



# All the Light We Cannot See

Study Guide by Course Hero



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## 👁 Book Basics

### AUTHOR

Anthony Doerr

### YEAR PUBLISHED

2014

### GENRE

Historical Fiction, War Literature

### PERSPECTIVE AND NARRATOR

The events of *All the Light We Cannot See* are described by an omniscient third-person narrator, with the perspective shifting among the main and minor characters.

### TENSE

*All the Light We Cannot See* is written in the present tense.

### ABOUT THE TITLE

*All the Light We Cannot See* refers to the spectrum of electromagnetic wavelengths that human eyes are unable to detect. These include radio waves, a key element in the novel. The title is also a metaphor for the invisible stories of ordinary people that are buried in the past, unseen and overlooked because they lie outside history's narrow spectrum, or field of focus. This metaphor extends to the inner light, or spirit, of those to whom these stories belong, including the blind character Marie-Laure.

## 🕒 In Context

## World War II

*All the Light We Cannot See* is set in France and Germany during World War II (1939–45). Doerr skillfully weaves together a variety of elements from this dynamic and troubled period, beginning with the rise of Nazi Germany and ending with the bombing of Saint-Malo in northwestern France.

German dictator Adolf Hitler came to power as chancellor of Germany in January 1933. As head of the government, he moved swiftly to change laws allowing him to seize power. His goal was to replace the existing democratic system with a dictatorship. By late summer 1934 Hitler had combined the posts of president and chancellor and declared himself the Führer, or leader.

Hitler then began to build his war machine, establishing the German air force, expanding the German army through conscription or forced enlistment, and forming alliances with Italy and Japan, collectively known as the Axis powers. In

defiance of the Treaty of Versailles that had concluded World War I (1914–18), German forces reoccupied the Rhineland, a demilitarized zone in western Germany, in March 1936. Austria was then annexed to Nazi Germany in March 1938. One year later, Hitler ordered the invasion and occupation of Czechoslovakia. Finally, after entering a short-lived alliance with Soviet Russia, Hitler's forces invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. In response Britain and France declared war on Germany two days later, on September 3.

Denmark and Norway next fell to Hitler, followed by the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France. In July 1940 Hitler unleashed his air force, the Luftwaffe, against Britain. The Axis powers then invaded and occupied Yugoslavia and Greece. Hitler then turned against Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, sending three million German troops into Russia in 1941 for an attempted invasion. The German Reich or Hitler's empire seemed unstoppable. On December 11, 1941, Hitler declared war on the United States following Japan's devastating attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7. America declared war against Japan on December 8.

Though the tide would eventually turn against Nazi Germany, it was three and a half more years before its defeat by the Allied powers (Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union, the United States, and China). The war in Europe ended with Germany's unconditional surrender on May 7, 1945. By the time Japan surrendered on August 15, 1945, ending the war in the Pacific, the worldwide human cost of World War II was approximately 85 million dead and wounded.

## Hitler Youth

In the novel Doerr explores how Werner Pfennig, an intelligent boy with great promise, is seduced by the Hitler Youth and transformed into a Nazi.

The children of Germany were targeted by the Nazi regime, with the goal of transforming them into future soldiers and a technically skilled elite. Hitler believed a secure future for the Third Reich (meaning Germany's third regime, or empire) relied on strictly regulated education. In schools, children were immersed in National Socialism, or Nazism, Hitler's particular form of fascism or absolute government. Boys and girls also were encouraged to join the Hitler Youth, where they absorbed Nazi ideology. In the year Hitler took power as chancellor, all other youth organizations were banned or incorporated into

the Hitler Youth. The pressure increased for German youths to join "voluntarily." Elite Nazi training schools, such as the Schulpforta school described in the novel, were established. Then in 1939 membership in the organization became compulsory.

Indoctrination began as early as age 10; membership in the Hitler Youth began at age 14. The young people were weaned away from their families, steeped in propaganda (biased information intended to support a political cause), and programmed to follow orders. With the approach of war, the organization became increasingly disciplined and politicized. Activities focused on the honing of soldierly skills; leaders fueled the young people's ideological zeal. In the novel a one-armed soldier at the school in Schulpforta sums up the goal for new cadets, saying, "You will all surge ... toward the same cause. You will forgo comforts; you will live by duty alone. You will eat country and breathe nation."

## Radio Comes of Age

Radio plays a key role in *All the Light We Cannot See*. It was deftly employed as a propaganda tool by the Reich. In the novel a boy's exceptional radiographic skills are used at the front to locate and destroy enemy radio transmitters.

Radio was invented in the late 19th century, changing and expanding the world of communication forever. Suddenly music and voices could be carried invisibly through the air on radio waves, to be heard far and near. What now seems common seemed miraculous then. Still, it was many years before the radio became a household item.

In the early 1900s, radio was primarily used for communication with ships at sea by way of Morse code, a system for transmitting information through tones, lights, or clicks. During World War I it was recognized by the military as an excellent tool for sending and receiving vital messages. Following the war, the civilian population discovered the wonders of radio. It was a fresh, exciting way to get news and entertainment.

In Germany, leaders of the Nazi Party recognized the promise of radio for spreading propaganda. However, it was necessary to control what the public heard. A cheap "People's Radio" that anyone could afford was made available to German citizens in 1933. By design, it could not receive transmissions from outside Germany. Listeners heard only news, advice, speeches,

programs for the Hitler Youth, music, and other forms of entertainment that had been approved by the German Ministry of Propaganda and Enlightenment. Any broadcast of American jazz and swing music or music composed by Jews was prohibited.

By 1938 the Nazis were beaming pure propaganda into German households over more than nine million radios. In factories and offices, workers were compelled to listen to scheduled government broadcasts. By 1941 the number of radios in homes had increased to 15 million, bombarding about 50 million people with a steady stream of indoctrination.

## Paris and the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle

In the novel, Paris is the home of Marie-Laure and her father, Daniel LeBlanc. Daniel is the principal locksmith of the city's Natural History Museum (Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle).

The museum was founded in 1793, during the French Revolution (1789–99), a period of social and political upheaval that culminated with the rise of Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. Though it is now made up of a collection of sites scattered throughout France, the original three buildings were located in the Jardin des Plantes (Garden of Plants) featured in the novel. Among these is the Mineralogy and Geology Gallery. By spring 1940 the threat of a German invasion loomed over the city. In an interview, Doerr suggests the possibility that the museum's curators scrambled to crate up and hide the most precious gems and minerals in its collection. In the novel they most wish to hide a (fictitious) cursed diamond, the Sea of Flames.

Paris fell to German forces in 1940 and was occupied for four years. However "the City of Light" was a prize highly coveted by Hitler and so was shielded from the ravages of war during that time. But as the tide turned against Hitler, he could see Paris slipping from his grasp and ruthlessly ordered its destruction. The defiance of German general Dietrich von Choltitz saved Paris from this fate when he surrendered the city to French forces rather than follow Hitler's orders.

## Saint-Malo

When Paris falls to the Germans, Daniel LeBlanc and his daughter flee to Saint-Malo, France, to live with Daniel's uncle Etienne. In this walled port city, the stories of Marie-Laure, Werner, and a Nazi treasure hunter converge.

Author Anthony Doerr first encountered this ancient city on a book tour of France. Located in Brittany, on the coast, Saint-Malo appeared to be centuries old, and indeed it had been founded in the sixth century. As a walled citadel, it had served as a stronghold for 17th-century privateers or maritime warriors. However, the city that captured Doerr's imagination was not the original, but a replica.

During World War II, Saint-Malo was occupied by German forces. In August 1944 American liberation forces bombed the city into rubble. After the war ended, the Malouins, or people of Saint-Malo, painstakingly rebuilt the entire city, block by block, from its castle to its cobbled streets, over a period of 12 years.

## Author Biography

### Early Life and Education

Pulitzer Prize-winning author Anthony Doerr grew up in Novelty, Ohio, not far from Cleveland, where he was born on October 27, 1973. Young Doerr and his two older brothers balanced an active outdoor life of fishing, riding bikes, and hiking in the woods with quiet time spent reading. In their home, books were everywhere, and Doerr's father ran a small printing company. Doerr fondly recalls being read to by his mother. Listening as she read British writer C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* series (1950+) sparked in Doerr an interest in books, writing, and the magic of words.

Doerr attended Bowdoin College, a private liberal arts college in Maine, where he majored in history and met his future wife, Shauna. He then returned to Ohio to earn his Masters of Fine Arts degree at Bowling Green State University.

## Writing Career

In 2001 Doerr submitted a short story to the *Atlantic Monthly* and, with its acceptance, enjoyed his first success as an author. This quickly led to publication of his collection of stories, *The Shell Collector* (2002). Inspiration for the series of eight tales sprang from his childhood collection of shells, rediscovered one day while visiting his parents. His fascination with shells he attributes to his mother, a science teacher who encouraged her sons to learn about other living things.

*The Shell Collector* earned Doerr numerous awards, including the Rome Prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Discover Prize, and two O. Henry Prizes, given to short fiction works. Doerr followed up this success with his first full-length novel, *About Grace* (2004), which was also well received. His next work, *Four Seasons in Rome* (2007), chronicles family life as he, his wife, and their twin baby boys, Henry and Owen, spend a year-long holiday in Rome. The author followed up this memoir with *Memory Wall* (2010), a collection of short stories about memory. Then he delivered his most acclaimed work to date, *All the Light We Cannot See* (2014), written over a 10-year period beginning in 2003. In addition to winning the 2015 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, the novel earned Doerr the 2014 Goodreads Choice Awards for Historical Fiction. The novel reached the top of the *New York Times* best-seller list and remained a best seller for 134 straight weeks.

Doerr's short stories and essays have won an impressive array of awards and have been anthologized in numerous collections. His written works have been translated into over 40 languages. Film rights for *All the Light We Cannot See* were acquired by 20th Century Fox in 2015.

