that it’s nearly three a.m. The bald man asks Jonas to help suffocate him so he can succeed in committing suicide. Appalled, Elena declares Jonas will do no such thing. Suddenly, a voice hissing “Elena!” is heard from outside. It is Elena’s cousin, Regina. Elena ignores her, citing that she is crazy, and Regina throws a package into the truck. The bald man tries to snatch it, but Elena manages to wrestle it away and hide it beneath her legs. A man asks Elena if she is the wife of Kostas Vilkas, provost at the university, and she nods yes, looking nervous and wringing her hands.

The fact that the NKVD bring a truck full of people to wait to arrest a woman in labor shows their complete disregard for the prisoners as human beings—their lives are completely at the whims of officers wielding guns. Though Lina and Jonas are confused as to why Elena would ignore her cousin as she tries to help her, it is for the same reasons she cited earlier: she does not want to risk an NKVD officer see Regina fraternize with a “criminal,” thus leading to her own arrest, and likely that of her entire family.



In an italicized flashback, Lina remembers another time Elena was wringing her hands. Elena asked Lina to bring a pot of coffee to Kostas and other men who had been talking in the dining room for hours. When she enters the room with coffee, one man notes that she is becoming quite a young lady, and that he has heard she is a talented artist. Kostas agrees proudly, but balks when another man asks Lina what she thinks of the “new Lithuania.” Lina announces that she thinks **Stalin**, who had recently annexed Lithuania, is a “bully.” Kostas tells her that that’s enough, and to go rejoin Elena in the kitchen. A journalist among the group of men notes that Elena’s headstrong opinions take after Kostas’s. The men leave the house at alternating intervals, some leaving through the front door and some through the back.

Back in the present in the truck, the bald man tactlessly says that if Kostas worked at the university, then he was surely “long gone.” Another man tells Jonas he saw Kostas at the bank that afternoon. Lina knows this is a lie, but is grateful for the comfort it brings Jonas. The bald man complains that he is on the list, even though he is just a stamp collector who has corresponded internationally with other collectors. Suddenly, the NKVD bring in the woman who has just given birth—she’s wearing a bloody hospital gown, and is accompanied by her newborn. A doctor runs after her, begging the officers to let him take care of the child, since it will surely die without medical assistance. As the woman is helped into the truck, the tiny baby is placed into Lina’s arms.

## CHAPTER 6

A man on the truck, who worked for the bank, gives Elena his jacket to keep the woman warm. She tells Elena her name is Ona, and that her husband, Vitas, was taken by the NKVD. Ona wails for her baby, while the bald man cries of the pain in his leg. No one on the truck has medical training, but they all chip in supplies to create a splint for the man’s leg. When Jonas offers up his tiny school ruler, an old woman begins to cry. The bald man starts yelling for someone to kill him, while Ona’s hospital gown becomes soaked with blood. Feeling nauseous, Lina pictures her grandmother for comfort. The truck arrives at a small train depot in the countryside, where a lot of other trucks are stationed as well. People yell from the trucks, searching for missing family members. Elena theorizes that they are going to be sorted by family, but sounds uncertain.

This flashback reveals that for a long time Kostas and his colleagues from the university have been discussing what the Soviet annexation means for their safety. As progressive, educated intellectuals, they are considered dangerous by Stalin, who wants to control the Lithuanians without any dissent. Kostas is rather hypocritical in not wanting Lina to have a strong opinion about Stalin, despite his own negative views about the annexation. Still, he does this out of his love for her—he knows she can easily get into danger if she is overheard badmouthing the state.



The bald man, despondent over his arrest, has already given up on any will to live. This means that he ceases to filter anything he is saying, since he believes everyone around him is going to die, too. This is why he tells Lina and Jonas their father is likely dead, despite the fact that this serves no function other than to upset the children. When Lina is given the newborn infant to hold, she is hit with the realization that the NKVD will spare no one in the arrests—even babies no more than a few minutes old. The bald man’s claims start to feel real—maybe they are not expected to survive.



In general, women, the young, and the infirm are being separated from men, who will presumably be put to work. Like when Jonas dressed for school instead of packing to leave indefinitely, his offering of his tiny ruler to make a splint for the man shows his innocence—there is no way he has committed a crime worthy of this punishment. This act, accompanied by the wailing of the baby and Ona’s bleeding, shows the extent of the inhumanity the NKVD has shown to these civilians in only a few hours. Though Elena is optimistic, Lina is wary of what is to come.



## CHAPTER 7

Shouting “Dava!” NKVD officers force the passengers off the truck. When the man from the bank demands medical assistance for Ona and the bald man, he is marched away at gunpoint without his luggage. A woman hears them, tells the group she is a nurse, and begins to attend to the wounded. Hordes of desperate people pass by. The group is herded towards trains, and must carry Ona and the bald man. Lina can feel the chaos as families are separated. She wonders where her father is, and an officer tries to pull Jonas away from Elena and Lina. Panicked, Elena takes a variety of money and baubles from her coat, and even a pendant on her neck, in an effort to barter with the officer. Eventually, he is satisfied by Elena’s father’s gold pocket watch and lets Jonas stay with the family. Lina is horrified that her brother’s life is only worth a pocket watch to the officer.

The refusal of the NKVD to treat the deportees as humans with basic rights is further evidenced by the man being taken away at gunpoint when he asks for medical assistance. However, the nurse’s immediate willingness to help shows that in the face of such evil, some victims will help one another. Lina is further horrified by how arbitrary all of the NKVD’s decisions for the deportees are—particularly evidenced by Elena’s ability to trade a pocket watch to keep Jonas by her side, when the officer could have just as easily decided to shoot him in the head. Lina realizes that, while the deportees were specifically targeted, their fates will be largely random.



## CHAPTER 8

Elena comforts her children, shaken by the near-loss of Jonas. Miss Grybas tells them to hurry and stay with the group, since people are getting split up. Lina takes note of the chaos happening around her, as frantic families attempt to balance their most valuable possessions while keeping track of each other. They are pushed onto train cars that appear to have been built for livestock. Lina doesn’t want to be in a car with Ona and her baby and the moaning bald man, but Elena tells her they don’t have a choice. Lina longs to jump off the car and start running. Once on the train, Elena comforts her, and tells her the most important thing is that they stay together. She theorizes that while she doesn’t know where they’re going, they won’t be in the cattle cars for very long.

The train cars transporting the deportees appear to have been built for livestock—because that’s how the NKVD see their prisoners: as “fascist pigs” who need to be removed from Soviet territory. Though Lina viscerally feels the need to start running away, she knows that she will likely be more miserable without her mother and brother by her side. Elena continues to keep up an optimistic front, despite what she actually thinks, for the sake of her children. Elena’s strength gives Lina and Jonas strength, now that the only thing they can be certain of is that they have each other.



## CHAPTER 9

The train car is extremely overcrowded. Shelves, six feet deep, have been installed, presumably to stack people on. Elena and Miss Grybas observe that all the men are gone—only elderly, infirm men are a part of the group now. There are no longer any able-bodied men to carry the injured. The librarian introduces herself to Elena and Lina as Mrs. Rimas. Lina wonders where the woman’s husband is, and whether he might be with Kostas. A small girl asks Lina whether she is going to bed, and Lina realizes she is still wearing her nightgown. Elena tries to finagle some privacy in the train car so that Jonas and Elena can change, but a defensive woman with children gives her a hard time about using the corner she has staked out for herself. Elena tries to peer out the door, searching for Kostas, and a kind older man gives her his suitcase to stand on. He notes that she has beautiful children, and Elena says they look like their father.

Though most of the deportees are kind and understanding of each other’s needs, a few people, like the grouchy woman and the rude bald man, express their distress through anger and lash out at the other inhabitants of the train car. Throughout the novel, Elena will continually show Jonas and Lina that it is important to be kind to everyone, particularly in the face of the struggles the NKVD have imposed upon them. Elena’s positive attitude and strength give not only Lina and Jonas, but also many of the people they will be with for months to come, the ability to survive and keep moving forward as humane and moral individuals.



In a flashback, Lina remembers her family being complimented by a photographer during a family photo. She recalls the beautiful clothing and jewelry she and Elena wear, and how the photographer noted that Lina looks just like Kostas.

The horrifying situation that she is currently in makes Lina think of a time when she felt beautiful and loved—she's attempting to maintain a connection to her past, as well as to her very humanity.



## CHAPTER 10

Lina counts forty-six people in the train car, and imagines it to be a rolling coffin. She begins to **draw** in the dirt on the floor to pass the time. People speculate as to where the train might be heading. Lina and Jonas begin to chat with a boy Lina's age named Andrius Arvydas while Elena speaks to his mother. Andrius says his father is in the army, and that he has been gone for a while. Lina observes that his mother seems "fancy and unaccustomed to dirt." Jonas wonders if he will be let out to look for Kostas at the station, but Andrius says he saw someone beaten for trying to run away. Lina calls the NKVD "pigs," and Andrius tells her to be careful with what she says.

Andrius' mother tells Elena that she had to bribe and tell the NKVD that Andrius is mentally disabled in order to keep the two of them together, much like Elena had to bribe the officer to keep Jonas with her. Ona's baby cries continually, and Mrs. Rimas reports that the baby cannot latch onto Ona's breast in order to feed. Long, hot hours pass without food or relief. Andrius tries to jump off the car to use the bathroom, but is punched and thrown back. The passengers eventually discover a small hole in which to relieve themselves. Mrs. Rimas organizes the children to tell them stories and distract them from the smells and horrors of the train car.

In a flashback, Lina recalls being a young child listening to a librarian tell a fantastical story. As she listens to the tale, Lina draws the dragon and princess being described. She is so absorbed in her **drawing** that she does not notice the end of the story and that the other children have departed. She shows her drawing to the librarian, who is immediately impressed by her skill.

Like Lina's family, Andrius' family is part of the Lithuanian elite. His father's status as a member of the military means that his father was likely one of the first people to be targeted by the NKVD. The NKVD, keen to remove anybody who has expressed or been privy to anti-Soviet sentiments, also sought to remove family members like Lina, Elena, Jonas, and the Arvydases. Like Kostas, Andrius fears what could happen if anyone overhears Lina's strong opinions.



## CHAPTER 11

As the sun begins to set, people share the food they have brought with them. Elena asks Lina for the loaf of bread, but Lina shakes her head—she left it in her room at home in the panic of packing. Andrius sits smoking a cigarette, and tells Lina he is seventeen. When she asks how long he has been smoking, he asks her if she is the police and ignores her. Though it is dark in the train car as night falls, Elena points out they should be thankful the door to the car is open for air. Lina falls asleep wondering where her father is.

Mrs. Arvydas and Elena find kinship in the fact that their husbands have been taken somewhere secretive, and that they had to fight to keep their sons close. They share the fierce strength that a mother feels towards her children. Flipping traditional gender roles, they are now the protectors and sole providers for their families. The NKVD, truly seeking to treat the Lithuanians like animals, force them to remain in squalor and deny them basic human dignities.



This memory shows that even from a young age, Lina had a very visual and active imagination. It is this ability to will herself to find beauty and meaning in almost anything that will help her find the strength to survive and to live.



Though Lina and Andrius should presumably get along well since they are of a similar age, they are also both teenagers, and therefore predisposed to sulking and sullenness (even in the most dehumanizing or traumatic of situations), as Andrius is here. Elena, positive as ever, points out the silver lining in their night on the train car.



Lina wakes up to Andrius' nudging. Jonas is at the door of the car. He tells Lina that an hour ago, a train arrived and there are rumors that it is full of men. He and Andrius wonder if their fathers are on it. With a guard one hundred feet away, they sneak off the train. Andrius reads the Russian writing on the side of the train: "Thieves and Prostitutes." Lina realizes that this is what kind of criminals they are being branded as by the Soviets.

Jonas, Andrius, and Lina creep along the sides of the train cars, asking for their fathers via bathroom holes. Eventually Jonas and Lina find Kostas. Lina and Jonas are extremely relieved to have found their father, but are shocked and upset at the state he is in: When he peers through the hole, Lina can see that he looks gray and that his eye is badly bruised. Kostas says that his train is being attached to the one Lina was on, and that they are being taken to Siberia. Kostas quickly gives his children items of clothing and a large piece of ham. Despite the fact that it has been shoved through a hole used for waste, he demands that Lina and Jonas eat it immediately. Lina tears it into quarters, giving some to Jonas and Andrius and saving the rest for Elena.

Kostas then gives Lina his wedding ring and tells her to give it to Elena in case she needs to sell it. Kostas tells his children to have courage, and he tells Lina to use her **drawings** "like Munch" to help him track her down eventually. Munch, Lina's favorite artist, has a very distinct signature and style she can recognize anywhere—just like Kostas will be able to recognize any piece of art that is by Lina's hand, even if she doesn't specifically write down that it is from or by her. Andrius asks if his father is in the car, but he isn't there. Andrius insists on searching for his father alone, while Lina and Jonas head back to the train car to tell Elena they found Kostas.

## CHAPTER 12

Lina and Jonas return to the train car, but not before they are caught by a guard. Lina claims they dropped something through the bathroom hole and merely jumped out to grab it. He searches them, and lets them go. Elena is upset with them, but relieved they found Kostas. When Lina gives her the ring, she begins to cry. Lina tries to give Elena the piece of ham, but the bald man—who Lina learns is named Mr. Stalas—demands to know where the rest of the food is. Elena instructs Lina to give him the ham, but Mr. Stalas disdainfully tells her he doesn't want it. Mrs. Arvydas is upset that Andrius did not return with them. Lina notices a priest outside the train cars, and wonders what he is there for.

Despite the brutality they have seen the NKVD commit already, the loyalty Lina and Andrius feel for their fathers gives them the courage to jump out of the car and look for them. Lina is horrified to see what kind of criminals they have been branded as. These markers are likely to dissuade any concerned civilians they pass from aiding or reporting the suffering passengers.