## Characters

### Marie-Laure LeBlanc

In 1934 Marie-Laure LeBlanc is a tall, freckled six-year-old living in Paris with her widower father, Daniel. By 1944 she is 16 and living in the walled city of Saint-Malo with her great-uncle, Etienne. She is intelligent, brave, and wise despite her youth. Repeatedly in the face of danger, she turns her disciplined

mind to logic and reason rather than giving in to fear. At age six Marie-Laure loses her sight, but with her father's help she learns to "see" the world through touch. She learns Braille, and through Braille books takes imaginative journeys that also nourish her passion for the natural sciences. With her adept fingers, she studies a small but accurate model of Paris carved by her father, until she can safely navigate the real city streets. She also eagerly explores the Natural History Museum where her father works, and spends a great deal of time with Dr. Geffard, the mollusk expert. When war comes to Paris, she and her father take refuge in Saint-Malo, France. After Germans occupy the city, she becomes involved in the resistance movement, where her bravery becomes an inspiration to others. Her life intersects briefly with that of Werner Pfennig. It is a transformative moment in which he redeems himself and salvages his soul. Marie-Laure and her story reflect the title of the book by contrasting her inability to see with her inner light, or spirit. The war for her is a private memory—one of many invisible stories of ordinary people.

### Werner Pfennig

In 1934 Werner Pfennig is an undersized eight-year-old German boy with snow-white hair, ears that stick out, and a high, sweet voice. He is gifted with an innate understanding of mechanics and dreams of becoming a great scientist in Berlin. By 1944, at age 18, Werner is a graduate of a Nazi training school and a German private hunting and destroying enemy radio transmitters. Werner and his sister, Jutta, are raised by Frau Elena at Children's House in Zollverein, a German mining town. Like other children at the orphanage, they have lost their father to the mines. Recognizing Werner's intelligence and potential, Frau Elena encourages his interest in science and mechanics and teaches him French. His true gift comes to light when he repairs a broken radio and enhances it to receive broadcasts from outside of Germany. Werner is captivated by this powerful new way to explore the world through radio waves. When his skill leads to acceptance at an elite Nazi training school, Werner thinks it is his chance to achieve his dream. He is flattered to be considered exceptional and seduced by the promise of participation in great things. Ambition blinds him to the fact that his talents are being appropriated by the Nazis and used in the service of evil. In Saint-Malo, Werner's life intersects with that of Marie-Laure. He awakens to the truth that he has been lying to himself. Risking everything to save her life, he at last redeems his soul.

## Daniel LeBlanc

Daniel LeBlanc is the principal locksmith for the Natural History Museum in Paris, a widower, and father of Marie-Laure. A thin, beak-nosed man, he is high-strung and smokes too much. When his daughter goes blind, Daniel uses his professional skills to carve a model replica of Paris. She learns by touch how to navigate the city's streets. When the Germans bomb Paris, he flees with Marie-Laure to the home of his uncle, Etienne, in Saint-Malo. He secretly carries with him the museum's most fabulous diamond, the Sea of Flames. His mission is to keep it out of the hands of the Nazis. A practical man, Daniel lives by the principles of logic and reason. He believes every problem has a solution just as every lock has a key. He resists belief in the supernatural or superstition, yet possession of the Sea of Flames tests his conviction. According to legend, the diamond brings misfortune to those whom its keeper loves. Sometimes it seems to Daniel that dark, invisible forces are at work around him. Daniel is proud of Marie-Laure's bravery and resilience. Yet he fears he's been inadequate as a parent and that his love is not enough. When a telegram summons him back to Paris, he does all he can shield her from harm. Hidden in the replica of Saint-Malo he has carved for her, he leaves behind the Sea of Flames as a talisman to protect her. Daniel never returns and dies in prison in 1942.

## Etienne LeBlanc

In 1944 Etienne LeBlanc is 63 years old, "stick-thin," and "alabaster-pale." He lives in the tall, slender house at Number 4 rue Vauborel in Saint-Malo, where he grew up with his much-loved brother Henri. Henri was Daniel's father and died in World War I. Etienne was with him at the time and has never recovered from Henri's death and other horrors experienced in that war. He has become a recluse, fearful of venturing outside. When Marie-Laure first meets Etienne, he seems kind and curious and radiates stillness. His voice is soft and low. Yet she knows he has spells when he sees frightful things that are not there. At these times he hides away in his room on the fifth floor. Etienne occupies the entire fifth floor of the house. He invites Marie-Laure to visit him, entertaining her with stories, taking her on imaginary journeys, and reading to her from books by the great naturalist Darwin. Sometimes they listen to music from one of his 13 radios. Eventually he shows Marie-

Laure a secret radio transmitter in the attic. From here, Etienne once broadcast recordings made by Henri—science lessons for children. Henri was the radio "Professor" heard by Werner and Jutta in faraway Zollverein, Germany. In 1942 Etienne joins the resistance movement in Saint-Malo, successfully battling the agoraphobia that has kept him confined to the house. In 1944 he is imprisoned by the Germans during the bombing of Saint-Malo, but he lives to be reunited with Marie-Laure.

## Frank Volkheimer

Frank Volkheimer grew up in Prussia, a heavily forested region in northern Germany bordering Russia. Before the age of steamships, Volkheimer's great-grandfather was a sawyer, cutting down giant trees that would become the masts of sailing ships. Desperate to leave this backwater region, Volkheimer applies and is accepted to Schulforta, where he first meets Werner Pfennig. He is three years older than cadet Pfennig. Volkheimer has high cheekbones, a long nose that is flared at the tip, and a "chin like a continent." He loves classical music. At the school, his impressive stature and strength earn him the nickname "the Giant." By the end of the war he has killed a hundred or more men. Yet Volkheimer's relationship with Werner reveals a fundamental decency that Nazi indoctrination and war's insanity do not destroy. In the arena of war, Staff Sergeant Volkheimer heads up the team of radio hunters that includes Werner. By this time Volkheimer is hardened to the brutality of war and has learned to survive. He does what the Reich expects of him without emotion. Nevertheless, he develops a brotherly protectiveness for diminutive Werner. Like so many others in Werner's life, he recognizes the boy's gifts and sees what he might have become in better times. In Saint-Malo, when Werner betrays the mission, Volkheimer protects him with feigned ignorance. Long after the war, Volkheimer's enduring loyalty and fondness drive him to find Werner's sister and deliver into her hands the dead boy's few but meaningful effects.

## Frederick

Like Werner Pfennig, Frederick enters Schulforta when he is 14. Unlike Werner, he is a misfit. His wealthy, politically well-connected family lives in Berlin. Frederick's father is an assistant to an ambassador, and his mother is an ambitious woman. They have pushed their son into Schulforta to further

their standing within the Reich. As Frederick explains to Werner, they need him at the school, and he has no choice but to be there. Frederick has weak eyes and must mask his poor eyesight while at school. Yet he sees what is going on around him more clearly than Werner. He sees the moral decay in what cadets are being taught and how they are being warped by relentless propaganda. Frederick also understands that Werner attends Schulpforta in pursuit of a dream, not to become a Nazi. He chides his friend for believing he has given up nothing in exchange for education and opportunity.

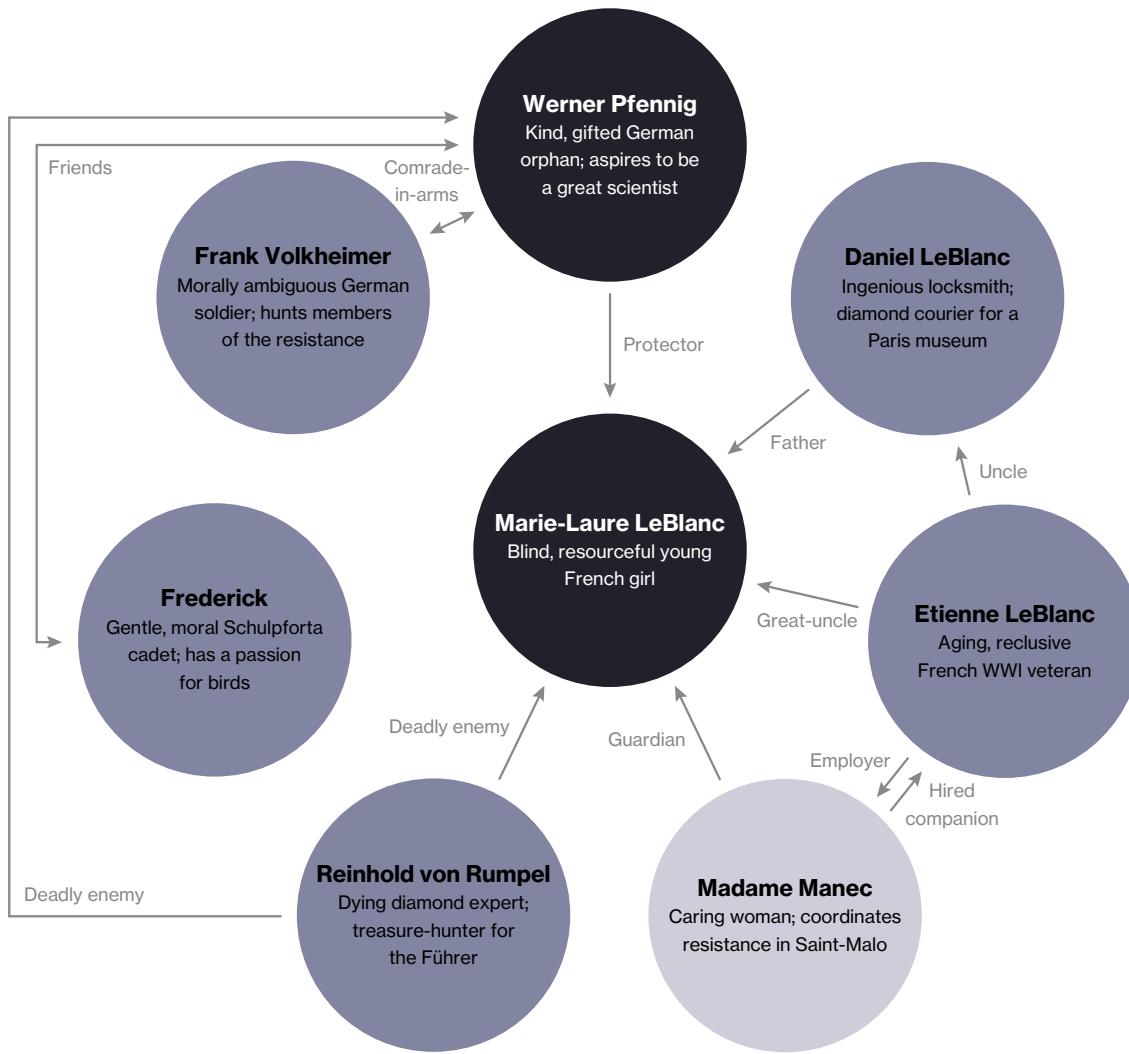
Frederick becomes a voice of conscience as Werner's story unfolds. Frederick resists the corrupting influence of Nazi ideology, and his gentle nature remains unchanged. With rare courage, he stands up to its cruelty and evil and pays a terrible price. He is a reflection of what Werner at last realizes he can and should aspire to be morally. He becomes a vehicle by which Werner makes amends for the consequences of his blind ambition. Frederick has a passion for birds and their profound beauty. They represent the innocent world, when it was one endless garden.

leads him to Saint-Malo and Marie-Laure.

## Reinhold von Rumpel

Before the war, Reinhold von Rumpel was a gemologist who ran a mostly honest appraisal business in Stuttgart. He is also a diamond expert. He has moist red lips and pale cheeks. He is married with two young daughters. Because of the war, von Rumpel has risen to the position of Sergeant Major. He now oversees the packing, crating, and cataloging of jeweled treasures confiscated from German-occupied territory. His dream is to track down the fabulous Sea of Flames diamond, adding this crowning touch to the Führer's vast collection of precious objects. Von Rumpel is well aware of the diamond's legendary curse—that its keeper cannot die though misfortune will come to those he loves. When the sergeant major begins his hunt for the Sea of Flames in 1940, he is 41 and beginning to show signs of illness. A cancer is spreading like a vine throughout his body. As it grows the diamond's legend of immortality takes on more profound significance for him. Though cruel and greedy, the sergeant major is a practical man who relies on patience, manipulation, and cunning to achieve his goals. However, as his illness progresses and it becomes clear that he is dying, he succumbs to superstition. The desperate hope that the legend is true soon drives his relentless search. He will stop at nothing to acquire the diamond, including torture and murder. His quest eventually

## Character Map



● Main Character

● Other Major Character

● Minor Character

# Full Character List

Character	Description
Marie-Laure LeBlanc	Marie-Laure LeBlanc is a brave and resourceful blind French girl. She lives in the walled city of Saint-Malo during its WWII German occupation and its liberation by American forces in 1944.
Werner Pfennig	Werner Pfennig is an intelligent, gifted German boy who dreams of being a scientist. He is seduced by Nazi propaganda into using his talents to serve the Reich during World War II.
Daniel LeBlanc	Daniel LeBlanc is Marie-Laure's loving father and the principal locksmith for the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris. When the city falls to German forces, he acts as a courier for the museum, transporting a legendary diamond to Saint-Malo in Brittany.
Etienne LeBlanc	Etienne LeBlanc is Marie-Laure's great-uncle and owns the house at Number 4 rue Vauborel in Saint-Malo, where the girl and her father take refuge during WWII. During the German occupation, Etienne becomes active in the resistance movement.
Frank Volkheimer	Staff Sergeant Frank Volkheimer is a giant of a man who heads up the team of radio hunters to which Werner is assigned. He remains Werner's loyal friend long after the war has ended.
Frederick	Frederick is Werner's bunkmate at the school at Schulpforta. He's a thin, reedy boy with pale skin and taffy-colored hair who loves birds. Despite his gentle nature, he demonstrates extraordinary strength of character.
Reinhold von Rumpel	Sergeant Major Reinhold von Rumpel is a middle-aged German diamond expert and treasure hunter for the Führer. He will go to any lengths to procure the legendary diamond known as the Sea of Flames.
Bäcker	Bäcker is a pigeon-toed, 14-year-old cadet in Werner's group at Schulpforta who singles out a boy, "Ernst Somebody," as the weakest in the group and thus someone to be purged.
Bastian	Bastian is the warrant officer in charge of field exercises at the school at Schulpforta. He is a cruel, overzealous schoolmaster who dislikes Frederick and targets him for physical and mental destruction.
Hubert Bazin	Hubert Bazin, a veteran of the Great War, lost his nose, left ear, and eye to shellfire. Also known as Crazy Hubert Bazin, he wears a mask over half his face. Bazin sleeps in an alcove behind the library in Saint-Malo and receives food from Madame Manec. He shows Marie-Laure a secret grotto under the ramparts of Saint-Malo and gives her the key to its gate.
Walter Bernd	Walter Bernd is a German engineer and member of the team assigned to track down illegal radio transmissions. He is "a taciturn, pungent man ... whose pupils are misaligned." When Saint-Malo is bombed, he is trapped with Werner and Volkheimer in the cellar of the Hotel of Bees. There he dies of wounds suffered when the hotel is hit.
Madame Blanchard	Madame Blanchard is a member of Madame Manec's resistance group of ladies responsible for writing "Free France Now" on every five-franc note the group can gather.

Dupont	Dupont is the lapidary (stonecutter) who cut three replicas of the Sea of Flames diamond for the National Museum of Natural History. They are used as decoys to conceal the true location of the stone.	Dr. Geffard	Dr. Geffard is an aging mollusk expert at the National Museum of Natural History. He lets Marie-Laure explore his vast collection of seashell specimens. She acquires knowledge of various mollusks and learns to recognize their shells by touch.
Ernst	Ernst is an ungainly, unexceptional boy identified in Werner's mind as "Ernst Somebody." He is a slow runner picked out by cadet Bäcker as the weakest in their group of 14-year-old cadets and is made to run while being chased by the 59 other boys.	François Giannot	Monsieur François Giannot is a friend of the National Museum of Natural History's director. When Paris falls to German forces, the director sends Daniel LeBlanc and his daughter Marie-Laure to Giannot's home in Evreux. But the home has been burned and Giannot has fled to London.
Frau Elena	Frau Elena is a kind and gentle Protestant nun from Alsace. She cares for the orphans at the Children's House in the mining town of Zollverein. Werner and Jutta are among those she looks after. Recognizing Werner's intelligence and natural curiosity, she teaches him French and encourages his interest in science.	Madame Guiboux	Madame Guiboux is a member of Madame Manec's resistance group of ladies.
Fanni	Fanni is a maid with baggy arms and a downy face employed at Frederick's home in Berlin.	Dr. Hauptmann	Dr. Hauptmann is the little, aristocratic professor of technical sciences at Schulpforta. He recognizes Werner's gift for understanding complex electronics and enlists the boy's talent to develop a device that will track down enemy radio transmissions during the war.
Siegfried Fischer	Siegfried Fischer is a young boy at the Children's House who is fiercely proud of Werner's acceptance to the National Political Institute of Education at Schulpforta. He hopes that, on behalf of all the orphans, Werner will do well and "show them."	Madame Hébrard	Madame Hébrard is the postmistress in Saint-Malo and a member of Madame Manec's resistance group of ladies.
Madame Fontineau	Madame Fontineau is a florist in Saint-Malo and a member of Madame Manec's resistance group of ladies.	Professor Hublin	Professor Hublin is the mineralogist at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris. He is present when Sergeant Major Reinhold von Rumpel forces the assistant director to surrender the Sea of Flames.
Francis	Francis is Marie-Laure's laboratory assistant at the Natural History Museum in 1974. He is present when Jutta brings Marie-Laure the carved model of Etienne's house.		

Jutta	Jutta is Werner Pfennig's sister. Two years younger than he, she is also white-haired, intelligent, curious, and lives in the Children's House. She is imaginative and artistic as well. She is 12 in 1940 when her brother goes off to the National School and fears for the affects of Nazi indoctrination on him.	Neumann One	Neumann One is a "gap-toothed thirty-year-old" driver assigned to help Sergeant Volkheimer and Werner track down enemy radio transmissions. In a world without war, Neumann One might have been a barber, but he dies instead on the beaches of Normandy.
Henri LeBlanc	Henri LeBlanc is Etienne's brother, Daniel's father, and Marie-Laure's grandfather. He died during WWI while protecting his brother. He and Etienne built the radio transmitter in the attic of Number 4 rue Vauborel to broadcast Henri's science lectures for children. These recordings are the ones Werner and Jutta hear in far-off Zollverein. They know Henri as the Professor.	Neumann Two	Neumann Two is a "dangerously underweight corporal" who fetches Werner from Schulpforta and delivers him to his first assignment tracking down enemy radio transmissions. In Vienna Neumann Two shoots an innocent mother and child by mistake.
Claude Levitte	Claude Levitte, also known as Big Claude, runs a perfumery in Saint-Malo on the rue Vauborel. He watches Daniel LeBlanc pace off the street, study houses, and make notes on a pad, and reports this to the Germans occupying the city. As a result Daniel is arrested.	Herribert Pomsel	Herribert Pomsel is a 14-year-old boy at Children's House who joins the Hitler Youth in 1936. He is soon corrupted by Nazi ideology.
Madame Manec	Madame Manec has cared for Etienne for 20 years, cooking, keeping house, and watching over him during his dark, haunted days. She takes care of Marie-Laure after Daniel disappears. She is short, wears heavy shoes, and has the rough, strong hands of a geologist or a gardener. During the German occupation of Saint-Malo, she organizes a resistance movement.	The Professor	The Professor is the "velvet" voice of a young Frenchman picked up by Werner's radio. His science lessons for children awaken in the boy a profound sense of life's possibilities. The lessons are recordings made long ago by Henri LeBlanc and broadcast from Saint-Malo by his brother, Etienne.
Michel	Michel is the grown-up Marie-Laure's 12-year-old grandson by her daughter Hélène.	Madame Ruelle	Madame Ruelle is the baker's wife in Saint-Malo and a member of Madame Manec's resistance group of ladies. She passes coded messages to Madame and, later, to Etienne, printed on tiny scrolls of paper baked into a plain loaf of bread.
		Helmut Rödel	Helmut Rödel is a small, unpromising cadet at Schulpforta "who keeps his hands balled in fists nearly all his waking hours." During one of commandant Bastian's field exercises, Helmut identifies Frederick as the weakest among the 14-year-old cadets. He is then ordered to beat Frederick with a three-foot-long hose.