The wound on Kostas' face shows that he has likely already been through an even worse ordeal than the rest of his family. Lina is again being forced to make sacrifices—like basic hygiene—that would have seemed unthinkable in her previous life.



Like Elena, Kostas insists that Lina and Jonas have courage—it is the only thing the NKVD cannot take away from them, and it will give them the resilience to survive even in the face of those who are doing everything to ensure they do not. Kostas, who has always encouraged Lina's art, further helps his daughter by urging her to continue drawing even in this situation, since it will keep her sane and also perhaps help bring them together one day.



Though Elena is angry that her children, who promised not to leave her side, have left the train car, she is relieved that her husband is in one piece. Just as Elena tells white lies to Lina, Lina tells her mother that Kostas seemed well, despite his anxious demeanor and bloodied face. Elena further exhibits her unending kindness by offering the ham to Mr. Stalas, who, in his own rude way, insists that she keep it for herself. Later, we learn that he is Jewish, and can also infer in this moment that he cannot eat the ham since it is not kosher.



## CHAPTER 13

Eventually the sun rises. The people in the train car are given a bucket of slop to share. Lina thinks it looks like animal feed, and some children refuse to eat it. Jonas finds the package from Elena's cousin Regina, and Elena splits the food inside among the other passengers. Ona's baby refuses to eat, and both mother and child continually cry. Elena asks Lina how Kostas looked, and Lina lies and says he looked fine. She asks Elena why they are being deported, and Elena says that **Stalin** wants Lithuania for the Soviets, and that similar processes are likely happening in Latvia, Estonia, and Finland. Lina wonders if Kostas is near her cousin Joana, and falls asleep wondering where Andrius is.

In a flashback, Lina recalls the first time she saw a painting by the artist Edvard Munch, who has since become her favorite. She encounters a charcoal portrait of a young man by Munch on a school trip to the art museum, and is enchanted by its subtleties. As soon as she gets home, she starts **drawing** and tries to create the blended charcoal technique. Back in the present, this memory makes Lina realize that Kostas mentioned Munch because Lina's art, like Munch's, has a very distinct technique. Lina sees now that if she leaves a trail of art no matter that where she is taken, there is a chance Kostas will be able to find her.

## CHAPTER 14

Lina wakes up in the dark and hears a noise outside. She looks out to see a very badly beaten Andrius. She jumps down out of the car to help him, and Lina and others help hoist him up. Lina is then pulled up without the guards noticing. When Lina sees the horrible injuries that Andrius has sustained from the guards, she feels even more hatred for the NKVD than before.

The NKVD further show how little regard they have for the lives and dignity of the deportees by feeding them the same things they would feed to livestock—if not worse. They have placed the deportees into such dire situations that they are beginning to do whatever they can to survive, even though it has only been a few days since they were ripped from their comfortable lives. Though Lina and Andrius barely know each other, Lina already expresses concern for his safety, given the desperation of their state.



Lina is a talented artist not only in her technique, but in her reverence and eye for what makes good artwork. For Lina, art is not just a visual experience, but an emotional one as well. Her documentation of the journey via sketching becomes a useful outlet to express her feelings and also to process the trauma of her time in the clutches of the NKVD. Despite her hardships, she always finds a way to draw.



Despite the earlier hostilities between Lina and Andrius, she is sympathetic to anyone who is at the mercy of the NKVD. Like Lina, Andrius longs to find his father, but unlike her, he cannot find him and gets caught doing so. The NKVD will use any excuse to exact brute force upon the deportees.



## CHAPTER 15

Lina wakes up sometime later to realize that the door to the train car has been closed. People begin to panic. The train begins to move, and Lina peers out of a small slot and reports back what she sees. There is a lot of luggage and food outside of the train. As the train moves away from the station, Lina notices that there are men in dark suits, NKVD officers with rifles, and priests flinging oil and crossing themselves at the train. Lina realizes the priests are issuing last rites for the passengers.

As the train moves away from the station, Lina realizes that the priests are issuing last rites for deportees who will likely die, and who will not have access to a priest before they do so. The train cars suddenly transform into moving coffins, full of civilians branded as criminals destined for death. Despite all of Elena's optimism, from this moment on the journey takes an even more sinister turn.



## CHAPTER 16

As the train rolls along the countryside, Lina reports to the other passengers what she sees. It is June, and the countryside of Lithuania is beautiful. Eventually, they arrive at Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania. Though she has never visited, Lina recalls learning the history of Vilnius at school. It is a symbol of power and opportunity for Lithuanians.

In a flashback memory, Lina recalls when her teacher held her after class to show her **drawings** she had pulled out of the trash. Though Lina thinks she is in trouble for drawing instead of paying attention to her lessons, her teacher praises her ability and says she has already spoken to her parents about sending her to an art academy in Vilnius for the summer. Her teacher says she will help her with the application, and that Lina has a bright future as an artist ahead of her.

Back in the train, someone finds a loose board and wiggles it open. Jonas peers through and sees men approaching the train. Though the bald man thinks they are partisans who might be able to help them, they are really men who have come to unhook train cars from each other. Lina realizes they are being separated from the men's trains. Suddenly, they all hear singing—it is men singing the Lithuanian national anthem. The passengers join in, and Lina weeps.

## CHAPTER 17

Lina notes the pride that she hears in the voices of the men, and wonders where they are going to go now that their trains are separated. Lina wipes her eyes with her handkerchief and lets others do the same. Suddenly, she realizes she can use the handkerchief to make a **drawing** indicating her whereabouts, and pass it along in the hopes it reaches her father. Meanwhile, Ona's baby continues not to feed, partly due to Ona's own dehydration.

The train rolls along for days, often stopping in the middle of nowhere, ensuring no one would be able to see and thus help the deportees. The NKVD opens the train car door once a day, allowing just one person to leave to get two buckets of slop. They ask if there are any dead bodies as well. The passengers take turns leaving the train car so that they can get a bit of fresh air. When it's Lina's turn to leave the train, it rains. The passengers scramble to collect rainwater to drink. In a flashback, Lina recalls a delightful day when it rained in her hometown. When the sun comes out, Lina is relieved she will be able to attend an outdoor picnic with her family. She enjoys the beautiful colors that a rainbow creates.

Since Vilnius is a symbol of Lithuanian power, seeing the Soviets occupy the city is even more of a blow to the pride of the Lithuanian deportees. Their livelihoods, families, and friends, have been taken away, and now even their national identity has fallen prey to the Soviet Union.



Lina's talent as an artist has been evident from a young age, and it is clear to anyone who sees her work. This memory shows what a supportive network Lina had around her at home in Kaunas—everyone, from her family, friends, and teachers, was eager to see her grow as an artist. This is in stark contrast to her life as a deportee.



Despite seeing Lithuania's symbol of power overtaken by the NKVD, the Lithuanian deportees are determined to express their patriotism. This show of love for Lithuania brings so much emotion for Lina that she weeps. Though the NKVD may have taken over their country and taken them from their homes, they cannot take their sense of common identity.



Despite the bleak nature of her situation, Lina is continually looking for ways to make contact with her father. A handkerchief is an innocuous item that will easily be passed from person to person and can find its way to Kostas. Ona's baby cannot feed because it is too young and the conditions are too harsh. If Ona cannot eat, neither can her baby.



On the train journey, the NKVD provide the deportees with barely enough food to survive. The fact that they ask each day if there are dead bodies in the train shows that, as evidenced by the issuing of last rites, they do expect—and intend—for many deportees to perish along on the journey. The meager slop ensures that only the strongest survive, and are thus the only people left to be put to work when the trains arrive at their destination. Lina is sad that the rain mars her one chance to go outside, and remembers when she used to love the sights and sounds of the rain.



When Lina jumps out of the train to collect the food, her legs give out due to stiffness from lack of movement. A guard yells and spits on her. Lina then sees dead people thrown from train cars. A woman jumps out after the corpse of her child, and is smacked in the face with a rifle by a guard. Lina notices how dirty and depressed the faces of those in the train cars look, and she feels an almost irresistible urge to run away. When she finally returns with the buckets, she reports that she saw the NKVD throw two dead children into the mud.

As Elena combs Lina's wet hair in the darkened car, Lina admits she wanted to run away. Elena says that she understands. Elena tells her it is important that they all stay together, and that they are worth much more than the NKVD believe. Lina says she noted how sick everyone in the car looked, and Elena refutes the idea that they are sick. She theorizes that the rest of the world will soon hear of the horrors the Soviets are imposing upon them, and put an end to it all, allowing them to return home. Lina is unsure.

## CHAPTER 18

The death toll rises. Jonas keeps track of the number of deceased children with markings on the floor of the train. The passengers keep track of the cities they pass, and believe they are heading south. Lina is extremely uncomfortable due to lice and the inability to move or wash. She passes the time by **drawing** images on the handkerchief—pictures that her father would be able to recognize as done by her hand. An older man notices her drawing, and she tells him her plan to pass it along to her father. He agrees to help pass it along so that it may reach Kostas.

After eight days of rolling along, the train stops opposite another train, this one full of men. Elena speaks to them in Russian, and learns that they are soldiers—the USSR is at war with Germany. Germany has invaded Lithuania, news that boosts the morale of the passengers. People sing and hug. Ona is quiet—her baby, unable to eat, has died.

The NKVD shows absolutely no regard for the humanity of the deportees. To show grief for a child is to be an annoyance to the guards, who truly seem to believe that the deportees are no better than livestock. The sight of dead children being thrown from the train cars as if they are trash horrifies Lina. It makes her more determined to survive, and to ensure no one in her family perishes in this fashion.



No matter what misfortune befalls them, Elena never ceases to be a source of strength for her children, as well as the other deportees. She encourages Lina to think creatively and positively, traits that will ensure Lina and Jonas' survival in the future. Elena is emblematic of a mother who would do anything to ensure her children's safety and wellbeing.



Jonas, who has had very little contact with the idea of death, is obsessed with counting the number of dead children. These children could be his friends, or if conditions worsen, he could be one of them. Lina's only escape, meanwhile, is drawing. The older man recognizes Lina's need to contact her father, and Lina must trust a total stranger to chance contact with Kostas.



The deportees don't know what the war with Germany means, but they are heartened by any chance that Stalin will no longer rule their country. They hope that the Germans will put an end to their suffering—but of course, they have no idea that the Germans are carrying out a genocide of their own in the form of the Holocaust.



## CHAPTER 19

The train with the Russian soldiers rolls away. Ona screams in anguish over the death of her child, but the bald man rudely tells her it is better off dead. Andrius yells at him, and tells him to shut up and stop being so pessimistic. No one tells Andrius to stop, and they are silently grateful that someone has said something to the bald man. Elena takes the baby from Ona, promising not to give it to the guards and to wrap it in something beautiful. The bald man replies that things aren't going to get better with Germany invading—Hitler will only make things worse. Jonas returns from getting the buckets, and learns that the baby has died. Distraught, he marks the death of the child and beats the ground in anger. Andrius tells Lina to let him do it so as to get used to the constant deaths, since they will not stop anytime soon.

People discuss what might happen with Hitler in Lithuania. Lina wonders what her father would say, and recalls her parents whispering about politics late into the night. She misses her father terribly, and imagines his smiling face. In a flashback, she recalls **drawing** a portrait of her father. They discuss her cousin Joana, who wants to be a doctor. Lina has written her a note but hasn't heard back, which Kostas attributes to her hard studying. Joana is seventeen, and Lina looks up to her very much. When Lina shows her father the portrait, he notes that her signature is so scribbled that no one will be able to read it. Lina replies that he will know it's hers.

As the doctor predicted, there was no chance for the newborn baby to survive in the squalor of the train. Having lost both her husband and her baby, Ona goes mad with grief. The other women try to comfort her, but it is likely difficult for Ona to accept their comfort when their own children are alive and present right in front of her. Jonas in particular becomes distraught at the death of the baby—it was never given a chance to live. The arbitrary cruelty of the NKVD is exemplified by this tragedy: even an innocent soul is sentenced to death for crimes it couldn't possibly have committed.



## CHAPTER 20

The train passes farther south through the Ural Mountains. Miss Grybas says they have now passed into Asia, and passengers speculate that they are on course for southern Siberia, or even China or Mongolia. Ona refuses to let go of her baby, even though it begins to smell of rotting flesh. Eventually she agrees to throw it down the bathroom hole, and Miss Grybas grabs it and commits the act for her. Meanwhile, Jonas and Andrius become closer. Lina thinks he is a bad influence on Jonas, especially since he teaches him Russian slang words that the NKVD use and gives him his first cigarette. Elena tells Lina she is grateful that Jonas has Andrius as a friend and male role model, and to leave Andrius and Jonas alone. One day, however, Lina catches Jonas and Andrius using pages from her copy of *The Pickwick Papers* that her grandmother gave her to roll cigarettes. She is furious with both boys, even after they apologize.

Throughout the journey, Lina has frequent flashbacks to conversations her parents had regarding politics. Though she knew things were changing, particularly with the annexation of Lithuania, she had no idea to what extent her family was in danger. Now that she has been thrust into political turmoil, she begins to piece together things she heard over the last few months. Lina in particular misses her cousin Joana, whom she looked up to, and who now has the kind of life Lina is not sure she will ever experience again.



The deportees have absolutely no idea where they are going, and at times it seems like the NKVD don't know, either—they just keep traveling farther and farther away from everyone and everything they've ever known. The sense of death is all around them—particularly with the death of Ona's baby. Though no one is happy with the way they must leave the child on the train tracks, they have no choice if they do not want to give it to the NKVD. The longer they are on the train, the longer things become tense between Lina and Andrius, particularly when he dares to damage a gift from her late Grandmother, and one of her only possessions on the train.