Martin Sachse	Martin Sachse is a younger boy at Children's House who pesters Werner with questions about his acceptance to the National Political Institute of Education.
Hans Schilzer	Hans Schilzer is a 13-year-old boy at Children's House who joins the Hitler Youth in 1936. He is soon corrupted by Nazi ideology.
Herr Rudolf Siedler	Herr Rudolf Siedler is a German official stationed in Zollverein. Werner's exceptional skill fixing radios comes to his attention, and he helps Werner gain entrance to the Nazi youth training school at Schulporta.
Frau Schwartzenberger	Frau Schwartzenberger is a Jewess who lives in the same five-story Berlin townhouse as Frederick's parents. Frederick's mother covets Frau Schwartzenberger's top-story apartment and hints that soon the "crone" will be gone and the top floor will be hers.
The Warder	The "hunchbacked," elderly warden works as a guide for the Natural History Museum in Paris. It is from him that Marie-Laure first hears the story of the cursed diamond, the Sea of Flames.

accurate model of Paris. With her clever fingers, Marie-Laure explores the streets and buildings, translating them into a life-sized map in her mind.

Shortly before she loses her sight, Marie-Laure learns of the museum's spectacular cursed diamond, the Sea of Flames, hidden in a vault behind 13 locked doors. According to legend, "The keeper of the stone would live forever, but so long as he kept it, misfortune would fall on all those he loved."

## Werner in Zollverein

In that same year Werner Pfennig is eight and living in the Children's House in Zollverein, a coal-mining complex outside Essen, Germany. Like other children in the orphanage, Werner and his little sister, Jutta, have lost their father in a mining accident. Werner's biggest fear is that he will be sent to work in the mines and similarly die. The children are cared for by a benevolent French woman, Frau Elena. Early on she recognizes Werner's intelligence and natural curiosity, teaches him French, and encourages his interest in science.

One day, rummaging through some trash, Werner finds a broken radio. He cleans it up, studies it, and figures out how it works. Three weeks later he has managed to fix it, and he and Jutta hear their first radio broadcast: music. Later, by enhancing the radio, they hear transmissions from a far-away Frenchman whom they dub the Professor. In science lectures for children, the Professor delves into the very things Werner has most wondered about.

The trajectory of Werner's life changes in 1940. His growing skill at repairing radios comes to the attention of a German official, Herr Siedler. He recommends the 14-year-old boy for admittance to the National Political Institute of Education. Located at Schulporta, Germany, it is a high-ranking Nazi school. Here Werner will join the ranks of the State Youth.

## Plot Summary

### Marie-Laure in Paris

In 1934, Marie-Laure is six years old and living in Paris with her widower father, Daniel LeBlanc. He is the trusted locksmith for the National Museum of Natural History. Late in the year, Marie-Laure loses her sight. Daily, she accompanies her father to the museum and often spends time in the laboratory with mollusk expert Dr. Geffard, exploring his seashell collections. At other times she remains in the key pound with her father and learns to read by studying Braille. To help Marie-Laure navigate the city, her father carves an elaborate and very

### Flight to Saint-Malo

That same year, life changes dramatically for 12-year-old Marie-Laure and her father when the Germans invade Paris. The two flee to the walled citadel of Saint-Malo, on the coast of France in Brittany, to live with Daniel's uncle, Etienne LeBlanc. Though Etienne is a recluse tormented by memories of World War I, he welcomes Marie-Laure and Daniel. He

delights in Marie-Laure's visits to his fifth-floor study in this "tall, derelict bird's nest of a house." She, in turn, is charmed by his stories of the world and intrigued by his collection of radios. One especially powerful radio transmitter is located in the attic, above her sixth-floor bedroom. In the past her great-uncle would transmit old recordings of his dead brother (her grandfather) Henri LeBlanc's science lectures for children.

Before leaving Paris, the museum entrusted Daniel LeBlanc with a stone: possibly the infamous Sea of Flames. His mission is to hide it from the Nazis, who are intent on confiscating all the treasures of Europe. Three fakes of the stone have been made. Of these, one resides in the museum's special vault. The other two and the real stone have been sent to different parts of the country. Only the museum director knows who carries the cursed diamond.

## At Schulforta

At the National School, Werner is indoctrinated with Nazi ideology while studying mechanics, history, literature, racial sciences, and the like. He is befriended by a gentle-natured boy from Berlin named Frederick. The boy's passion is studying birds, and he attends the school only to boost his father's political status within the Reich. Werner soon earns the respect of the technical sciences instructor, Dr. Hauptmann. The instructor enlists Werner to help him design a complex device for tracing the location of radio transmissions. When it is perfected, the device will target transmissions used by enemy forces to coordinate attacks against Germans.

## The Scale Model and the Treasure Hunter

In Saint-Malo, Marie-Laure's father carves her a scale model of the town to help her learn its topography. As Marie-Laure discovers later on, the model serves a second purpose. Daniel walks the streets, counting the paces and figuring measurements of the buildings. A French informer takes note and reports this "suspicious" behavior to the German authorities now occupying the town.

In the meanwhile, a 41-year-old diamond expert and treasure hunter for the Reich has stumbled upon the legend of the Sea

of Flames. He is Sergeant Major Reinhold von Rumpel. Intent on acquiring this extraordinary jewel, he soon tracks it to the Natural History Museum in Paris. However, the stone in the vault proves to be one of the three clever fakes. He learns that the real diamond has been sent away with one of three possible couriers. One courier may be the museum's former locksmith, Daniel LeBlanc.

## Saint-Malo's Secrets

In Saint-Malo Daniel receives a telegram from the museum in late December 1940 asking him to return and to "travel securely." He promises Marie-Laure that he will be back in no more than 10 days but is arrested by the Germans before reaching Paris and never returns. Though she receives occasional letters in which her Papa assures her he is in a "good place" with plenty of food, she and her great-uncle are unable to determine the truth of this or where he is.

As the living conditions in Saint-Malo deteriorate under German occupation, the woman who for decades has cared for Etienne organizes a resistance effort. She is Madame Manec, and her group is mostly older women. However, a homeless man, Hubert Bazin, contributes to their cause. He also shows Marie-Laure a secret grotto beneath the ramparts of Saint-Malo where he, Etienne, and Henri played as boys. Bazin gives her the iron key to this hiding place shortly before he disappears.

## Radios

The war wages on. At the National School, indoctrination in Nazi ideology continues, but Werner's friend Frederick cannot be corrupted. As a result he is badly beaten and sent home unable to think or care for himself. During this time Werner helps Dr. Hauptmann perfect his device for tracking down radio transmissions. Then in 1942 Werner is assigned to a special division of the Wehrmacht (armed forces of Nazi Germany) that puts this technology to use. He will be working under Staff Sergeant Volkheimer, a former upperclassman at the school.

In June 1942 Madame Manec falls ill with pneumonia and dies. Though Etienne has been reluctant to get involved in the resistance, he does so now to honor the brave efforts of this

woman. By this time all of the radios in Saint-Malo have been confiscated by the Germans. However, Etienne's radio transmitter remains hidden in the attic. From here he transmits codes that have been passed to Marie-Laure by the baker's wife, Madame Ruelle, on tiny scrolls of paper baked into plain loaves of bread.

By the time 1943 becomes 1944, the treasure hunter von Rumpel has found all three fake stones. Whoever is courier of the fourth holds the real stone. Von Rumpel's investigation leads him to Etienne's house in Saint-Malo, where the sergeant major is certain the Sea of Flames must be hidden. He is now obsessed with finding the jewel with its promise of eternal life. He has been diagnosed with cancer and given four months to live.

In April 1944 Werner and his team of radio hunters are sent to Saint-Malo to track down illegal transmissions. As he travels through war-torn Europe, it is clear to Werner that Germany is losing and that the utopian visions of a victorious Reich were lies. Rather than the order, beauty, and purity that were promised at the Nazi school, he sees destruction, deprivation, and death in the wake of German forces.

## Intersecting Paths

The stage now is set for the climax of the novel. The life paths of 18-year-old Werner Pfennig, 16-year-old Marie-Laure LeBlanc, dying treasure hunter von Rumpel, and the cursed Sea of Flames will intersect in Saint-Malo in August 1944, when the citadel is bombed by American forces.

Before the bombing, Etienne is imprisoned by the Germans in the nearby Fort National, leaving Marie-Laure alone in the house. She has discovered the diamond secreted by her father in the tiny carving of Etienne's house, which may be lifted out of the model and opened like a puzzle box. Grasping the stone's significance, she keeps the house and its secret with her.

The bombing of Saint-Malo begins on August 8, 1944. Marie-Laure hides in the kitchen cellar. Werner, Volkheimer, and a dead engineer are trapped in the basement of the Hotel of Bees. Their only contact with the outside world is a broken radio that can receive but cannot send signals. Von Rumpel waits for the bombing to cease so he can ransack Etienne's house for the stone.

Four days later Marie-Laure is trapped in the attic with Etienne's radio transmitter. The only access to this space is through a cunning door at the back of a heavy wardrobe on the sixth floor. Below her, von Rumpel searches every floor of the house again, seeking the stone. He has been here since August 8th.

Desperate to be heard by friendly forces and rescued, Marie-Laure starts up the transmitter and begins to read from her Braille copy of *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*. Across town, beneath the rubble of the Hotel of Bees, Werner catches the broadcast and knows it issues from the transmitter he was sent to Saint-Malo to destroy. He knows the girl who is reading. Before the bombing he has seen her in the town, followed her to the bakery, and protected her by not reporting illegal transmissions from her house. Now, when the girl suddenly stops reading and whispers "He is here. He is right below me," Werner's instinct is to find some way to save her.

With the daring use of a grenade, Volkheimer and Werner break free of their tomb. Werner heads directly to the tall, bird's-nest house where the girl is trapped. He arrives in the nick of time. Von Rumpel has figured out that a secret room exists.