## CHAPTER 21

Lina stops keeping track as to how long she has been traveling. Every day, more dead bodies are thrown from the car. She wonders if they will be buried, or if the people who find them really will believe they are thieves and prostitutes. Small bits of goodness mark the travel, such as when Elena bribes a guard to let her leave the train to go to a kiosk. She buys all the candy, matches, and cigarettes she can and gives them to the passengers. The bald man chastises her for wasting money, but Elena replies that it is what they all needed. Andrius finds a beautiful oval **stone** made of quartz and minerals, and Mrs. Arvydas pretends it is a ring, calling herself the “train car princess” and making everyone laugh. Lina notes that Andrius is handsome when he smiles.

Despite the fact that they are treated like animals, the deportees find small ways to remind themselves that they are human and deserving of happiness. Elena treats the whole train car to a feast of kiosk goodies, even though no one would have faulted her for saving her money or keeping all she bought for herself. Elena’s loving kindness extends not just to her own children, but for anyone who needs to feel some warmth and happiness. Lina starts to experience normal teenage romantic feelings—but in a very abnormal situation.



## CHAPTER 22

After the train has been traveling for six weeks, the passengers are left without food or an open door for three days. The bald man guesses they are in the Altai region just north of China. Lina longs for food and privacy. The next morning, the guards tell them it is time to leave the car. Elena reminds Jonas and Lina to stay close to her. She attempts to make them presentable before they leave the train. When they go out the passengers relish the beauty of the outdoors: a blue sky and forested hills. Still, their legs buckle under their own weight after not having walked for weeks. Lina makes note of the appearances of the other passengers, whom she has only seen in dim light, and how dirty they all are.

The conditions in the car are so bad that when Lina and the deportees leave, they suffer from muscular atrophy and have a difficult time walking. Elena, ever the mother, wants her children to look presentable when showing up to a new place and meeting new people. Lina makes note of how disheveled everyone looks, and the feelings their appearances convey, so that she may draw them when she has the chance.



The old man who agreed to help Lina comes over and discreetly asks her to borrow a handkerchief. Lina hands him the **drawings**, and he walks away with it. Lina knows he will pass it along in the hopes that it will reach Kostas. People then arrive on horse-drawn carts. Lina does not recognize them, but notes that their skin and hair are darker than hers. Elena listens to the conversations in Russian, and translates that the NKVD are selling the passengers to the people.

The kind older man keeps his promise, and surreptitiously takes Lina’s handkerchief to pass along. There is a very small chance it will actually reach Kostas, but the surreal nature of the situation they’re in almost makes anything seem possible. The passengers are horrified when they realize the NKVD are looking to profit off the deportees by selling them to Siberians as slaves.



## CHAPTER 23

The men who arrived look at all of the deportees. When they arrive at Lina’s group, Mrs. Arvydas begs Elena to tell them in Russian that Andrius is a simpleton. Elena tells them, and they leave the group alone. They are given food and water and finish it quickly. They discuss running, but hear a gunshot and presume it’s not a good idea. The NKVD inspect the train cars and yell at the passengers for “disrespecting” the cars. Andrius theorizes they will go back for more deportees, so that they can sell and get rid of all of them.

The fact that the NKVD yell at the passengers for “disrespecting” the trains show that not only do they have total disregard for their lives, they are actively pretending that they are not human beings with basic bodily functions. This is further evidence that the NKVD seem to stop at nothing in dehumanizing these civilians, and Lina still has no idea why her family is being targeted.



## CHAPTER 24

As the hours pass, only two groups remain, including Lina's. The bald man complains that they would be better off dead, and Mrs. Arvydas points out that they are lucky not to have been sold as slaves. Andrius, Jonas, and Lina discuss why their parents have been put on the list to deport. They lie in the grass and relish the freedom to move around. Jonas notes that a cloud looks like a cannon, and Lina muses that she wishes it were a cannon that could blow up the Soviets. Andrius notes that she has a "mouthful of opinions," and Jonas notes that Kostas always told Lina to be careful.

In a flashback, Lina recalls Kostas finding a caricature Lina drew of **Stalin** such that he was wearing a clown suit. Kostas and his friends with whom he discussed politics are depicted as throwing paper airplanes at him. Kostas demands to know if there are more **drawings** like this, and Lina replies that there aren't. Kostas is furious, because he is afraid what would happen to the family and his friends if anyone in the Kremlin were to see it. He rips up the drawing and throws it in the fire. Back in the present, Andrius asks Lina if she is serious about wanting the Soviets to be blown up. Lina replies she just wants to go home and see her father, and Andrius nods in agreement.

## CHAPTER 25

With only two groups left, there are five soldiers guarding around seventy-five Lithuanians—but no one dares run away, mostly because they are exhausted. The NKVD eat and drink late into the night. Elena tells Lina they are discussing their families back home, but Lina doesn't believe her. Ona is still grieving for her dead daughter and rocks back and forth, chanting "No." Elena goes to comfort her, and Lina sits in the grass with Andrius. She notes his strong jaw line, and wishes she could **draw** him. He notes her looking at him, and gives her the beautiful **stone** he found the other day. Lina tries to give it back, but he insists that she keep it.

The group wakes at sunrise, and watches as the only other group left is sold. Lina's group is put into a truck, and eventually brought to a bathhouse. Men and women are separated. Lina hears the bald man declare that Jonas must help him bathe since he is injured. The guards tell everyone to remove their clothes for delousing.

*The fear of retaliation from the Soviet Union is so great that even those who have suffered greatly under the torment of the NKVD refuse to make statements that can be construed as insulting. Lina, however, is still young, and has no problem declaring how much she hates the people who want her dead. She finds Andrius' warnings patronizing, and like Kostas', they are to an extent, even if they come from a place of care.*



*Lina recalls this anecdote because it points to Kostas' fear that he is being watched and is a potential target by the NKVD. He also realizes that Lina is parroting his opinions and channeling them into her artwork. As Lina's father, Kostas will never forgive himself if he has taught her to repeat sentiments that can get her, and the rest of the family, killed. Looking back on this moment, Lina acknowledges that Andrius is probably right—her life likely depends on her ability to keep quiet.*



*Elena is fluent in Russian because she studied for years in Moscow. She often acts as a translator between the deportees and the NKVD. This can be useful, as it's harder to see someone as being less human if you speak the same language. However, it also means that she overhears many things that she likely wishes she didn't know. Here Elena tells a lie to protect her children, a habit that Lina will eventually become angry with her for. Still, given that there is little to do to change their situation, it's understandable that Elena wants to protect her children.*



*This is a chilling scene, particularly to those who are familiar with the SS's tactics in Holocaust concentration camps. The SS often told Jews they were being taken to showers, when instead they were killed in gas chambers.*



## CHAPTER 26

Elena translates that ten people will go and bathe at a time. The women undress as the guards ogle at them. A guard gropes Lina's breast, and it makes her feel sick, dirty, and violated. Elena yells at the guard in Russian and pulls Lina behind Ona, who is still caked in blood from her rushed delivery. The guards scream at Elena to remove the rest of her clothing, and they are marched into the bathhouse.

The scene becomes even more ominous when the women must strip in front of the guards, who could easily assault them if they decided to. Lina is molested by an officer, but their guns and her nakedness don't allow her to fight back. This scene shows how women were particularly vulnerable during times of war.



## CHAPTER 27

The guards toss soap at the women and spray them with icy water. Elena helps Lina and Ona wash. Then they leave the bathhouse and get dressed. Lina whispers to Elena that she wants to go home, and Elena tells her they must keep the dream of their home and of Kostas alive in order to persevere. The group reconvenes. The bald man complains they are now just clean dead men, but the older man says they wouldn't have been washed if the NKVD wanted to kill them. Jonas asks Lina what is wrong, as she has been thinking about the guard groping her. She ignores him and squeezes the **stone** from Andrius for comfort. Andrius playfully notes that Lina's hair is blond once the dirt has been washed away, though Lina instinctively pulls back when Andrius touches her.

Thankfully, the showers appear to be safe, and the women are able to clean themselves without further trouble from the NKVD guards. Lina doesn't reveal to Jonas what happened, likely because she is unsure of how to process it herself, and to recite what happened out loud would make it seem more real. Andrius takes note of Lina's appearance, something that makes her both happy and embarrassed, particularly since she has been noticing how handsome he is lately.



The group's morale is raised after being cleansed, and they joke about the luxuries they now want, like a four-course meal. Only Ona has not been calmed, and she continues to chant and pull at her hair, despite Mrs. Rimas' attempts to soothe her. A guard notices this and pulls Ona from the truck. She attacks him, and though Elena scrambles to pull her away, the guard shoots Ona in the head. Andrius urges Lina not to look at Ona's body, but to look at him instead. The truck rolls away, leaving Ona's body behind. Lina thinks of Ona's daughter, decomposing in the grass miles away, just like Ona will. She wonders how her family will know what happened to her—or how people will know what happened to the Vilkases.

Though they have been witnessing horrors for weeks, Ona's murder is one of the most shocking events that has happened to the group of deportees. It is one of the most enduring images from the book: a young, grieving mother, shot in the head for being an annoyance. It is done both because the NKVD have the power to commit such atrocities, and because they want to prove to the other deportees what can happen if they step out of line. Lina is horrified by the notion that none of Ona's family will know how she perished.



## CHAPTER 28

The group is brought to a large collective farming area marked by one-room cabins. They are ordered off the trucks and into the shacks, though they quickly realize there are already people living in them. Lina, Elena, and Jonas are assigned to a run-down shack where an Altaian woman is already living—and the woman begins to scream and yell. Elena says that the woman is claiming she has “no room for filthy criminals,” and has barely enough food for herself, let alone other people. Elena tells Jonas and Lina to put their stuff in the corner, but the woman grabs Lina’s hair in an attempt to throw her out. Elena slaps her and Jonas kicks her in the shin. Elena and the woman stare each other down, until the woman laughs. She tells Elena “feisty people make good workers,” and demands rent to let them stay. The farm grows beets and potatoes, rationed by the Communist guards. Lina recalls Kostas explaining the tenets of Communism to her—where everything is owned by **Stalin** and rationed out to the people. Lina realizes she is on a *kolkhoz*, a collective farm, and about to become a farmer. She notes that she hates beets.

As per the tenants of Soviet Communism, the deportees are forced to be a part of a collective farm, where they will work to grow food but will only receive a small portion of the collective produce. The family is forced to live in someone else's home, which shows that the NKVD are an imposition not only on those who are branded criminals, but also on people whom they deem low enough to interrupt their entire lives. Though the other Lithuanians have thus far been generous and kind to one another, the woman in the shack seeks to improve her lot by demanding they pay her rent with money they do not have. They now see why the NKVD washed and fed them: they are to become laborers, but essentially slaves, in the camp.



## CHAPTER 29

Lina makes note of how small the shack is: approximately ten feet by twelve feet. It is run-down and there is nowhere for the family to sleep or use the bathroom. Elena assures them that a little cleaning will spruce things up. Suddenly, a blond NKVD officer enters the hut and demands to see Elena. Elena insists Jonas and Lina come with her to the guard’s log building. Elena disappears inside while Jonas and Elena wait outside.

By the time they reach the labor camp, even Lina and Jonas are becoming wary of Elena’s optimism: it is hard to believe that anything can make this one-room shack feel remotely as comfortable as their home back in Kaunas. Still, one thing they can all agree on is how important it is for them all to stick together.



In a flashback, Lina remembers Elena briefly leaving a dress shop while Lina’s new dress is being tailored. Lina meets her mother outside, where Elena has gone to surprise Lina with ice cream. They sit and enjoy the ice cream and their day of shopping while Jonas and Kostas are at a soccer match. Lina reminds Elena that she also needs some charcoal for **drawing**.

This memory reminds Lina of how much she loves her mother, and how much she looks up to her. Their family is very close, but she has always had a special connection with Elena. Like Kostas, Elena supports Lina’s artwork wholeheartedly.



Back in the camp, Jonas frets that he and Lina should have followed Elena into the building. Lina peers through a window and sees Elena talking to the commander, who holds a file. Jonas urges Lina not to make trouble—or risk Ona’s fate. Lina wishes she could talk to Kostas to answer all her questions. She also wishes she could **draw** the landscape and show it to him. Elena returns, and the family heads back to the hut.

Jonas, who is only ten years old, has been greatly traumatized by the horrors he sees around him. In particular, he has been shocked by the deaths of children and the death of Ona. Ona was very young—close to Lina’s age—and a mother, like Elena. After he sees her die, he begins to fear for the women in his family even more.



## CHAPTER 30

Back in the shack, Elena tells Jonas and Lina that the NKVD wanted her to work for them, translating documents and into Lithuanian. (Elena studied in Moscow and is fluent in Russian.) They also wanted her to spy on other Lithuanians and report their conversations, in exchange for preferential treatment. Elena refused the offer. She urges the children only to speak to each other, and for Lina to be careful with what she **draws**.

Lina sorts through her belongings, and takes out the picture frame with the **photo of her family**. Elena sees it and expresses her happiness that Lina brought the photo. Lina sees the tablet of writing paper on which her interrupted letter to Joana had been written. She wonders where Joana is, or what she would write to her if she could. Lina knows Elena would not want her to document their struggles, but she begins to write them down anyway.

## CHAPTER 31

The Altain woman begins to cook herself potatoes. When the family asks her how they can get food, they are told they must work. Elena must pay the woman for one potato, and then again to be allowed to cook it. The woman falls asleep on the bed of straw, and Lina wonders what her life has been like in Siberia.

In a flashback, Lina remembers receiving her acceptance letter for the art school in Vilnius. Kostas and Elena are elated on her behalf, and Lina can't wait to tell Joana. The family has a cake waiting for her, having been sure she would receive good news. Kostas tells Lina that she is blessed with a gift, and has great things ahead of her. Back in the shack, Lina hears a rustling and sees the woman pee into a tin can.

Besides being incredibly kind and optimistic, Elena is a very principled woman. Even though she would likely receive preferential treatment for being a spy, she knows the NKVD would mostly just offer empty promises in exchange for her self-worth and dignity. She clings to whatever sense of integrity she has left.



*In the labor camp, far from all of their possessions and all of their relatives, Elena finds great comfort in the picture that Lina brings. Lina is pleased to reciprocate the support that her mother provides for her. At the same time, Lina cannot help but express her own emotions the best way she knows how—through writing and drawing—despite the great risks it poses.*



Though sleeping in the shack is much better than living in the squalor of the train, Lina is continually in disbelief about how horrible her life has become. Having grown up in a comfortable home, she can't understand how someone could live this way her entire life.



*This memory reminds Lina of the loving home and family she used to be a part of. Everyone in her family is confident and supportive of her artistic skills. They have no doubt in her ability, and express this often. This is in sharp contrast to the cold, merciless world in which she is living now.*



## CHAPTER 32

While it is still dark the next morning, the NKVD yell at the deportees to get out of their shacks and line them up for work detail assignments. Lina notes that she is picking up words and phrases of Russian. Jonas is separated from Elena and Lina for work. Lina and Elena are then brought to a clearing in the woods and told to dig a pit, using rusty hand shovels. Elena theorizes that she is being punished for refusing to spy for the NKVD. Elena and Mrs. Rimas discuss rumors that there is a town five kilometers away, with a store, post office, and school. Elena wonders if they can send letters, and find out where the men have been sent. Mrs. Rimas warns Elena not to put anything dangerous in writing, and Lina guiltily thinks about her pages of writing and **drawing**. Elena hints to Mrs. Rimas that she has a “contact” who might help her out, and Lina wonders who it could be. Mrs. Rimas’ housemate has told her that while the villagers are not happy about the influx of Lithuanians, it was to be expected: Estonians were dumped on a neighboring village. The Soviets have deported Estonians and Latvians as well. Mrs. Rimas theorizes that hundreds of thousands of people will be deported.

Though the NKVD want the women to work, it is clearly more a torture exercise than a method of productivity. The women bend over backwards attempting to dig the frozen dirt with handle-less shovels. This is a method of humiliation for the pleasure and humor of the sadistic NKVD officers. Elena hints that she has an outside “contact” she can use to receive information, which reveals that she has planned for a possible arrest more than Lina or Jonas realized. Mrs. Rimas and Elena theorize that Stalin will subjugate even more Lithuanians using even more arbitrary arrests, so that he can harness even greater control over the lands he has annexed during the war.



## CHAPTER 33

When the pit they’re digging is more than two feet deep, the women are given a break and some water. Lina is in pain from the effort of digging. The women go into the woods to relieve themselves, and joke about passing the talcum powder, and the ridiculousness of squatting in a circle to use the bathroom. They laugh, and enjoy the feeling of a joke. Elena says that the NKVD cannot take their sense of humor away from them.

Despite the horrors they have endured together so far, the women become friends, sharing their memories from home and their abilities to make one another momentarily forget their situation. They cling to their mental resilience, something the NKVD cannot physically take away from them.



In a flashback, Lina recalls enjoying a night with her cousins, aunt, and uncle. Joana and Lina take a walk along the Baltic Sea. Lina insists they take a nighttime swim, so the girls jump into the water. Joana asks Lina if she will paint the image of them in the sea in the dark. Joana points out a boy among a group passing by on the beach, and tells Lina it is a boy she has been seeing. The girls exit the water to chat with the boys, who then excuse themselves to attend a meeting. The kind of meeting they are attending remains a mystery to Lina. The girls agree not to tell their parents about meeting the boys, or what they said about a meeting. Back in the woods, Lina wonders if Joana knew what the meeting was about. As the women head back to work, Lina wonders if they are digging their own grave.

Lina is an adolescent, on the cusp of developing into a young woman. She admires her cousin Joana, who is only a few years older but seems, to Lina, much more mature. Beach vacations and boys once were something to giggle about with her cousin, but now seem worlds away. Looking back, Lina wonders if the boys were discussing anything that had to do with the Soviet Union or some kind of Lithuanian resistance. Similar to the priests issuing the last rites, Lina wonders if the NKVD are anticipating their deaths.



## CHAPTER 34

Lina draws in the dirt with a stick before heading to work the next day. Elena tells Jonas and Lina that they must begin to prepare for a harsh winter, even if it is months away. The women must dig that day in the rain, and are told to work faster because the soil is soft. Lina continues to ache from the labor and hunger. When they return to the camp, they discover that Jonas had smartly filled every available pot with rainwater to use for drinking and cleaning. Jonas also brought them his bread ration, of which they are allowed 300 grams a day for their work. That is the only food they are given. Miss Grybas sees Elena on her way back from receiving her ration, and quickly gives her beets she has been hiding in her underwear. Lina is too hungry to care that she hates beets or that they had been transported in underwear.

As it becomes clear that their return home is not going to be any time in the near future, the deportees learn to become thrifty and resourceful with whatever they can find to help them survive. People take risks not only for themselves, but also to help the people around them. As Lina's willingness to eat beets shows, people are willing to give up old qualms to ensure their survival. Three hundred grams of bread is extremely little to live on, especially since the deportees must labor long hours. The NKVD are doing the barest minimum they can to keep the deportees alive enough to work.



## CHAPTER 35

Elena insists that Lina take a bread ration to the bald man. Jonas finds straw for the family to sleep on. Lina brings the beets to the bald man, where he is as rude as expected. He tells Lina her hands are disgusting, and Lina tells her she's been digging. He asks Lina if the guards have "gotten" to Elena and Lina—"between your legs." Lina leaves in disgust.

The threat of sexual assault is brought up several times throughout the novel, and it is something that is very real and dangerous for women in times of war. The bald man knows this, and is extremely crass in the way he brings it up to Lina, particularly since she has been actually groped by the guard, and the bald man himself is presumably immune to such a risk of sexual violation.



Lina sees Andrius on her way back to her hut. He tells her she looks horrible, and Lina is too tired to muster a clever reply. Andrius tells Lina that he has found out the name of the blond guard who oversees the digging: Kretszky. Lina tells Andrius she wants to send a letter to Kostas in the nearby post office, and Andrius tells her to be careful what she writes. Lina misses privacy. Andrius gives her three cigarettes for Jonas and Elena, and seems cagey when Lina asks him about his mother, quickly saying that he has to go.

Andrius' insults of Lina's appearance are actually expressions of care—he doesn't really think she looks awful, but that she looks tired, and he is worried about her wellbeing. Andrius' care for Lina, Jonas, and Elena is expressed in his gifts of three cigarettes, which can be used to barter, trade, or simply to help her mother and Jonas calm down. In the labor camp, they are valuable gifts.



Lina gives the cigarettes to Elena and passes along Andrius' hello. The Altaian woman demands the cigarettes as payment, and Elena gives her one. They briefly converse, and Elena learns that her name is Ulyushka. The women briefly smoke together. In a flashback, Lina recalls talking with Joana in the middle of the night. She has just been seeing her boyfriend, who is studying engineering at university. Lina is skeptical of any boy Joana is infatuated with, since she has such high standards for her cousin. Joana hints that her boyfriend has a brother whom Lina might be interested in, and promises to introduce them when he visits the following week.

Elena shares the cigarettes with the Altaian woman because she recognizes how important it is to have the woman they live with on their side—some day, she could provide them with necessary resources, and at the very least she can make their day-to-day lives a little less painful if she respects their presence in her home. Lina's encounter with Andrius reminds of her of better times, when her biggest worries were her standards of boyfriends for her cousin and herself.



## CHAPTER 36

Lina wakes to the NKVD yelling at the deportees to get out of the huts in the middle of the night. They herd them at gunpoint to the kolkhoz office, which the guards use as home base. The room they are placed in has portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and **Stalin** on the walls. The commander says (through Elena's translation) that the deportees have been brought in to sign a document saying they agree to join the collective farm, are to pay a war tax of two hundred rubles per person, and that they agree to be sentenced to twenty-five years' hard labor for their "crimes." People begin to panic, but the NKVD point their rifles at them.

An older man shouts for everyone to keep calm. He says he is an attorney. Many people say they will refuse to sign, and since it is early August and they are needed to work on the farms, they are not likely at risk to be killed. They all agree to refuse to sign in civil disobedience. They sit down in straight lines on the floor of the log cabin.

They sit for hours. The guards try to hurt and intimidate people into signing, but no one does. Those who fall asleep are beaten. The commander goes up to Elena and spits something slimy into her face. Elena quickly brushes it off, but Lina is filled with hatred.

## CHAPTER 37

At sunrise the deportees are sent back to work. Lina, Jonas, and Elena clean up and head to work. As they walk to the pit, they see the body of a man with a stake through it pinned to the side of the kolkhoz office. Buzzards peck at his bloody body. Mrs. Rimas whispers that he was caught writing a letter to the partisans, the Lithuanian freedom fighters, indicating where they had been sent. The letter is tacked up next to the man—on it is a very crude **drawing** of a map with just a few lines. Lina thinks of her own detailed diagrams in horror. Lina wishes she could go to the village and buy food or send letters. Mrs. Rimas says she will ask the woman she lives with, and Elena warns her to be careful.

Though the NKVD has already been punishing the deportees for supposed crimes against the state, they now further humiliate them by forcing them to sign documents subjecting them to an even more terrible fate. Even the children are being charged with crimes they couldn't possibly have committed. As usual, the NKVD have no explanation for their brutal rules, but are able to enforce them because they are the ones wielding the weapons.



The deportees utilize what little agency they have by enacting civil disobedience and peacefully refusing to sign the documents. Though they will still be punished and subjected to starvation and abuse, they at least can reserve their dignity and refuse to participate in their own sentence.



Elena is being specifically targeted for refusing to translate and spy for the NKVD. Lina now hates the NKVD even more for so spitefully and personally abusing her mother.



This is one of the most enduring images in the novel. It is frightening because Lina, our protagonist, is an avid documentarian of her own life via drawing, and soon she will begin to write down her experiences as well. Information (here in the form of a drawing) and words, rather than specific acts, are the number one thing that can get people killed in the labor camp. This image is reminiscent of Jesus on the cross, since the man has to an extent been crucified for trying to help his fellow people.



The women go and dig in the pit for a time. Then the commander comes and demands that the women get into the hole. Komorov, the commander, points pistols at the women and tells them to put their hands on their heads and to lie down as he circles the hole. Elena tells Lina she loves her as Mrs. Rimas starts to recite a prayer. The commander shoots into the hole and laughs, kicking dirt onto their bodies and faces. Lina tries not to suffocate. When the shooting stops they lay silently. Eventually they sit up and Elena frantically wipes dirt off of Lina's face. She says everything is okay, the commander is just trying to scare them into signing the documents. The blond guard Kretszky helps Lina out of the hole. They dig in silence for the rest of the day.

## CHAPTER 38

When Lina and Elena return to the shack, they are noticeably shaken but don't tell Jonas why. Jonas reveals that he has brought them three potatoes, but they keep quiet so Ulyushka won't take them for rent. While Elena brings some food to the bald man, Elena hides her writing and **drawings** in the lining of her suitcase. Suddenly Lina realizes that Elena didn't take a potato for the bald man, and wonders what she could be bringing him. She goes outside and sees Elena talking discreetly to Andrius, who hands her a bundle. Through a window Lina sees Mrs. Arvydas distributing drinks to the NKVD. Lina concludes that Andrius and his mother are working with the Soviets.

## CHAPTER 39

While eating the potatoes Lina wonders aloud if the NKVD will wake them again to sign the papers. Elena notes that Andrius gave them bread to eat with the soup they make. Lina scoffs at the notion that they should be grateful for Andrius, even though he sneaks them food nearly every day. The next day, Elena and Lina are assigned to the beet fields. Lina realizes how difficult and brave it was for Miss Grybas to sneak them food.

Lina refuses to bring food to the bald man each day. Eventually Jonas agrees to do it, and Elena insists they go together. Andrius meets them there and gives them salami. Lina is rude to him despite the food, and Andrius asks Jonas if he can speak to Lina alone. Lina accuses him of working with the Soviets and spying on the Lithuanians, and Andrius tells her she has no idea what she's talking about. Andrius reveals that his mother is being forced to sleep with the NKVD officers in exchange for their lives. Andrius calls Lina self-centered and spoiled and walks away.

In this moment, the women are absolutely certain that they are about to be executed and that it is just as Lina feared: they have been digging their own graves. This is one of the cruellest things that the NKVD do to Lina throughout the novel. The commander is only torturing the women for his own enjoyment, and to punish them for not having signed the documents the night before. This is an act of such horror that it terrifies and shocks even Kretszky.



Even though the bald man is rude to everyone who helps him, Elena insists on bringing food to him regularly—she can see that his meanness is a cry for help in his desperation. Of course, Elena is not actually on her way to see him this time—she is talking to Andrius, who is extremely upset that his mother is being forced to sleep with members of the NKVD in exchange for their lives. Mrs. Arvydas, as kind and giving a mother as Elena, works with her son to ensure they can exploit this trauma in the form of stealing food and supplies for the other deportees.



Lina doesn't understand what Mrs. Arvydas is being forced to do, and is unknowingly unkind to Andrius, who is extremely upset over the situation his mother has been put in by the NKVD. Lina realizes that Miss Grybas has risked her life to share food with them, even though she didn't have to. In the face of danger, some deportees exhibit extreme courage and kindness.



Lina, fed up with the bald man's crankiness, refuses to bring food to him. Unlike Elena, she does not have the maturity and wisdom to see that he needs help despite his rudeness. But also unlike Elena, Lina has the gumption to express her dislike for someone who has shown her nothing but disrespect. When Andrius reveals to Lina what his mother is forced to endure for their safety, she is disgusted with herself for jumping to conclusions about the integrity of Mrs. Arvydas' moral character.



## CHAPTER 40

Back in the shack, Elena chastises Lina for resisting Andrius' attempts at friendship. She notes that Kostas was quite clumsy in his courtship of her. Elena recalls that when trying to talk to her, Kostas fell out of a tree and broke his arm. Andrius' overtures might not seem like he's trying, but Elena thinks he is trying to express his feelings for Lina. Lina tries not to let Elena see her cry, as talking about her father makes her very sad.