## The Plot Threads Resolve

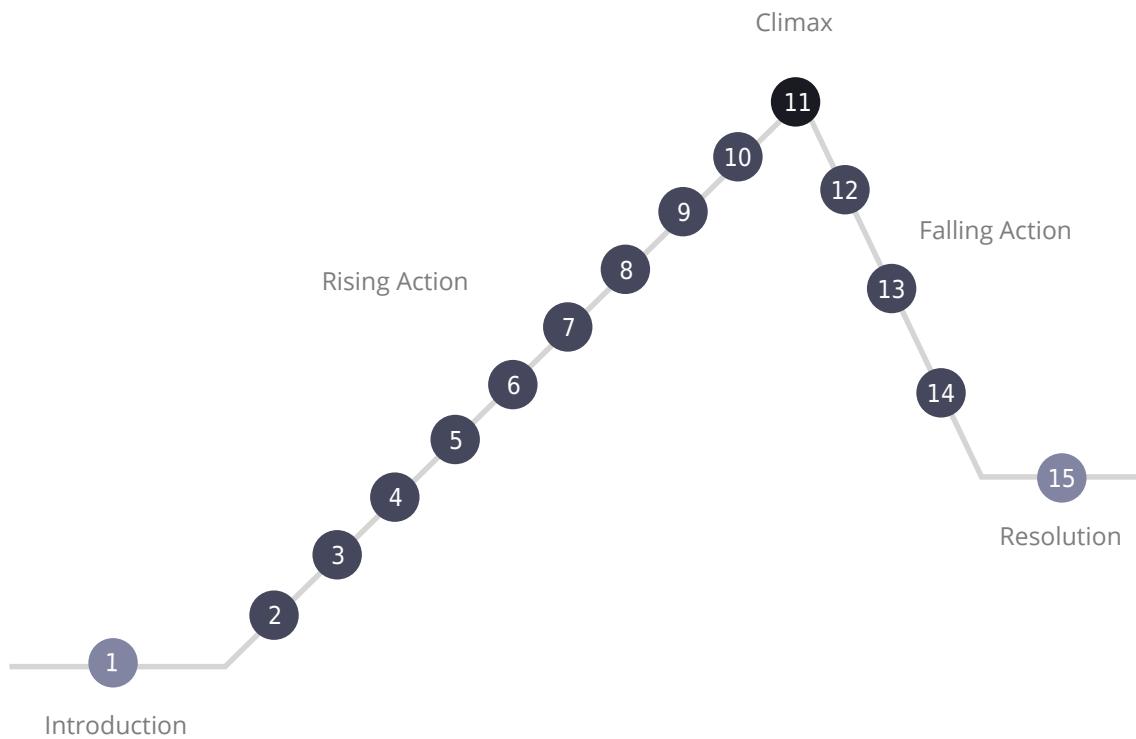
In a scuffle the sergeant major is shot dead. Marie-Laure is rescued, and Werner directs her to where refugees from the town are being taken to safety. Here she is reunited with her great-uncle Etienne and Madame Ruelle. Werner intends to head home to Germany but is arrested by the Americans instead and dies not long after when he steps on a landmine.

Before they part ways forever, though, Marie-Laure has led Werner to the grotto beneath the rampart walls. With the key given her by Hubert Bazin, she enters, takes the little house with its hidden stone, and tosses it into the sea. She entrusts the key to Werner.

The loose ends of the story are tied up 30 years later. In 1974 the carved replica of Etienne's house makes its way from a US Army prisoner-of-war processing camp in Bernay, France, to Marie-Laure in Paris. On the way, it passes through Germany and the hands of Volkheimer, who survived the war, and Werner's sister, Jutta, who carries it to Marie-Laure. Inside the

little house's secret compartment is the iron key to the grotto. From this Marie-Laure understands that Werner went back and retrieved the model, perhaps as a keepsake, but left the stone where it belonged. Off the coast of Brittany, the Sea of Flames remains among the pebbles, covered with algae and barnacles, and crawled over by snails.

## Plot Diagram



### Introduction

1. German forces bomb Paris in June 1940.

### Rising Action

2. Daniel flees to Saint-Malo with Marie-Laure and a diamond.
3. Von Rumpel begins a hunt for the diamond.
4. Werner helps develop a device for tracking radio signals.
5. Marie-Laure's uncle uses radio to aid the French resistance.
6. Werner is sent to Saint-Malo to locate enemy transmissions.
7. The trail of the diamond leads von Rumpel to Saint-Malo.
8. American forces bomb Saint-Malo to drive out the Germans.

9. Marie-Laure hides as von Rumpel ransacks the house.

10. Werner responds to the girl's radio signals for help.

### Climax

11. Werner kills von Rumpel and saves Marie-Laure's life.

### Falling Action

12. Marie-Laure throws the troublesome diamond into the sea.
13. Marie-Laure is reunited with her great-uncle.
14. Werner is killed when he steps on a landmine on the beach.

## Resolution

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15. The diamond remains hidden among pebbles in the sea.

## Timeline of Events

1934

Marie-Laure LeBlanc, age 6, lives in Paris with her father.

Same year

Werner Pfennig, age 8, lives in the Children's House orphanage in Zollverein, Germany.

Same year

Marie-Laure hears the tale of a cursed diamond kept in the museum vault.

Later that year

Marie-Laure loses her eyesight.

June 3, 1940

As the Germans bomb Paris, Marie-Laure and her father flee to Saint-Malo.

Some weeks later

Etienne shows Marie-Laure his secret radio transmitter in the attic.

About the same time

Werner finds and fixes his first radio, revealing a gift for complex mechanics.

About the same time

Werner begins his training at the National Political Institute.

During this time

Von Rumpel begins hunting for the cursed diamond, the Sea of Flames.

December 1940

Marie-Laure's father is arrested by German police and imprisoned.

**About the same time**

Madame Manec organizes a French resistance group in Saint-Malo.

**June 1942**

After Madame Manec dies, Etienne uses his radio to broadcast codes for the resistance.

**Summer 1944**

Von Rumpel comes to Saint-Malo to seize the Sea of Flames.

**August 7–8, 1944**

At midnight American forces begin to bomb Saint-Malo's citadel.

**Later in August**

Werner is killed when he steps on a landmine planted by German troops.

**Winter 1941**

Werner helps develop and test a new device for tracing secret radio transmissions.

**Spring 1942**

Werner joins a team to hunt and destroy enemy radio transmitters and their operators.

**April 1944**

Werner and his team are sent to Saint-Malo to track down enemy transmissions.

**August 6, 1944**

Marie-Laure discovers the diamond hidden in a carved model of Etienne's house.

**Four days later**

Saved by Werner, Marie-Laure throws the diamond in the sea.

# Q Chapter Summaries

*All the Light We Cannot See* unfolds in numbered, named parts, beginning with Part Zero: 7 August 1944. The part names provide important information to orient the reader given the novel's frequent leaps back and forth in time. Each of these parts is further divided into named sections.

## Epigraphs

### Summary

The novel opens with two epigraphs, or short quotations setting the stage for the story to come. The first is a quote from English historian Philip Beck, author of *The Burning of Saint-Malo*, describing the catastrophic destruction of the city in World War II. The second is from a 1933 speech by Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's Minister of Propaganda. It attributes the Nazis' ability to "take power [and] use it in the ways we have" to the radio.

## Analysis

The epigraphs signal the critical importance of a place and an object to the novel. Saint-Malo is where all the disparate plot threads will come together. The radio plays a key part in the story as a simultaneous inspiration for Werner Pfennig's love of science, vehicle for Nazi propaganda, and voice of the French resistance. It illustrates the way in which science can be used for good or ill, depending on the hands that manipulate it.

## Part Zero

### Summary

## Leaflets

At dusk, leaflets pour from the sky, warning residents of a walled town to head for the open country. Later that night, to the east, American artillery units begin to launch incendiary

bombs.

## Bombers

Crossing the English Channel at midnight, 12 planes approach the coast of France. Bombardiers peer down through aiming windows, count to 20, and drop bombs on the walled city.

## The Girl

In a corner of the city is a tall, narrow house at Number 4 rue Vauborel. Inside, 16-year-old Marie-Laure LeBlanc waits for her great-uncle Etienne to return. He has been gone since the previous night. To occupy her mind, Marie kneels beside a miniature replica of the town and traces its buildings and pathways with her fingers, whispering their names as her fingers walk along. Marie is sightless.

When she hears the hum of approaching bombers, she goes to the bedroom window. Lodged in the shutter slats is a crisp sheet of paper that smells of fresh ink. Marie stands there, listening to the growing drone of the airplanes. Behind her in the room are neat displays of seashells and pebbles, a cane in the corner, and a Braille novel on the bed.

## The Boy

Five streets to the north, in L'hôtel des Abeilles, the Hotel of Bees, 18-year-old Werner Pfennig awakens to the sound of antiaircraft flak guns. A corporal, hurrying down the corridor, calls out, "Get to the cellar."

The history of the hotel began five centuries ago. It was the home of a wealthy privateer who "gave up raiding ships to study bees in the pastures outside Saint-Malo." Over time it was transformed into an elegant hotel that once hosted emissaries of the French republic and, more recently, Parisians on holiday. However, over the last few weeks, it has become a fortress. Windows are boarded. On the fourth floor an antiaircraft gun has been installed. Werner can hear the Austrians who man the gun singing as they prepare to fire.

Before Werner reaches the cellar, the gun goes off three times, shaking the walls to their foundation and rattling his teeth.

## Saint-Malo

Only the poor, the stubborn, and those physically unable to leave are still in Saint-Malo. Some take refuge in bomb shelters. Some hope this is merely a drill. Two months ago, on D-Day (Allied liberation of Western Europe from Nazi control that took place from June to August 1944), much of France had been liberated by the Allies, and the tide of war had turned. Yet the fortress city of Saint-Malo remains a last stronghold for German forces. Rumors abound that a vast underground facility has been constructed that will allow the Germans to live in safety for a year and to bombard with mounted guns any ship seeking to attack from the sea.

The fortress city, part of France's Brittany peninsula, is surrounded by ocean and connected to the rest of France by "a causeway, a bridge, a spit of sand." On an outer island a quarter mile away stands another fortress, this one a prison. As antiaircraft shells howl over the sea, the 300 inmates of the prison wonder whether it means liberation or annihilation.