Elena, observant as most mothers are, hints to Lina that Andrius has a crush on her, but is too immature to properly express his feelings for her. In this moment, the comment feels even worse to Lina given her fight with Andrius. This conversation about love and courtship makes Elena reminisce about her own love, Kostas, causing Lina to feel even worse.



In a flashback, Lina recalls feeling giddy after meeting the brother Joana had promised to introduce her to. Joana tells Lina that everyone could tell they had a great time dancing together. Both girls fall asleep feeling happy. The next day, however, they see the boy Lina had danced with with another girl. Lina had hoped to give him a **drawing** she had made. Instead she is heartbroken, rips up the drawing, and concludes that boys are idiots.

Lina's fight with Andrius makes her recall the first time her heart was broken. Like most teenage girls, she quickly realizes that most teenage boys won't live up to expectations—at least for a few years. She feels lost in this moment, since Joana has introduced her to the boy, and she had previously turned to her for firm guidance.



## CHAPTER 41

As time goes on, the NKVD push the deportees harder and reduce their bread rations if they stumble. Elena becomes alarmingly thin and Lina is so dehydrated that she cannot cry. Every other night they are woken up to be intimidated into signing the documents. Eventually some people give in and sign. People who sign are allowed to go to the village and thus post letters. The bald man speaks unkindly of Mrs. Arvydas and calls her "whore," saying that she could perhaps find a way to send letters. In case they get a chance to post letters, Lina and Elena write cryptic letters to Kostas and Elena's "contact."

The NKVD does their best to make life even worse for the deportees by adding sleep deprivation to their long list of horrors. Eventually, some people decide that the small pleasures of sleep and the ability to go to a real village are worth the impending twenty-five years of labor. Those who disobey and do not sign have no idea whether they will endure, but decide that death is worth their dignity.



## CHAPTER 42

Using sterling silver serving pieces from her wedding, Elena bribes a grouchy woman who has signed the documents, and the woman agrees to post Elena's letters in town. Everyone longs for news about the war. They hear that Hitler has pushed **Stalin** out of Lithuania, but have no idea what this means for the future of the country. Lina wonders what happened to her house, her possessions, and her relatives.

The deportees know very little about the tumultuous events that are raging across the globe as World War II spreads. Though Stalin is no longer in charge of Lithuania, they don't know if Hitler will be any better. And now that they have been deported, they are still in the clutches of the USSR.



In a flashback, Lina recalls listening to Kostas and his friends speak about politics in hushed voices. They argue whether **Stalin** or Hitler is worse. Worried about her daughter overhearing upsetting things, Elena orders Lina to go to her room. Bored by their politics anyway, she goes to her room and tries to **draw** the faces of the men by sound alone. Back in the shack, Lina notes that Jonas has charmed the two Siberian women he works with making shoes. They let him keep scraps so that he can make boots for winter. He learns Russian faster than Lina, and she often asks him to translate. She hates the sound of the Russian language.

## CHAPTER 43

One day while in the beet field, Kretzsky comes by looking for someone who can draw. Lina is nervous that they have found her **drawings**, but Kretzsky clarifies that they will pay two cigarettes in exchange for a copy of a map and **photograph**. Lina volunteers, despite Elena's warnings. Kretzsky will not let Elena accompany her. When Lina is brought to the NKVD building, the officers slap and berate her, nearly burning her with a cigarette. Kretzky then drags her into the kolkhoz office. Lina suddenly regrets agreeing to the task.

## CHAPTER 44

Lina is given a map of Siberia and a **photo of a family**, with a black box around a man's head. An officer gives Lina a nice selection of pens and paper. Lina wonders where she is on the map, and where her father is. Lina tries to commit the map to memory so she can **draw** it herself later. Though guards hover throughout her drawing, Lina manages to covertly drop a pen into her lap to steal for herself. The commander comes in and observes her work, and appears surprised at her talent.

## CHAPTER 45

Lina hurries back to the shack with the stolen pen and her payment of two cigarettes. Behind the NKVD barracks, Lina notices Mrs. Arvydas crying and Andrius comforting her. Lina approaches them, but Andrius tells her to go away, and Lina sees that Mrs. Arvydas has a wound on her face. Lina heads back to her own shack, and is struck by the number of horrors she has seen throughout her deportation. When Ulyushka tells her to sit down and be quiet, she yells at her and leaves the shack with pen and paper. **Drawing** calms her down. Elena returns from meeting the grouchy woman who has posted her letters. Soon, the NKVD round them up to sign papers. Elena expresses her relief that Lina has returned safely back after drawing for the NKVD. Lina thinks that she was safe, but only in the arms of hell.

Looking back, Lina wishes that she had paid more attention to the political conversations that Kostas frequently had with his friends. At the time, she only eavesdropped for inspiration for her drawings, but in retrospect these conversations now hold great weight in her current situation. Lina resists learning Russian, because it seems to normalize the situation she has been put in, and suggests that she needs to get used to it.



Lina is eager to put her drawing to good use if it means she can get out of the fields for the day, warm up in the office, and earn some currency for her family to barter and bribe. Despite offering her services, the NKVD beat and berate her since she has not signed the documents. Even during a peaceful exchange, the officers take any chance they can to humiliate the deportees.



Though the NKVD treat the deportees as less than human, even the commander cannot deny Lina's talent for drawing. Lina hates doing anything that can help the Soviets, but she relishes being able to properly draw as she used to. She cannot resist stealing one of the beautiful instruments—after all, she can put it to much better use than the NKVD.



Lina feels badly for having suggested that Andrius and his mother were voluntarily consorting with the NKVD. Even though they live more comfortably than the rest of the deportees, it comes at a very high price, as evidenced by the gash on Mrs. Arvydas face. Unlike the other deportees, Andrius and Mrs. Arvydas only have each other, whereas Elena, Lina, and Jonas have forged a network of friends who become like family, and who implicitly agree to help each other survive in the camps. Lina is grateful she has stolen the pen, since she can now draw better and more accurate representations of her time in the camp.



In a flashback, Lina recalls Jonas noting that a classmate was sent to the principal for mentioning hell. Kostas asks Jonas why the friend had mentioned hell, and Jonas replies that he was repeating something his father had said: that if **Stalin** came to Lithuania, that's where they would all end up.

Though the horrors of the camps are a new low for the Soviet Union, it's well known that Stalin has been committing atrocities across the Baltic States for some time now.



## CHAPTER 46

Elena learns that the name of the village is Turaciak. In order to check for mail, she will have to continue to bribe people who have signed the documents. They hear rumors that men might be in a prison near Tomsk. The bald man warns their letters could lead to their deaths. They speculate what the Germans are doing in Kiev, which they have just taken, and Lithuania. The bald man says that Hitler is killing the Jews, and this makes people upset. Despite the harsh reality of Hitler and **Stalin**, Elena is elated by any news of Lithuania.

Though the deportees are generally kind and generous towards each other, those who have signed and are granted passage to the village accept bribes, since they have given up twenty-five years of their lives for the ability to have certain privileges. While anyone other than the Stalin seems like a savior to the deportees, the harsh reality is that Hitler is just as bad or worse.



The possibility of letters keeps morale up throughout the camp. Even as it gets colder, the NKVD push the deportees harder. They force Elena to teach a class of Altaian and Lithuanian children. Only the children of people who sign the documents are allowed to attend. Jonas gets a job chopping wood, and pays Ulyushka with splinters and logs. He also makes the family boots, and his Russian improves. Lina is assigned to move 60-pound bags of grain in the snow. Everyone learns how to pilfer food, no matter how maggot-infested it might be.

Despite Jonas' young age, he adapts socially to the camp much better than Lina does, since she is bitter and resistant to any kind of acclimation. Jonas charms the Altaian women he works for, thus ensuring that his family has warm shoes for winter. Though Elena has resisted translating for the NKVD, she accepts a job teaching children, since it at least does some social good.



## CHAPTER 47

Eventually, Mrs. Rimas receives a letter. Everyone crowds inside her shack to read it. At the gathering, Lina sees Andrius and has a short but polite conversation with him for the first time in weeks. The letters are from Mirs. Rimas' husband, meaning he is alive. He writes of a summer camp, and says it is beautiful, as described in Psalm 102. Unfortunately, the letter is in code, and when Jonas reads the passage from the Bible, it is about sadness, suffering, and starvation. Andrius quietly points out that he is at least alive.

The arrival of the first letter is moment of disappointment for the deportees. Most of them have family members in other camps run by the NKVD, and they all hope they are in far better conditions than they endure in Altai. However, the bleakness of the psalm shows that everywhere, people are starving and suffering. Even if they are alive now, there is no telling how long they will survive.



## CHAPTER 48

One week later, Jonas becomes sick and cannot work. His leg is covered in spots and he has a fever. The NKVD refuse to give Jonas his ration because he had collapsed on the job, and the young boy soon begins to slip into unconsciousness. Worried that the sickness is contagious, Ulyushka tells Elena to take Jonas outside into the snow. Elena refuses and yells back at Ulyushka until she leaves. Elena prays for Jonas' life.

Although Elena generally maintains a pleasant disposition, she is fiercely protective of her children. The inhumanity of the NKVD policies are further shown when people become sick for want of food and thus cannot work, and as a result are deprived of their already meager rations.



The older man who told the group he was a lawyer comes to the shack and announces that Jonas has scurvy and needs vitamins. Elena rushes out of the shack to beg the other deportees for food for Jonas. Andrius comes to the shack and brings him a can of tomatoes and forces him to eat it. Elena brings in the Siberian shoemakers who befriended Jonas, and they promise to give him tea that will improve his condition.

## CHAPTER 49

Elena asks Andrius to stay with Lina and Jonas. Andrius looks mad, and Lina tries to apologize for her previous accusations. Andrius does not accept her apology. In the awkward silence, Lina **sketches** and thinks of how she misses her books from home. In a flashback, Lina recalls receiving books of Munch's art from Oslo. She also receives a letter from Joana, who notes that her parents argue and seem distressed. Things have changed since the annexation. Joana asks Lina to draw her a picture of their summer vacation to bring her much-needed joy.

Back in the shack, Andrius suddenly asks Lina to look at her **drawings**. He flips through them and sees a picture Lina drew of him. He seems to enjoy it, and jokes about the perspective—as Lina is shorter than him, she drew him from below. Elena returns and thanks Andrius for staying. Neither Elena nor Lina can sleep for worry about Jonas' condition.

## CHAPTER 50

Two weeks later, Jonas has nearly improved but is still weak. Lina and Elena are weaker than usual, since they have been giving their bread rations to Jonas. The NKVD will not give bread rations to Jonas as long as he does not work, and as the situation becomes even more dire, the other deportees become less generous with their food. Their morale is raised only by the thought of their impending Christmas celebration, Kucios, to be held in the bald man's shack. With no actual food to share, they trade descriptions of the food they wish they were bringing to the celebration.

Though Andrius has been angry at Lina for some time now, he still cares about Jonas and the wellbeing of her family. He shows a great kindness by bringing Jonas tomatoes, which ultimately save his life by giving him the vitamins he desperately needs.



Lina tries to ask Andrius for forgiveness, but he is understandably still very upset at her accusations. His silence makes Lina miss Joana, her best friend and cousin, even more. She wishes she could write to her and tell her everything. Her life now is worlds away from art books featuring Munch and summer vacations on the beach.



Andrius, like everyone else who has seen Lina's artwork, is shocked at her talent. In this moment, he seems to begin to accept her apology by joking about the drawing. He is clearly flattered that she has noticed him enough to take the time to draw his portrait.



The deportees must relish whatever small joys they can. Though Lina and Elena become weaker by sharing their rations with Jonas, they are grateful that he is getting better. The deportees plan a traditional Lithuanian Christmas celebration to the best of their abilities, given the meager resources, and it is this brief promise of joy that gives them strength through the darkest days of winter.



Lina begins to steal firewood for warmth. During one stealing session she runs into Andrius, relieved he is not a guard. She invites him and his mother to join the deportees' evening gatherings. Andrius is skeptical they will be welcome, but they show up three days later anyway. Though the deportees are silent when they arrive, they do not resent Mrs. Arvydas' clean clothing—no one would want to trade places with her. Someone produces a bottle of vodka, and Elena calls for a toast to good friends. That night, Lina fantasizes about Kostas joining them for the celebration. In a flashback, Lina recalls Kostas being late for dinner on Christmas Eve. She is worried about him being out alone in the snow. When he finally arrives, he jokes that he's not late, but right on time.

## CHAPTER 51

On Christmas Eve, Lina works all day chopping food. Everyone brings their bread rations to eat together, and shares pictures of their families. They leave one space on the floor empty, with a stub of tallow burning in remembrance of those not in attendance. Everyone places **family photos** at the empty setting. The deportees share bits of food they have been hoarding and stealing, including chocolate sent from Andrius and his mother. The bald man reveals he is Jewish, but doesn't mind the *Kucios* celebration since he keeps his worship private. The NKVD break up the Christmas Eve celebration to try and intimidate them to sign the documents. Kretszky stands motionless, staring at all the photographs.

## CHAPTER 52

The deportees are worked hard on Christmas Day. Elena gives Ulyushka a packet of cigarettes for Christmas. Lina gives Andrius a **drawing** of him, and Jonas gives him the oval **stone** that sparkled like jewelry, which Lina had given to Jonas for strength during his bout of scurvy. Elena goes with Andrius to say Merry Christmas to Mrs. Arvydas. Jonas and Lina reminisce about how they used to spend Christmas, and hope their father is safe.

## CHAPTER 53

One day Andrius runs into Lina's shack, saying that the NKVD are looking for her. Lina reveals she stole a pen. Elena is alarmed, but Andrius clarifies that the commander wants Lina to **draw** his portrait. Lina wants to refuse to do it, but Andrius and Elena point out she has no choice. Andrius urges Lina to make the portrait realistic and flattering. Lina wants to draw the commander with hollow black eyes and snakes sprouting from his neck, but she knows she cannot do that. They discuss what Lina should ask for in return.

Andrius and his mother feel as if they are shunned by the rest of the deportees, since they live in more comfortable conditions than the others. However, no one would want to trade their places—the decision to keep them alive pending Mrs. Arvydas' prostitution is an arbitrary one, and there is no telling if the NKVD will change their minds on a whim. It is a despicable exploitation of Mrs. Arvydas' gender and her love of her son, one that is an unforgivable crime against her humanity. Once she arrives, the other deportees are eager to include her in their circle of warmth.



At the *Kucios* celebration, the deportees share the memories that keep them going through even the bleakest days in the camp. It is a beautiful ceremony of generosity, in which they all share the very little they have so that others may have a small bit of happiness in the darkness of winter. Everyone is shocked when the bald man reveals he is Jewish, since everyone knows Hitler is killing the Jews—he can only wonder what has happened to his family. Kretszky's pause is foreshadowing for his eventual attempt to save the surviving deportees.



Christmas Day is particularly hard for Lina and Jonas, since it is the first Christmas without Kostas in attendance. They reminisce about the warmth of family that used to surround them on this day, and still find it surreal how quickly everything has changed. Andrius is flattered by Lina's gift, and it appears that their fight is now in the past.



The deportees are rightly alarmed at any indication that the NKVD is singling them out—even if, in this case, it is for Lina's artistic talent. Like Edvard Munch, Lina seeks to create artwork that is a realistic representation of how she feels the world—not how it physically exists. She feels that the commander is evil, and if she were drawing honestly, she would portray him as such.



## CHAPTER 54

Lina is brought to the kolkhoz office and the commander enters. Lina tries to make note of his clothing and expression so she doesn't have to look at him too much. The commander tells Lina to take off her coat, but she refuses, saying it is cold. He ogles her and asks her how old she is. Lina must continually remind herself not to draw him unflatteringly. She pretends not to understand the question. Lina wants to do the **drawing** quickly, but the commander insists on taking frequent smoke breaks. As she is close to completing the drawing, the commander asks her questions about herself, such as how long she has been drawing and who her favorite artist is. Lina tells him it is Munch. She hands the finished drawing to the commander, and notices a file on the desk—the one for her family.

The commander tells Kretszky to give Lina bread. Lina protests, since she was supposed to receive more as compensation. Jonas comes in and tells Lina she is allowed to go to the kitchen to get bread. Lina argues that she asked for potatoes. In a rush, while gathering extra paper, Lina steals the file and shoves it in her coat.

## CHAPTER 55

Lina and Jonas go to the NKVD barracks and wait for Lina's bread. Suddenly, drunken officers throw potatoes and garbage at the children. A can cuts Lina's face. When a sack hits Jonas, the officers cheer. Kretszky tells the children he is going to report them for stealing food. They quickly grab what they can. Andrius helps carry the food back, and tells Lina she's bleeding. He notices that she's holding her coat funny—the file is beneath it—and asks her if she's hurt her arm. Lina replies no, and they walk in silence.

## CHAPTER 56

Lina tells Jonas to run ahead and tell Elena they're safe while she tells Andrius she has stolen the file. She asks him to return the file once she has read it. Lina asks Andrius to translate the Russian for her. Andrius can read enough to tell her that they have Lina listed as an artist, and that her father is in a prison in Krasnoyarsk. There is another word describing Kostas' criminal charges, but Andrius claims he can't read the word. Andrius is angry that Lina has put both of them in danger, but takes the file all the same. Lina says thank you and hugs him, and Andrius nods, pulling away.

Lina is perturbed by the way the commander asks her questions about herself. Up until this point, the NKVD have only ever treated the deportees as less than human—not as real people with artistic interests. The commander's leering gaze, his request for Lina to take off her coat, and his question of her age suggests he has ulterior motives of a potentially sexual nature. Lina's refusal to engage seems to successfully divert his attention and allow her to be left alone.



As Elena theorized when the NKVD asked her to be a translator for preferential treatment, they are full of empty promises. Though Lina has asked for one thing, they give her another, and there is nothing she can do about it.



This scene shows that the NKVD officers are largely sadistic, and often beat the deportees for sport than because of their orders. However, even though they are being mocked and injured, conditions in the camp are so bad that Lina and Jonas are grateful for the scraps of food that rain down upon them. Though Lina knows it was dangerous to take the file, she's done the deed, and might as well take advantage of it.



Lina is perturbed that the NKVD know so much about her, even though she is only a teenager. She is relieved that she now knows where her father is, at least, since she can start to direct her drawings there, but there is also something sad about knowing where her father is but not being able to go to him or help him in any way. Andrius' anger is less out from the imposition of Lina's request, and more out of his disbelief that she would take such a risk.



## CHAPTER 57

Lina, Elena, and Jonas eat all the food quickly in case the NKVD came back for it. The can that hit Lina on the head was full of sardines, and they taste so delicious that she thinks the wound was worth it. They share their meal with Ulyushka at Elena's urging, even though Lina is angry that Ulyushka never shares food with them. Lina wonders what the word Andrius couldn't read was, and worries about his safety in returning the file. However, she sees him the next day and he gives her a brief nod, indicating that the file was safely returned. That night Lina draws a picture of her house at home, signs it "with love from Miss Altai," and asks the grouchy woman to pass it along to someone in town so that it may get to Kostas in Krasnoyarsk prison. Lina tries to bribe her, but the woman doesn't accept it and agrees to deliver the letter anyway—presumably she's heartened by Lina's patriotic **drawings** of Lithuania.

## CHAPTER 58

It is March 22, Lina's 16th birthday, and Lina presumes everyone has forgotten, particularly since there is little to celebrate. Lina recalls her previous birthdays, filled with family, friends, food, and presents. While Lina is in line for her ration, Jonas tells her to hurry to the bald man's shack, since Mrs. Rimas had received a thick letter from Lithuania.

When Lina arrives at the shack, everyone shouts "Happy birthday"—it was a surprise party all along. Everyone sings and eats their bread together, and shares stories of their own sixteenth birthdays. Everyone has chipped in and gotten Lina a pad of paper and a pencil stub to **draw** with. On the way back to the shack, Andrius approaches Lina and gives her *Dombey and Son*, a Charles Dickens novel, as a birthday present. It's in Russian, and Andrius teases her that she now has to learn the language. Overwhelmed by the present, Lina pulls Andrius' face to hers and kisses him. Andrius remains sitting, stunned. He tells Lina that his birthday is November twentieth.

## CHAPTER 59

The Siberian tundra begins to thaw, and the snow turns to slush. Elena receives a letter from her housekeeper's cousin, which reveals in coded words that Kostas is still alive. It is then that Lina tells her mother that she read the file and knows Kostas is in Krasnoyarsk. Time in the camp passes, one day feeling longer than the next. New guards come and other guards go. Meanwhile, Lina grows bolder with her **drawings**, and creates some that are definitely anti-Soviet. Andrius asks her if she's learned what the word "krasivaya" means, but won't tell her the meaning, and makes her promise not to ask her mother.

Elena continues to show how grateful she is that Ulyushka is sharing her shack with the family, though Lina is not mature enough to understand that it is important to be gracious to their host despite her rudeness. Lina does not tell her family about what was in the file right away, in case something bad happens when Andrius tries to put it back. This way, they can claim to not know she did it. Lina's drawing to her father conveys where she is, that she is alive, and that she still holds a patriotic love for Lithuania in her heart. The grouchy woman is uncharacteristically moved by her drawings, and helps Lina for free.



Though Lina is sad that there is no pomp and circumstance on her birthday, she understands that it is because they have very little to celebrate in their lives. Lina's reminiscence on her previous birthdays is bittersweet.



Much like the Christmas Kucios celebration, the deportees are determined to do what they can to keep morale high and to remind themselves that they are deserving of love and happiness. In a labor camp where there is very little in the way of resources, particularly of food and presents, the gifts Lina is given for her birthday represent extreme acts of kindness, love, and understanding by their givers. It is this display of emotion, particularly by Andrius, that gives Lina the courage to kiss him.



Now that Elena has confirmation that Kostas is still alive, and the file has been safely returned, Lina decides the coast is clear for her to admit the truth to Elena. Heartened by the idea that her drawings really might reach Kostas one day, Lina grows bolder in her depictions of the camp. She feels that she must resist the NKVD in her own way. The word "krasivaya" becomes a loaded term in the novel, here as a romantic link between Lina and Andrius.



## CHAPTER 60

On the first warm day of spring, Andrius takes Lina aside and warns her that people are being moved, and that while he is not on the list for relocation, Lina, Jonas, and Elena are. Lina runs to tell Elena, who optimistically theorizes that they are perhaps going someplace better or closer to Kostas. In a flashback, Lina recalls listening to her parents discuss trying to arrange passage for some people to Germany. Lina asks who they are trying to help, and her parents stop talking. Elena claims they are discussing one of Kostas' colleagues, and Kostas leaves the house, saying he will return for dinner.

Rumors fly around the camp. One day everyone gathers in the bald man's shack to discuss the changes to come. Mrs. Rimas is on the list, but Miss Grybas is not. All of this information was received from Mrs. Arvydas. They speculate how to prepare for another journey, and pray they will not be put back onto train cars. Miss Grybas wants to sign the documents so that she can go into town and communicate with those leaving using letters, and teach the children in the camp. Others urge her not to, but she doesn't feel that she has a choice.

## CHAPTER 61

Andrius comes to the shack and speaks to Elena privately, and then asks to speak to Lina. They take a walk together, and discuss the impending relocation. Andrius tells Lina that he figured out the word in Lina's file: her father is being charged with "accessory," for helping people who were in danger. Lina tells Andrius she is scared, and how much she misses her father. They admit they don't want to leave each other. Lina gives Andrius her secret **drawings** and asks him to keep them safe. He urges her to keep drawing. They kiss, and Andrius asks Lina if she has learned what "krasivaya" means yet. He says he will come see Jonas in the morning, and then he leaves with the drawings.

This flashback reminds Lina that there had been murmurs of relocations in her household long before the family's deportation. Though many of the deportees on the list hope they are going someplace better, Lina and Elena know that there is little chance they are being rewarded by the relocation, particularly since they have not signed the documents. Still, some remaining haven't signed either, showing the arbitrary nature of the NKVD's cruelty.



Even though Mrs. Arvydas cannot be there to support the deportees on a day-to-day basis, she and Andrius still do their part to resist the NKVD by passing along food and information. Here, the NKVD have put the deportees in a situation such that people like Miss Grybas feel they must set aside their beliefs, morals, and dignity to give into NKVD demands in order to survive.



Lina is scared that she is once again being sent into the unknown, and this fear is further compounded by the fact that she will now have to leave Andrius, for whom her feelings have only just begun to blossom. Andrius, too, admits that he is scared for Lina to leave—while she is going into the unknown, he is being left behind. Andrius is showing a great kindness by hiding Lina's illicit drawings, further evidence for his feelings for her and for his belief that they will be together again some day.



## CHAPTER 62

The NKVD come to collect those on the list before sunrise. Surprisingly, Ulyushka gives the family food for the journey, as well as a thick animal hide. Elena tries to hug her, but she pushes her away and stomps out. Mrs. Rimas, a young girl who always carries a doll, her mother, and other people stream out of their shacks. Miss Grybas rushes out to say goodbye, claiming they are being sent to America. The grouchy woman is on the list too, as are her daughters. Andrius comes to say goodbye, asking Jonas to write and saying that he'll see Lina again one day, and when he does, he'll give her back her **drawings**. Lina cries for the first time in months. As the truck she is loaded onto leaves, she realizes Andrius has slipped the **jewel-stone** into her pocket when he hugged her goodbye. She tries to stand up to indicate she has found it, but he is gone.

Here, Elena's kindness towards Ulyushka has paid off—despite her rudeness towards the family for most of their time in the camp, Ulyushka shows that she understands the horror of what the NKVD has put them through, and seeks to help them in whatever way she can. In the harsh Siberian tundra, particularly under Soviet Communism, these kind of goods are few and far between. Andrius' passing of the stone is a symbol of his feelings for Lina, as they will not remain in the camp but will instead travel with her wherever she goes.



## CHAPTER 63

They travel in the truck all morning, and eventually stop and are allowed to relieve themselves in the grass at a field. Kretszky is also on the truck with them. They then stop at a train station and are loaded onto cars. The bald man instructs them to stand at the opening and look uncomfortable so the car appears full. It works, and though the car is filthy, they are not as cramped as last time. At the last moment, a few more people are shoved in, including a woman and her very sick daughter. The girl with the doll tells Lina the NKVD shot her doll and then beat her when she cried. She says her name is Janina. She tells Lina she saw Lina's "boyfriend" give her something, and Lina shows Janina and Elena the **stone**. The passengers share rumors about the war, and hear that the Japanese bombed America, and that America and Britain have declared war on Japan. They also hear that the Soviets invaded Finland.

Once again the deportees are forced to endure the horror of the train cars. Since people are living in close quarters without a chance to bathe, diseases run rampant. And for every train car on the train, there is presumably another set of characters just like the ones in the novel—more families ripped apart, more suffering and sadness endured. The obvious emotions between Lina and Andrius are evident even to Janina, a young girl who is traumatized by the "murder" of her doll by a nasty NKVD officer. The deportees are heartened by any news of a war, since it increases the chances that someone will invade and end their suffering at the hands of Stalin.



## CHAPTER 64

As the train moves on, the sick girl—who appears very yellow—becomes sicker, and coughs up blood on Jonas. Elena rips off Jonas' shirt and throws it down the bathroom hole, even though they are all breathing the same air as the girl. A tall man on the train, who often repeats his words, talks frequently about them going to America. In the middle of the night, Janina wakes Lina up and tells her the yellow girl is dead. The next day, guards drag her body off the train and shoot her mother when she tries to jump out after her daughter.