## Number 4 rue Vauborel

In her sixth-floor bedroom, Marie-Laure kneels beside the model of the city and traces the path from its outer ramparts to 4 rue Vauborel. She has lived in this "tall, derelict bird's nest of a house" owned by her great-uncle Etienne for four years. In the sky above the city, "a dozen American bombers roar toward her."

The floor under her is starting to vibrate as her fingers find a hidden catch that releases the little house from the model. Lifting it out, Marie-Laure twists the tiny chimney and slides off three wooden panels of its roof. Then she tips the little house, and a teardrop-shaped stone the size of a pigeon's egg falls into her hand.

## Cellar

In the Hotel of Bees, Werner Pfennig has taken refuge in the cellar. Hacked out of the bedrock, it will be safe from the bombing. With him are Staff Sergeant Frank Volkheimer and engineer Bernd. The cellar is crammed with confiscated treasures.

Werner starts up a two-way radio. It will allow him to

communicate with the antiair battery upstairs, on the third floor, as well as two other batteries inside the city walls and the defense forces stationed underground, across the river. Through his headphones Werner can hear the Austrians upstairs as they load and fire the gun.

Overhead, the ceiling lights flicker. The crackling of the radio reminds Werner of home, Frau Elena, and his little sister, Jutta. He also hears the radio voices of his childhood.

## Bombs Away

The 12 planes reach the city and release an avalanche of bombs—480 in all. The roar of the explosions drowns out the warning sirens. The antiair guns fire until empty. The bombers rise and peel away, unscathed.

On rue Vauborel, in her sixth-floor bedroom, Marie-Laure takes cover beneath her bed. She is clutching the stone and little model house.

The cellar beneath the Hotel of Bees goes dark.

## Analysis

Part Zero introduces the story's two main characters, Marie-Laure LeBlanc and Werner Pfennig, and a third character of significance, Frank Volkheimer. It establishes the historical time and place for the climax of the story in which the life paths of Marie-Laure and Werner will at last converge. This section also describes Saint-Malo's bombing from three perspectives: that of Marie-Laure, Werner, and the plane bombardiers. In addition, Part Zero sets up the structure of the novel.

The leaflets fall on August 7, and the bombers arrive shortly after midnight, on the 8th. From the airmen's perspective, the walled city of Saint-Malo looks like "an unholy tooth ... a final abscess" to be taken out—nothing more. Yet drawing closer, the reader discovers that the city teems with life. There are people who have not evacuated as the leaflets advised, individuals with lives and stories to tell. One of these individuals is Marie-Laure.

As Marie-Laure kneels by the model of Saint-Malo, she looks down on it from much the same perspective as the bombers. Through the tracing of her fingers, a picture of the city emerges, from its landmarks and streets to the irregular star

shape of its ramparts. The city is made real: a place where people live. Shortly after, this perspective is turned on its head. As Marie-Laure holds a tiny replica of Etienne's house in her hands, the bombers approach. Suddenly, it is as if she is in a tiny house and "giant fingertips seem about to punch through the walls." She is small and alone, and the bombers are indifferent to her fate.

The two vignettes about Marie-Laure leave the reader with many questions. Why is a girl who is blind alone in the house? Where is her great-uncle Etienne? Where is her father? How will she survive the bombing? How and why will she and Werner meet? What is the significance of the stone that drops out of the little house?

Not far from Marie-Laure, the German private, Werner, is stationed in the Hotel of Bees. At this time he and Marie-Laure have as yet to meet. However, the titles of their introductory vignettes—"The Girl" and "The Boy"—suggest they will come together in some meaningful way. In the cellar of the hotel, Werner works a two-way radio transceiver and thinks of home, Frau Elena, and his little sister, Jutta. There are tantalizing hints of his past in these memories and in the visions of sunflowers and blackbirds that will find explanation as Werner's story is told.

The structure of Part Zero will be repeated throughout the novel. In each part a series of sketches will build each storyline, piece by piece. Like separate parts of a giant puzzle, these stories come together in time to reveal how and why Marie-Laure and Werner are present in Saint-Malo in August 1944.

The ending of Part Zero is dramatic and fitting. The play of darkness and light in the lives of various characters is an important motif in the novel. In this moment, all physical light goes out of Werner's immediate world. However, in this darkness, invisible light in the form of radio waves will brighten not only the physical but also the spiritual night that has engulfed him.

## Part 1

### Summary

### Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle

In 1934 Marie-Laure is "a tall and freckled six-year-old" living in Paris. Her eyesight is rapidly failing. One day, on a children's tour of the National Natural History Museum, she hears the fable of the Sea of Flames for the first time.

Long ago in Borneo, a prince plucked a blue stone from a dry riverbed. On his way back to the palace, he was attacked by thieves and stabbed through the heart. Yet instead of dying as he should have, the prince crawled home and miraculously recovered 10 days later. Sitting up in bed, he opened his hand and found he had been clutching the blue stone all this time. His nurses concluded the stone had healing powers.

His father's jewelers said the stone was the largest raw diamond ever seen. Cutting it revealed an exquisite jewel "the blue of tropical seas" with "a touch of red at its center." But the diamond was cursed. Whoever kept it would live forever, but "misfortunes would fall on all those he loved." The priceless jewel, called the Sea of Flames, now belongs to the museum and is kept locked up, behind 13 iron doors, each one smaller than the one before it.

One month after her tour of the museum, Marie-Laure is blind.

### Zollverein

Zollverein is a 4,000-acre "coalmining complex" outside Essen, Germany. It is also where Werner Pfennig and his sister, Jutta, are raised in Children's House, an orphanage. Many of the orphans have lost their fathers to the coal mines. It is an impoverished time in Germany, when jobs are few, food is scarce, and hunger is always present.

Werner is seven in 1934. He is inquisitive and resourceful, always questioning the world and hunting for hidden treasures, like berries in brambles and food scraps in trash bins. Once in a while, Werner takes little Jutta, two years younger than he, to visit Pit Nine at the coal mine. Here a five-story-deep shaft leads to a sprawling maze of tunnels where the miners toil. Down there, Werner tells Jutta, is where their father died.

### Key Pound

Doctors have diagnosed Marie-Laure's loss of sight as caused by cataracts. Her blindness will be permanent. The world she

has known becomes a bewildering place "of bruises and wretchedness," impossible to navigate.

As if the family is cursed, Marie-Laure's father, Monsieur LeBlanc, had lost his own father in World War I and his wife in childbirth. Now his child is blind. Yet he dismisses this idea of being cursed. With his help Marie-Laure begins to adapt to her blindness.

Six days a week, Marie-Laure goes with her father to the National Museum of Natural History. He is the museum locksmith in charge of its thousands of iron keys and estimated 12,000 locks. Grave responsibility goes with this job. Keys and locks protect the museum's priceless treasures.

Every morning, Marie-Laure studies Braille for an hour. Her father also teaches her to identify keys by touch. He takes her on his rounds of the vast museum, and on some afternoons he leaves her with Dr. Geffard, "an aging mollusk expert." Dr. Geffard lets Marie-Laure explore his endless collection of seashells, and she learns to gather information through the testing and probing of her fingertips. She also acquires a love of shells.

In the evenings her father works to build a scale model of their neighborhood.

## Radio

When Werner is eight and Jutta six, Werner finds a broken radio behind a storage shed. Taking it back to Children's House, he dismantles it, cleans up the parts, and cleverly figures out what is wrong with the device. When he then tries it out, the first sound the receiver picks up is music. Werner swallows back tears as "an infinitesimal orchestra" seems to stir to life in his head. While around him the physical world has not changed, now there is music.

## Take Us Home

Marie-Laure's father builds her puzzle boxes for her birthday. By the time she is seven, her hands have become clever enough to find the key that unlocks a hidden compartment to reveal a gift in just four minutes. Monsieur LeBlanc also has finished his model of their neighborhood. But this model makes less sense to Marie-Laure. It is intended to help her learn to find her way through the city. But it cannot mimic the real world

with its ever-changing noises and smells that confuse her senses.

One cold Tuesday when the museum is closed, her father takes her to the edge of a garden they walk past every morning. On this day he stops and asks Marie-Laure to lead them back to their home, six blocks away. Fearfully she tries, but "the world pivots and rumbles." She is surrounded by bewildering sounds and uncertain space. In the end she cannot find the way home.

## Something Rising

Werner improves his radio and builds a loudspeaker so Frau Elena and the other children at the orphanage can listen to broadcasts. Through the radio, they hear speeches about a "new faith rising" in Germany. And indeed, something does seem to be rising. There is more work and more prosperity, even for the orphaned children.

In the autumn of 1936, the children raptly listen to a play about hook-nosed invaders who try to take over a German village and plot to murder the children. The plot is foiled by a humble man and the "big handsome-sounding policemen with splendid voices" who come to the rescue.

## Light

In the winter of 1936, when Marie-Laure is eight, the model of the city begins to make sense to her. She begins to connect details picked up by her fingers with their counterpart in the real world. At last, one Tuesday in March she leads her father in triumph from a spot along the banks of the Seine to their apartment house.

## Our Flag Flutters Before Us

In the spring of 1937, when Werner is 10, two older boys at Children's House—Hans Schilzer and Heribert Pomsel—join the Hitler Youth. Frau Elena becomes fearful of these boys. Werner decides it's best to remain inconspicuous around them and stick to his study of science. That same year, an official from the Labor Ministry comes to the orphanage "to speak about work opportunities at the mines." Werner thinks of his father dying down there, his body never recovered. He feels the walls around him closing in.

## Around the World in Eighty Days

In her head, Marie-Laure has mapped out all the rooms of the museum. She knows their unique smells, and she uses cables, pipes, railings, ropes, hedges, and sidewalks to guide her. Sometimes she gets lost, but there is always some kind person to bring her back to the key pound and her father.

For her ninth birthday she receives the expected puzzle box from her father as well as a second gift: a book in Braille, Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*. Marie-Laure is captivated by the story, and her museum wanderings cease. She reads and rereads the book, and it leaves her filled with a strange, fearless longing.