Like on the previous train journey, the NKVD expect and prepare for many deaths. And, similarly to the way Ona was treated, the NKVD seek to murder anyone who mourns the dead. The "yellow girl" likely has jaundice, just one of many medical conditions that could easily be treated if doctors were available. Jonas must once again witness the horrors of children his own age dying preventable deaths.



The food that Ulyushka gave the family keeps them alive on the train, and they share it with others as well. Lina **draws** to pass the time. Janina asks the bald man if he is a Jew, and if Hitler might kill the Jews. The bald man retorts that Hitler is killing the Jews, and that he's using them as a scapegoat for all of Germany's problems. He also thinks that the U.S. may already be allied with the Soviets.

The bald man, though rude and tactless, is often wiser about the true nature of World War II's politics than are the rest of the deportees. Indeed, the Soviet Union and the U.S. formed an alliance during World War II against Hitler. Unfortunately for the deportees, though, this means the U.S. is not searching for the lost Lithuanians.



## CHAPTER 65

After a week, the train stops late at night. Mrs. Rimas says she saw a sign that said "Marakov." The passengers are herded into a huge building, but when they get off the train, Elena collapses, and others quickly help her up. She sees Kretszky and greets him as "Nikolai." The deportees lie on the ground until morning, and Jonas and Lina speculate why Elena referred to Kretszky as "Nikolai." The NKVD feed them mushroom soup and bread, and they speculate that this is because they are going to be put to work. They are then brought to bathe at a bathhouse, but no one ogles the women since they have become emaciated. The deportees are then driven to the bank of a river and are about to be put on boats. Though the repetitive man thinks they are being sent to America, Lina is skeptical and doesn't want to leave her father behind in prison. She thinks of Andrius' face when he told her about the list, and is fairly certain they aren't going anywhere better than the previous camp.

Once again, this scene is a chilling reminder of the Holocaust, a similar genocide carried out by the Nazis against Jews, homosexuals, Romani people, and other minorities of Nazi-controlled territories in Europe. While this scene might have been a precursor to death by gas chamber in a Holocaust novel, the fact that Lina and the other deportees are bathed and fed means that the NKVD want to keep them alive for further back-breaking labor and torture somewhere even bleaker and more remote than the previous camp. Lina's desperate devotion to finding her father and Andrius again is evidenced by her wish that she not be taken to America, despite the fact that it would be a welcome respite from the harsh Siberian tundra.



## CHAPTER 66

The boats are delayed and the deportees must wait on the banks of the river for more than a week. They are fed barley porridge, and Lina is worried about what is to come if the Soviets think they will need their strength. Women chosen to carry supplies help pass along letters. Lina sends a slat of wood with the hopes it will reach Kostas. One day, when Lina and Elena wade into the river, Jonas worriedly tells them to cover up since the guards are watching. Jonas then accuses Elena of sleeping with Kretszky. Elena grabs Lina's arm painfully and harshly rebukes Jonas for implying such a thing. The children are shocked at her response.

Like with the previous train journey, the NKVD show total disregard for the humanity of the deportees by keeping them waiting for days for their next passage. Though they are fed relatively well, this concerns the deportees—it means they will be put to work as soon as they arrive at their destination. Elena, who has worked hard to uphold her dignity throughout the ordeal, is deeply hurt by her childrens' accusations. So much of her strength has come from her love for Kostas, and she is profoundly hurt that anyone would suggest she is anything but faithful to him.



## CHAPTER 67

The deportees are transported through a dark forest until they arrive at Us Kut, on the River Lena. They must wait for barges in makeshift tents as it rains. After two weeks, they are put on barges. Jonas wonders if they really are going to America, but Lina still doesn't want to leave Kostas behind. In a flashback, Lina recalls Joana telling her about fashionable universities in America. Lina says she doesn't care much for America, because she can't name a single accomplished American artist. Back on the barge, Lina **draws** the bald man despite his complaining. She asks him why he was deported, and he says it's none of her business. He also says she'll never be a famous artist, but Janina insists that she will be.

Art has been one of the main things that has kept Lina going throughout her deportation. In times of war, funding for things such as the arts and humanities are often cut, since they are seen as frivolous and anti-utilitarian. However, they provide much needed support and methods of expression for people, especially in times of suffering and sadness. For Lina, her goal is not to be a famous artist (though she would doubtless love to know that would be her future). Rather, she loves art for its ability to move her, and for her ability to move others.



## CHAPTER 68

They sail farther north, but no one knows where they are going. When they stop to load more supplies, they overhear Kretszky arguing with the commander that he wants to stay off of the barge. However, the commander insists. The passengers cheer when the barge pulls away, convinced they are going to America. When people still think that a week later, Kretszky yells that they are fools. They pass into the Arctic Circle, and in late August they reach the mouth of the River Lena, where the temperature is just above freezing. They hurry off the boat, but arrive to find a barren wasteland and two buildings—which are only for the NKVD officers. An officer calls them “fascist pigs who sleep in the mud,” and demands that they build a bakery and fish factory. It takes ten hours to unload the barge. A sign shows that they are at Trofimovsk, the top of the Arctic Circle near the North Pole.

Since their entire time under the NKVD has been so surreal, even deportees who have endured the worst suffering are convinced they are being sent to America—it really does feel like anything can happen. Lina is wary of this claim, since she doubts the NKVD would be keen to bring people they have been torturing to a land of greater opportunity. Unfortunately, her pessimism is warranted—they end up in an even colder and bleaker tundra than the one in Altai. Lina and the deportees have been brought to one of the coldest places on Earth in the NKVD’s hope that they will perish.



## CHAPTER 69

The conditions are so miserable that the deportees long for their previous labor camp. They hope there is a village nearby to mail letters from, and that this is perhaps not their final destination. The older man who was a lawyer says that the polar night—when the sun falls below the horizon for 180 days—is nearly upon them. They must prepare for the cold and darkness. Janina’s mother, going mad with despair, tries to strangle Janina. Elena forces her off of the girl and Mrs. Rimas slaps the woman across the face while Janina cries. Elena calms the woman, and says they mustn’t lose their senses. She assures the deportees that everything will be fine.

As the struggle for survival becomes even more desperate than before, so too do the deportees, as evidenced by Janina’s mother’s tragic attempt to kill her daughter. Like the bald man’s initial suicide attempt when he jumped off of the truck, Janina’s mother’s twisted logic is that it would be better for her and her daughter to die by her own hand than to be killed by the monsters that make up the NKVD. Elena, in her unyielding optimism, soothes the woman and urges the other deportees that losing their minds will help no one.



## CHAPTER 70

The NKVD put the deportees to work at daybreak. They are divided into twenty-five groups, fifteen people per group. Lina is set to work building a *jurta*, a hut, but not using any building supplies meant for the NKVD building. They collect sticks, stones, and chips of brick. They use moss for mortar. Jonas and the men are sent to fish, but they are not allowed to eat what they catch—only bread rations. Together they build a tiny hut to share. Ivanov, the cruel guard who called them pigs, laughs when they ask for a stove. The men build barracks and a bakery, with stoves and fireplaces, for the NKVD. Lina realizes that their hut is no place for people to survive—and that they are not expected to survive at all.

Despite the desperate conditions at the camp in Altai, the deportees now long for the shacks and relative sense of infrastructure. Here, they are entirely left to fend for themselves in the wild, exacerbated by the fact that they are worked to the bone building relatively luxurious accommodations for their torturers. When Lina has a passing thought as to how they are expected to survive in these conditions, she realizes they aren't expected to survive at all—this is just a sadistic, drawn-out attempt to torture and murder Soviet dissidents and their families, essentially for sport.



## CHAPTER 71

The day after they finish the *jurta*, Janina sees a ship on the horizon flying an American flag. At first the deportees are excited that they might be saved, but they quickly realizes that the NKVD will just hide them—the Americans are helping the Soviets. The Americans bring food supplies, but only for the NKVD. The older man reads the English words on the packages—delicious piles of food that make Lina's mouth water—as the deportees are forced to carry the supplies to the NKVD barracks. Elena asks the man to stop translating the words, since she can't bear to know what she's carrying. The man replies that he wants to know what's there, in case the opportunity to steal presents itself. Jonas notices that Elena is talking to Kretszky.

This scene unfortunately reinforces what the bald man has theorized all along—that the Americans are in fact working with the Soviets, and no one knows about the atrocities they are committing. Salt is further poured into the wounds of the deportees when they must carry huge packages from the Americans, filled with delicious food. Not only do the Americans not know about the deportees, they are actively providing support to their torturers. The world may know about Hitler's atrocities, but the plight of these deportees remained hidden for decades.



## CHAPTER 72

Jonas finds an empty barrel and pulls it ashore to use as a stove. The men set to building it. Ivanov begins to steal bread rations—he once grabbed an old woman's food, chewed it, and spit it at her feet, and she scrambled to eat the remains. They hear rumors that Ivanov had been demoted from a prison in Krasnoyarsk, and that guard assignments in Trofimovsk are demotions. The deportees must chop logs for firewood but are not given any for themselves. Jonas and Lina set off to steal some of the wood. They notice that Elena is getting weaker, and realize she has been giving them her rations—starving herself to feed her children. The polar night begins and the days and nights are freezing. Kretszky sees them, and throws pieces of wood at them to use for firewood. The first snowstorm arrives at the end of September. Janina itches and Lina realizes there are lice in the *jurta*. They scoop ice to melt for water, and must relieve themselves inside the hut with the snowstorm raging outside.

Though Kretszky is one of the guards who is cruel to the deportees, he begins to show signs that he questions the actions of the NKVD. Lina and Jonas are not sure why Elena speaks to him, but it appears that he has some sympathy for the deportees, since he gives Lina and Jonas firewood. Ivanov, the other new guard, is reportedly bitter and cruel because he has been demoted, perhaps from the same prison that Kostas is in. This leaves Lina to wonder whether he exacted this kind of cruelty on her father as well. In order to survive, the deportees must scrounge and be even more creative with the little resources they have in the wilderness. Elena again shows her generous and self-sacrificing nature.



## CHAPTER 73

They are sent back to work as soon as the storm breaks. Lina sees that some jurtas have been completely snowed in, and people have died inside. They must walk three kilometers to gather firewood for the NKVD. The bald man demands that Lina give him her mittens in exchange for information. He tells Lina that Elena knows why she was deported, and it is because of her uncle, Petras Vilkas. Since Lina's aunt is German, Kostas helped the family repatriate to Germany. The Soviets found out, and Kostas was charged with accessory. In a flashback, Lina recalls hearing Kostas talk about repatriation. A letter from Joana reveals that Lina's uncle has been acting strangely, doing things like packing up books. She hears Elena and Kostas discuss other places Joana's family can escape to, such as Sweden or America. Back in the snow, Lina realizes that Joana's freedom has cost her hers.

## CHAPTER 74

Lina confronts Elena about why the family was deported. Elena says that they were planning to help Lina's uncle, and then receive help from him in return via their own immigration to Germany. Unfortunately, after Lina's uncle's family moved to Germany, someone tipped off the Soviets and searched their house, revealing Kostas' hand in the matter. Elena is angry the bald man told Lina, since she had trusted him with the secret. Lina is angry at Joana and her family, but Jonas points out that they had to sacrifice things, too, like Uncle's store and Joana's studies. Lina wonders what Joana knows about their plight. Lina angrily draws Soviet and Nazi symbols shredding a Lithuanian flag as she watches a man carve a small piece of wood.

In a flashback, Lina recalls showing Joana Munch's pictures, and trying to express to Joana why she loves his technique so much. Joana declares the paintings weird, and says she prefers Lina's. Lina decides she loves Ashes, one of the paintings, since she viscerally feels the sorrow that Munch is trying to convey. Back in the hut, Lina realizes that she can use ashes mixed with water as a kind of watercolor. She fashions a brush out of a stick.

The first snowstorm arrives in September, and it already brings about casualties. The bald man tactlessly breaks Elena's trust and tells Lina that her family was deported because her father helped her cousins repatriate to Germany. Lina is angry, and wonders if her cousin is living in the lap of luxury while she struggles to survive in the Arctic. Though no mention is made as to what happens to Joana, given the turmoil in Germany, there is no telling what has happened to her family. Lina has always looked up to and admired her parents' generosity, but now she feels that this time their selflessness has gone too far.



Even though Lina is only sixteen years old, she has endured significantly more than most teenagers, and as a result has been forced to mature very quickly. Thus, she is angry that her mother did not share with her the details of their arrest and deportation. Even though she is young, she believes she deserves to know the truth surrounding the upheaval of her entire way of life. Lina has long wished she could speak to Joana, but now she feels angry at her—she feels that her cousin's freedom and happiness has come at the direct cost of her own life.



Lina recalls this memory—in which Joana shows a lack of appreciation for Munch's art—because she is angry at Joana. Lina thinks Munch is brilliant in the way his art conveys emotions simply by the technique of his brushstroke. Despite the sadness of this revelation and memory, it at least gives Lina the idea to fashion watercolors from the ashes.



## CHAPTER 75

November comes, and Elena grows more despondent. The family pray for Kostas, and this is the only time Elena can muster a smile. Lina dreams of Andrius at night. A storm is coming, but Ivanov won't give them a ration, since he says they're not going to work. Lina steals wood from the NKVD barracks so she can survive. When she goes to the wood stacks, she sees Elena talking to Ivanov and Kretszky. Ivanov laughs, mimes shooting a gun to his head, and leaves. Elena flinches and her knees buckle. Kretszky catches her before she falls. Lina runs to her mother, who is now sobbing. Kretszky reveals that there has been news that Kostas was shot in Krasnoyarsk prison. Lina refuses to believe it is true, and tells Kretszky to go away and that she hates him. Elena is too distraught to walk, and Lina cries out for help. Mrs. Rimas helps them to the hut. They tell Jonas what they have learned, and they all come together to comfort one another.