## The Professor

Werner has modified his radio to pick up transmissions from outside Germany. It picks up voices from far places like London, Rome, and Paris, and he and Jutta secretly listen to broadcasts after lights out in the orphanage. One night the radio picks up the velvet voice of a young Frenchman. The man is talking about the human brain's ability to imagine and construct a world of light, though the brain itself lives always in darkness. He goes on to discuss many related ideas, touching on the very topics Werner is most curious about. "Open your eyes," the professor concludes, "and see what you can with them before they close forever."

## Sea of Flames

In the museum, rumors circulate that the Sea of Flames is going to be put on display. Monsieur LeBlanc meets with the museum director and immediately after begins work on something quite secret deep within the Gallery of Mineralogy. Marie-Laure is not allowed to accompany him but must stay in the key pound. It has been four years since she first heard about the diamond and its curse, and Marie-Laure hopes that her father hasn't been anywhere near it.

## Open Your Eyes

Again and again, Werner and Jutta find and listen to the French professor's broadcasts. They learn and mimic the Frenchman's science experiments. The broadcasts inspire restlessness in

Werner and a growing sense of the greater world in which things of great importance are happening. He longs to be part of it.

## Fade

The Sea of Flames is not put on display. Marie-Laure's doubts about the curse begin to fade. Then for her 11th birthday, she receives a Braille copy of Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* from her father. The views of the story's narrator—marine biologist Pierre Aronnax—appeal to Marie-Laure. Aronnax believes logic, reason, and pure science are the means to unravel life's mysteries, rather than fables and fairytales.

## The Principles of Mechanics

A vice minister and his wife on a tour of orphanages come to inspect the Children's House. They are served supper with the children, and while at the table Werner studies a book in his lap. It is titled *The Principles of Mechanics*. It is old and water stained, but it teaches him about the invisible realm of electromagnetic waves. The vice minister catches him reading and demands to see the book, checking in particular to see if its author is a Jew. He then shoves aside the book and tells Werner that he, like all the boys in this house, is destined only for the coal mines.

## Rumors

New rumors begin to circulate around the museum that the Germans are coming. Already they have taken over Austria. Marie-Laure's father assures her that everyone remembers the last war; no one is mad enough to start another. Yet all summer, Marie-Laure "believes she can smell gasoline under the wind" as sits reading and rereading *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*.

## Bigger Faster Brighter

In Germany, membership in the State Youth is now compulsory. Boys are taught to live faithfully, fight bravely, and die laughing.

Meanwhile, Werner's skill in building and repairing anything

mechanical is growing, though his book *The Principles of Mechanics* has been confiscated. He becomes locally known as the radio repairman and soon knows the location of nearly every radio in the district.

The coal mines of Zollverein are busy seven days of week producing the raw iron ore to be melted, refined, and cast into steel bullets. Among people in the district, bigotry against Jews and non-Germans like Frau Elena is becoming more overt.

## Mark of the Beast

On a cold day in November 1939, Marie-Laure sits in the Jardin des Plantes, reading. She is approached by several boys who frighten her with tales of what the Germans will do to blind girls when they come. Already she has overheard whispering office girls in the museum exchange other alarming rumors. Though her father assures her that no war is coming, stores are selling gas masks and people are preparing for wartime blackouts by taping cardboard to their windows. At night Marie-Laure dreams of Germans sneaking up the Seine and into the museum. In her dreams "the windows go black with blood."

## Good Evening. Or *Heil Hitler* if You Prefer.

In May 1940 Werner turns 14. Next year he will be forced into labor in the coal mines. In his nightmares he walks the tunnels as the walls splinter and the ceiling falls. Awake, he is "hemmed in by the vast walls of the cokery and smelter and gasworks." Beyond are the villages and cities of the "ever-expanding machine that is Germany."

## Bye-bye, Blind Girl

War is no longer a question. It is coming. At the museum the collected treasures are being swiftly catalogued, crated, and shipped to safety. Marie-Laure's father works tirelessly to supply the locks and keys. Yet he does not forget Marie-Laure's birthday and gives her the second volume of *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*.

On June 1 airplanes appear, flying high in the sky. The next day, the radio stations begin to go out. Marie-Laure imagines the city to be the size of her father's model, with the shadow of a

great hand falling over it. She senses things are about to change forever.

## Making Socks

One night Werner wakes to find Jutta sitting next to the bed. She is listening to a radio report of German planes bombing Paris.

## Flight

The Germans have broken through France's defenses and are coming to Paris. In panic, people pack up valuables and try to flee the city. The museum director has arranged train tickets for Daniel LeBlanc and Marie-Laure. At the station Gare Saint-Lazare, they join a crowd of Parisians waiting and hoping the train will come to take them away.

## Herr Siedler

One evening after curfew, a lance corporal comes to the orphanage and asks Werner to come with him and bring his tools. He takes Werner to the largest house in the colony where the mining officials live. It is the home of Herr Siedler, and he wants Werner to repair his radio. It is the finest radio Werner has ever seen. His success at repairing it is rewarded with wedges of cake. Herr Siedler is impressed with Werner's skill and says he will write a letter to the recruiting board in Essen, who may be interested in a boy like him. He then gives Werner 75 marks and sends him back to the orphanage, where Frau Elena and Jutta are waiting.

## Exodus

At the train station, four hours pass and no trains arrive. Monsieur LeBlanc decides it will be better to walk. Heading west, he and Marie-Laure join a procession of people escaping on foot. By dusk the next day they are west of Versailles, and Marie-Laure can go no further. Her heels are bleeding. Leaving the road, she and her father settle down in a field. He explains that they are going to Evreux to stay with a friend of the museum, Monsieur Giannot. If he will not take them in, they will go to stay with Marie-Laure's "crazy" great-uncle in Saint-Malo.

Once Marie-Laure falls asleep, Daniel LeBlanc pulls a

drawstring bag from his tool case. Inside is a majestic blue stone the size of a chestnut. For safety's sake, the museum has made three decoys for the Sea of Flames. Of these three and the real diamond, only the director knows which is which. He has sent three diamonds off in different directions, while one remains at the museum. Daniel has no idea if the diamond he carries is one of the fakes or the real thing.

## Analysis

Part 1 takes readers back ten years to 1934 to fill in the backstories of Marie-Laure and Werner. Several beginning connections among characters are set up, though these connections will not become clear until much later in the novel. The novel's frequent leaps in time serve to slowly build an understanding of what the novel's central event—the destruction of Saint-Malo by Allied forces—means to the characters.

The childhood stories of Marie-Laure and Werner reveal the personal characteristics and experiences that will shape their decisions and their lives. Werner's life at the orphanage contrasts sharply with Marie-Laure's in Paris. His surroundings are grim, poverty stricken, and potentially dangerous; they are devoid of intellectual stimulation and hope. Marie-Laure, on the other hand, is surrounded by people and places that feed her mind and spirit in an atmosphere of safety and relative comfort.

Nevertheless, the boy and girl have several things in common. Both have lost someone dear to them. Werner has lost his father to the mines, and his mother is presumably dead as well. Marie-Laure's mother has died giving birth to her. Both children are intelligent, inquisitive, love science in some form, and possess natural gifts. They each inhabit a darkened world: Marie-Laure through blindness and Werner through poverty. However, their common love of science and books will shine light into that darkness. Both children also are cared for by people who recognize their gifts. And finally, both share a powerful connection with someone who will influence their life. Werner shares this with his young sister, Jutta. Marie-Laure shares this with her father, Daniel LeBlanc.

Other connections established in the beginning of Part 1 take on more meaning by its conclusion. For example, through fanciful drawings Jutta demonstrates her emotional connection to Paris. By the end of Part 1 she is appalled to learn that German planes are bombing the city. The news

comes to her by way of foreign broadcasts made illegal by the Reich, but Jutta is willing to risk listening in order to hear the truth, revealing the strength and integrity of her character.

It is Werner's ingenuity that has made the outside world accessible to Jutta and himself through radio. This connection once opened his mind to the wonders of music and science. By the conclusion of Part 1, he is beginning to shut out that world because it is increasingly dangerous to be caught listening to news of it. However, this early connection will have a far-reaching effect on Werner's life. From Part Zero, readers know radio still plays an essential role in his life in 1944.

In Marie-Laure's life, it is her father's puzzle boxes that will connect to events in her future. Like his birthday gifts, the tiny house Marie-Laure opens in Part Zero opens like a puzzle box to reveal the treasure inside. These childhood gifts prepare the girl for a time when such a box is not a toy or part of game but a serious matter.

With the introduction of the Sea of Flames in this section, an element of a fairytale enters the story. The stone and its curse are a contradiction to the science, reason, and logic that Daniel, Marie-Laure, and Werner embrace. The tale itself is gleefully told by a museum warden who is old, troll-like, and impish by nature, like someone out of a storybook. The diamond and its supposed curse will be a driving force throughout the novel. Its formal introduction here explains the mysterious stone hidden in the tiny puzzle house in Part Zero. However, the question remains as to why it is there, in Saint-Malo, and not at the museum in Paris.

Also introduced in this series of vignettes is the rise of Hitler's power and Nazi Germany. Just as Marie-Laure's model of Paris corresponds to the real city, the orphanage shows in miniature what is happening in all of Germany. Growing oppression infuses everyday life with fear. Voluntary membership in the Hitler Youth becomes mandatory, and boys soon become bullies. Frau Elena, a foreigner, is eyed with suspicion as never before. Anti-Semitism raises its ugly head, and the story hints of the forced euthanasia of disabled people like Marie-Laure. At the same time, mine production increases in preparation for war. Radio becomes a tool of propaganda tying "a million ears to a single mouth." And for Werner, who fears entrapment in the mines of Zollverein, a different trap opens up: He comes to the attention of Herr Siedler, a Nazi German mining official.

Certain moments in this part of the novel foreshadow key events. In the vignette titled "Key Pound," Daniel tells Marie-

Laure "he will never leave her, not in a million years." Yet in "Light," the reader learns that Marie will try all her life to remember her father's laugh. This suggests that her father may leave her after all, reminding readers of the moment in Part Zero when she whispers "Papa?" to an empty house.

Similarly, there is a moment when Werner takes to heart the radio professor's counsel, "Open your eyes and see what you can with them before they close forever." This phrase will drive him to pursue his dream to be a scientist in Berlin and foreshadows a time when, recalling this advice, his eyes will be opened to truth.