## CHAPTER 76

Lina cannot sleep. Every time she tries, she can only picture her father's bloody face through the bathroom hole. She hopes Kretszky had the wrong information, and that there is a mistake. She feels her **drawings** have failed. She tries to sketch, but is too upset even to do the thing she loves. The storm rages on, and Elena grows even weaker. Still, she insists on shoveling snow from the entrance to the hut. It is so cold that the moisture in Lina's nostrils freezes. She worries how they will survive until the polar night ends in March. On November 20, Lina remembers that it's Andrius' birthday. Lina wishes him a happy birthday to herself, and reads *Dombey and Son*. She flips through the pages and finds little notes he has written to her, saying he is thinking of her. She thinks of him too.

## CHAPTER 77

By mid-December, people begin getting frostbite and dying. There are no doctors, only a veterinarian from Estonia. The guards won't come into their huts, saying they are filthy pigs, and they make them leave their dead outside the doors. Diseases run through the camp, and some people commit suicide. One day Janina points Lina to a huge, dead owl in the snow. Janina suggests that they eat it. Together and with the help of other deportees, they smuggle it back into the jurta. They cook it and are heartened by the taste of meat.

Just when Lina thinks things can't get much worse, Ivanov brings the news that Kostas has been shot, hundreds of miles away from the rest of his family and loved ones. Elena, Lina, and Jonas are not even sure if he ever knew they were still alive. The memory of Kostas and the hope that they would one day be reunited was one of the main things keeping Elena's optimism afloat. Now that she believes he is dead, she has nothing outside of her children to hope for. Kretszky, who was previously a source of terror in the first labor camp, reveals bits of humanity, such as when he catches Elena and comforts her here. Lina, distraught over the news and overwhelmed with hatred for the NKVD, lashes out at Kretszky.



Even though Elena has lost much of her hope when she hears that Kostas has died, she continues to do her best to help her children and the other deportees survive. Lina has also lost her sense of direction, as shown by her inability to draw. For so long, she drew for her father, in the hopes that he would find her sketches and find her. With no one to draw for, she feels lost and hopeless. Yet the memory of Andrius heartens her, and the notes in the novel make her feel like they are communicating. Andrius gives Lina someone to keep drawing for.



With extremely little food, lots of hard work, and a harsh winter, a large owl is a lifesaving source of protein for the deportees. Yet their immune systems are still weakened, and the close quarters of the jurta and lack of hygiene allow diseases to run rampant. The fact that the only medical professional in the camp is a veterinarian makes the deportees feel even more like they are less than human.



## CHAPTER 78

Christmas arrives, and the deportees are glad that they've made it through half the winter. While they freeze and starve, the guards enjoy sumptuous food and warm fires. Elena becomes even weaker. The lice bring typhus, and the man who repeats words quarantines himself in a jurta designated for the sick. Four days later, Lina sees his naked body, half-eaten by foxes, on a stack of corpses. In a flashback, Lina recalls Elena asking her to move her Munch book off of the dining table, since she finds the images ghastly. Yet despite the imagery of rotting bodies, Lina finds the work beautiful. Kostas tells her she is beautiful for seeing the work that way.

Back on the tundra, Lina is enraged that people are dying left and right. Mrs. Rimas says all they can do is pray. In the jurta, Elena tells Lina to apologize to Kretszky for saying she hated him. Elena reveals that he once helped her escape from near-rape by other guards. He drove her back to safety, and was punished for aiding her. That is why he was demoted to Trofimovsk. Lina still has no sympathy for him. Soon Elena grows very ill and is running a high fever. She complains of the cold, and they all huddle together for warmth.

## CHAPTER 79

Lina practices the Russian words for "doctor," "medicine," "mother," and "please." She goes to the NKVD barracks in the hopes that Kretszky can help her mother. Ivanov laughs at her and tells her to leave, and takes away her ration for the day. Lina is determined not to lose her mother. Fearing she is near death, Elena gives her wedding band to Jonas. Lina and Jonas hold their mother, desperately willing her not to die.

## CHAPTER 80

On January 5th, Jonas holds Elena throughout the morning, while Mrs. Rimas tries to feed her. She cannot eat or speak. Lina describes scenes of warmth and happiness to try and soothe her. Elena's breathing becomes more labored. Suddenly, Elena looks up at Jonas and opens her mouth, but no sounds come out. Her trembling body relaxes, and her eyes fade into a hollow stare. Jonas and Lina cry over their mother's dead body, while Mrs. Rimas recites a prayer. The other deportees comfort the family, saying everything they loved about Elena. They all promise to bury her body. For once, the bald man is silent.

As people become weaker and thus even sicker, they begin to quarantine themselves with the other sick, even though it means certain death—with no medical supplies, there is no chance for recovery, and the best that the ill can do is try and prevent the spread of their disease to those who are still relatively healthy. Lina recalls, how she used to find Munch's images of rotting flesh and dead bodies beautiful. Now, however, seeing them in reality is anything but beautiful—even if it adds another element of truth to Munch's dark work.



Even when Elena reveals that Kretszky showed her kindness when he saved her from being raped and potentially murdered by other guards, Lina has no sympathy for him. Kretszky only showed Elena the courtesy any decent human being should show another, and yet still continued to torture them, showing what Lina believes to be his true, evil nature.



Elena's optimism and will to live wanes after she hears of Kostas' supposed death. Lina must now take on the role of caregiver in the family, and does for Elena what her mother did for Jonas when he was sick. But with no resources or mercy to be had, eventually all they can do is pray.



When Elena dies, their small group of deportees is in total shock. Since they first were thrown into the truck following their arrests, Elena was a source of grace, comfort, and strength. She always had a kind word or even food to share with the deportees, and was willing to fight for their right to live. When she dies, it feels as if their collective will to survive has died as well. Even the bald man, the most pessimistic of the group, mourns the loss of Elena.



In a flashback, Lina recalls her Grandmother's funeral. Jonas acknowledges how pretty she looks in her coffin, and Kostas say she is watching them all from above. He explains death using an anecdote of when the children were playing with a kite, and they lost grip and it disappeared into the sky. Spirits, he says, fly up into the sky like a kite. Jonas wonders if Grandmother found the kite. Back in the hut, the bald man reveals that he almost worked for the Soviets, confirming people's occupations. However, he changed his mind at the last minute. Lina calls him a traitor, and the bald man says he has wished for death since the first day he was arrested. He wonders why it is so hard to die.

## CHAPTER 81

Lina struggles to sleep that night, distraught over the loss of her mother. She lies down next to Elena's body, and contemplates what the bald man said about it being "hard to die," but finds that she is determined to survive despite her losses. Later Mrs. Rimas and Lina go through Elena's suitcase. They discover that she had a clean set of clothes for both herself and Kostas—she intended to return back to Lithuania in this clothing. Both women begin to cry. They also discover the deed to Lina's home in Lithuania, and an address in Germany—likely where Joana is living. Together all the deportees work to dig Elena a grave in a place Lina and Jonas will remember so they can eventually bring her body back to Lithuania. They carry her coffin out of the jurta in a funeral procession, and eventually many deportees join in the march and pray for Elena. Kretszky sees the procession and becomes silent when he realizes it is for Elena.

## CHAPTER 82

Lina paints a map to the gravesite so that she may remember where it is. The bald man continues to complain that he wants to die, and Lina tells him to shut up—they want to live. When she asks him what's keeping him from committing suicide, he replies "fear." A whistle indicates that a storm is coming, and Lina goes to steal extra firewood despite the danger this poses. She encounters Kretszky, who is drinking behind the NKVD barracks. Slurring, he tells her that he could tell Elena used to be pretty—"krasivaya." He tells Lina that the word means "beautiful, but with strength." He tells Lina that he hates himself, too, and that his mother was an artist like Lina is. He tells Lina that his mother died when he was five, and that he wanted to go help her relatives in Poland—the reason he wanted to stay off of the barge. Drunkenly, he tells Lina to take as much firewood as she wants. Against her better judgment, Lina tells Kretszky that she is sorry about his mother, and he says he is sorry about Elena's passing.

Elena's undignified and untimely death makes Lina recall her Grandmother, who died after a long life surrounded by the people she loved, and was buried in her best clothing and honored by others. Lina wishes she could give Elena the proper funeral she deserves, and the other deportees want this for her as well. While Lina and the others continue to struggle desperately for life, there is also an allure to the bald man's words—an easy death feels like a relief compared to the horror of their present situation.



While going through Elena's possessions, Mrs. Rimas and Lina realize just how idealistic and optimistic Elena was, even to a fault: she carried in her suitcase several sets of clothing that could have been put to use warming her in the coldest hours of her illness. However, she really did believe that she and her husband were going to return triumphantly to Lithuania, and she wanted to do it with the dignity and grace that she maintained to the very end. This makes Lina even more determined to eventually bring Elena's body back to Lithuania and give her the proper funeral she deserves. All the deportees are sad for the loss of Elena—even Kretszky takes pause when he realizes who has died.



Even though Elena has died, Lina continues to embody her spirit of resilience and survival—she decides, simply, that she wants to keep living. She does whatever it takes to protect herself and Jonas, including continuing to put herself in harm's way by stealing the resources they desperately need. Lina further embodies Elena's ability to be kind to everyone, no matter how rude they are in return, when she comforts Kretszky over the loss of his mother. In truth, they are both comforting each other over the loss of Elena. Even Kretszky could tell that Elena was a pillar of strength and an exceptionally brave human being. Together they mourn the loss of their families and previous lives due to the terror Stalin has imposed on Eastern Europe.



## CHAPTER 83

Lina is confused as to why she comforted Kretszky despite her deep hatred of the NKVD. The next day, Kretszky is gone. February arrives, and Janina comes down with scurvy. Jonas realizes that he, too, is developing it again. Lina tries to convince him they will be going home soon, to give him some hope for the future. She gives Jonas the **stone** Andrius gave her as a source of strength. As the storm rages, Lina goes begging from jurta to jurta for some food to give Janina and Jonas, but there is none to be had. Lina does her best to make Janina comfortable as they wait out the storm. Janina's mother has been taken to the typhus hut. Lina tells Jonas she loves him.

Despite Lina's determination to live, she simply cannot locate the resources she needs to help Janina and Jonas fight off the scurvy—they need fruit, vegetables, and sunlight, and there is none to be had for the deportees, particularly in the midst of a snowstorm. As with Elena before her death, all Lina can do is make the two children comfortable and pray for a miracle.



## CHAPTER 84

The storm calms a day later, and Jonas is so ill he can barely speak. Mrs. Rimas says they need to go work to receive rations. Suddenly, the door opens and a man in civilian clothing enters. He asks if there are sick people in the hut. Mrs. Rimas cries out that they need help. The man sees Janina and Jonas and is shocked at the state they are in. He demands fish from an NKVD officer. The bald man agrees to help prepare food as long as Janina and Jonas are the first ones helped. The man—a doctor—says that he is an inspection officer, who could report to the tribunal the horrors in the camps. He tells Lina his name is Dr. Samodurov, and he shakes her hand. Lina is shocked by this show of respect. The doctor gives them food, orders supplies for them, and stays for ten days. Lina gives him letters for Andrius, and the doctor expresses his doubt that Kostas is actually dead—he theorizes there is a chance Ivanov was lying. When Lina asks how the doctor knew to come to the camp, all he replies is "Nikolai Kretzsky."

Luckily, a miracle does arrive—in the form of Dr. Samodurov. At the last hour, Kretszky defects from the camp and somehow informs those with influence of the horrors happening in the camps. It appears that even the Soviet officials did not intend the camps to be this bad—most of the day-to-day evil has been passed along only by the NKVD guards. The doctor nurses Jonas and Janina back to life, and even gives Lina hope that her father is still alive. The deportees are not completely saved from their fate, but at least people who have some kind of respect for them have seen the squalor they have been put into, and they have much more hope that they can survive and one day return to their normal lives.



## CHAPTER 85

Jonas slowly begins to heal, and Lina fantasizes about seeing her father again. When Lina goes to chop wood one day, she can see a sliver of gold on the horizon—sunlight. They have survived the winter. Lina thinks of Andrius and squeezes the **stone**, hoping she will see him again someday.

Though the doctor is not able to end the deportees' imprisonment, he gives them valuable hope for the future. The sliver of sunlight on the horizon symbolizes hope for a better future for Lina and Jonas.



## EPILOGUE

It is April 25, 1995, in Kaunas, Lithuania. A construction worker finds a wooden box in the ground. Inside is a large glass jar full of papers. The papers describe the imprisonment of the Lithuanian people in Siberia. After they were eventually released, the Soviets promised to kill anyone who spoke of the deportations. Lina is the author of the letters, and she writes that Andrius is her husband—she is now Lina Arvydas. She writes that the papers include detailed descriptions of the camps, and may horrify people, but they are meant to stir human compassion such that these evils never occur again. She buried the letters on July 9th, 1954 in Kaunas.

*In this epilogue, the reader learns that the information in the novel has essentially been compiled from writings Lina left in a box in Kaunas, thirteen years after she was first deported. Though we do not know the rest of the details of her imprisonment—we know it was at least a decade, as she mentioned when she noted that she wouldn't look in a mirror for over ten years—we do know that she and Andrius reunited and married. However, it was years before the truth of the deportees' plight came to light. Lina writes that she fervently hopes her documentation of her suffering helps to prevent further genocides in the future.*





## HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

### MLA

Munk, Olivia. "Between Shades of Gray." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 17 Feb 2017. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

### CHICAGO MANUAL

Munk, Olivia. "Between Shades of Gray." *LitCharts* LLC, February 17, 2017. Retrieved April 21, 2020. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/between-shades-of-gray>.

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Sepetys, Ruta. *Between Shades of Gray*. Speak. 2012.

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Sepetys, Ruta. *Between Shades of Gray*. New York: Speak. 2012.