At the beginning of Part 1, the storylines of Werner and Marie-Laure are connected superficially. They are countries apart, with little reason to ever meet. However, by the end of Part 1 the threat of war draws their storylines closer. Herr Siedler's interest in Werner will change the trajectory of his life. The bombing of Paris has already changed this for Marie-Laure. Finally, in her letter to the Professor and her insistence on listening for truth on the radio, Jutta demonstrates courage and clear-eyed understanding of the world beyond her years. In her letter she asks why the Professor's broadcasts have gone silent. Her question foreshadows an answer that is found by Marie-Laure in faraway Saint-Malo.

## Part 2

### Summary

#### Saint-Malo

The fortress city of Saint-Malo shatters, crumbles, and erupts in flames as the bombers finish their work, peel away, and regroup over the Channel. Explosions on the rue de la Crosse lift the Hotel of Bees in a spiral of flame. It rains in pieces back to earth.

#### Number 4 rue Vauborel

Curled into a ball beneath her bed, Marie-Laure calls out for Papa. Clutched in her left fist is the blue stone, and in her right, the model house. To her the bombing feels as if a colossal tree in the middle of Saint-Malo is being pulled up by the hand of

God. Its vast network of roots that spread beneath the city is coming up, too, dragging along great heaps and clumps of granite. Then as the world settles, Marie-Laure smells smoke and knows something huge is burning beyond the shutters of her window; perhaps the entire town. She tries to calm herself with the thought that this is not reality.

### Hotel of Bees

The hotel has been hit, and when Werner recovers from the shock of it, he is in absolute darkness. A roaring sound deafens his ears, and the side of his face is wet. He is on his knees and cannot stand because the ceiling has come down. He cannot find his field light and has no idea where his two companions—Bernd and Frank Volkheimer—may be. He shouts into the darkness, "Are we dead? Have we died?"

### Down Six Flights

As the sound of the bombers fades away, the whistle and crash of artillery shells begins. One lands very near Number 4 rue Vauborel, and Marie-Laure knows she must get downstairs. In stocking feet—she cannot find her shoes—she starts down the stairwell, stopping on the third floor to drink her fill from a bathtub that has been filled with water. In the center of the first-floor kitchen, a trap door in the floor leads to a damp cellar. Marie-Laure grabs a half-loaf of bread from the cupboard, checks that she has the model house and its treasure safely tucked in her dress pocket, and starts down the cellar ladder, shutting the trap door after her.

### Trapped

In the cellar of the Hotel of Bees, Werner sees a light moving over the rubble. It is Volkheimer searching for his companions. His field light finds a mound of brick, mortar, and plaster that had been the staircase. Lifting aside chunk after chunk, he uncovers Bernd. After carrying the engineer to a still-upright armchair, Volkheimer searches for and finds Werner. The boy tells him they must find another way out. Still unable to hear, Werner reads the staff sergeant's lips: There is no other way out.

## Analysis

Part 2 picks up and moves along the storylines of Marie-Laure and Werner in Saint-Malo that began in Part Zero. The reader returns to the bombing of the city on August 8, 1944. The citadel that has withstood onslaughts for hundreds of years is in danger of being obliterated. This conjures up the words of the aging mollusk expert Dr. Geffard, who tells Marie-Laure in Part 1's "Rumors" section, "Nearly every species that has ever lived has gone extinct, Laurette. No reason to think we humans will be any different!" The Hotel of Bees is lifted and rains down to earth in pieces. Marie-Laure imagines the whole city being torn apart by the hand of God. Once again she cries out for her father, and the reader wonders where he is. Reflecting the motifs of lies as a form of self-protection, Marie-Laure tells herself that what is happening is not real.

In the cellar, Werner regains consciousness following the blast that leveled the Hotel of Bees. The cellar ceiling has caved in and he is unable to sit up, sharply reminding the reader of Werner's fear of the mines and being trapped. He is physically reliving his experience in Zollverein when the official from the Labor Ministry visits the orphanage. The man looks at the children as fodder for the mines. In his presence, Werner felt the ceiling of the room slip lower and the walls constrict. Not only is Werner trapped, but he cannot hear, and for a while he is surrounded by absolute blackness. Thus cut off from the others, he is as alone and sightless as Marie-Laure.

Marie-Laure demonstrates her bravery and presence of mind when she flees to the cellar. Her decision advances the theme of destiny in opposition to choices. Rather than giving in to fear and a fatalistic view that she is doomed, she summons her skills for navigating in darkness and finds her way to safety. This contrasts with Werner's situation in the cellar of the Hotel of Bees.

When Volkheimer locates Werner in the rubble, he says they are trapped with no way out. The reader is left with a cliffhanger that also supports the theme about destiny. Readers wonder: Has fate spared the two soldiers' lives only to let them die slowly from lack of food, water, and air? Or is there something they can do to save themselves and cheat fate?

Finally, in the vignette "Trapped," the character of Volkheimer begins to come into focus. The ease with which he moves the body of Bernd—as if he is "a child in the staff sergeant's

arms"—provides a sense of the German man's size and strength. Yet he handles the wounded man gently. He is genuinely concerned for Werner's welfare and takes care when he touches the blood on Werner's cheek. There is humanity in this portrayal that, as Volkheimer's story spins out, will be at odds with his cold detachment in performance of his military duties.

## Part 3

### Summary

#### Château

In June 1940 Marie-Laure and her father reach the town of Evreux two days after fleeing Paris. The town is in chaos, and the home of Monsieur Giannot, where the two refugees hoped to find shelter, has burned down. They learn the museum director's friend has run away to London.

All Daniel LeBlanc's hopes are shattered. He has let himself imagine the food, warmth, clean clothes, and safety that waited for them after these long days and miles of exhausting travel. He would hand over the stone to Giannot for safekeeping, and his duty would be fulfilled. In no time the invasion would be over and life would return to normal, "everything as before."

Now Daniel fears that it may be known he carries the stone. Someone may be after it. Fearfully he turns from the smoldering ruin of Giannot's château and heads east, carrying foot-sore Marie-Laure on his back.

Daniel spies a deserted farmhouse where he and Marie-Laure can take refuge in the barn. He tries to make light of their poor accommodations, but the little girl is not laughing. "Now we go find Uncle Etienne?" she asks. The answer is yes.

### Entrance Exam

The city of Essen is located 18 miles south of Zollverein. Here, at the National Political Institutes of Education, Werner joins the ranks of 100 boys to take the eight-day entrance exam. His family background is checked, every inch of his body is measured, his physical abilities are evaluated, and his range of

knowledge is tested. It is rumored that very few will be chosen, and Werner sometimes desperately wishes to be among them. Yet he is also haunted by a recent memory of Jutta. He sees his sister holding pieces of their smashed radio. He tells himself that he had destroyed the radio to keep her from listening to dangerous broadcasts and protect her. But Jutta has not spoken to her brother since.

The tests grow ever more grueling. As the days progress, boys begin to give up. On day eight, the toughest test of all requires each boy to climb an unsteady 25-foot ladder, step onto a tiny platform, and jump into a Nazi flag held by 12 other recruits. The first boy topples sideways from the platform and breaks both his arms. Other recruits stand indecisively, while the examiner times the delay and scribbles on his clipboard. One refuses to jump. Werner forces himself to think of the coal mine, his father lost in Pit Nine, and the fine cake he was given at the home of Herr Siedler. When his turn comes to climb the wobbly ladder, he scrambles up and jumps without hesitation, landing in the dead center of the flag. Rolling to his feet, he shouts, "Heil Hitler!"

## Brittany

A truck leaves Evreux in the morning carrying 12 passengers, including Marie-Laure and her father. Its destination is Saint-Malo in Brittany, on the coast of France. Well after midnight, the truck runs out of gas. Daniel and Marie-Laure continue on foot to the fortress city. As they enter Saint-Malo and wend their way through the streets, Daniel describes things to Marie-Laure. They find the house on rue Vauborel, ring the buzzer, and wait. Marie-Laure wonders what is happening to the rest of France. Who do the roads, the fields, the trees belong to now?

## Madame Manec

At Number 4 rue Vauborel, Madame Manec takes care of Etienne LeBlanc, who has not been well since he fought in World War I. When Daniel rings the buzzer, she answers and welcomes the refugees with open arms. Soon she is cooking them omelets and setting out bowls of canned peaches. She tells Daniel the town is crammed with people fleeing the Germans. She would give them shelter, if she could, but it would upset Etienne.

Marie-Laure eats and listens to the adults talk. Through an open window, she can hear "the hypnotic voice of the sea." At last she falls asleep.

## You Have Been Called

Five days after Werner returns from Essen, a letter arrives at the Children's House in an envelope embossed with an eagle and cross. The letter tells Werner "You have been called" and directs him to report to the National Political Institute of Education #6 at Schulforta, a Nazi boarding school. At last he has found a way to evade the threat of the mines.

The news spreads quickly through the neighborhood, and a celebration follows. But Jutta does not join in. She runs upstairs and will not come down. She "has spoken no more than six words to Werner since his return."

## Occupier

Marie-Laure awakens in a narrow bedroom on the sixth floor of her great-uncle's "strange, narrow house." She has slept most of the day. Going to the door, she calls out, "Hello?" which brings Madame Manec hurrying up the stairs. With Madame's help, she takes a warm bath in the narrow bathroom and dresses for dinner served in the narrow kitchen. As she, her father, and Madame Manec eat, they listen to the radio. The announcer reads an endless list of notices for people lost and separated from loved ones. Madame Manec notes, "Everybody has misplaced someone."

That night, before going to sleep, Marie-Laure's father tries to reassure her that they will stay in Saint-Malo only a while. Then they will return home, and things will be as they left them.

## Don't Tell Lies

Jutta still refuses to speak to Werner. But one day before he must leave for Schulforta and the National Political Institute of Education, he persuades her to go for an early-morning walk. She tells him he will become like Hans and Heribert, the two boys who joined the Hitler Youth. Before he destroyed their radio, she heard broadcasts from Paris describing atrocities being committed by Germans. This is the opposite of everything heard through German radio.

Werner argues that he will not change, and this move to the school could be beneficial. He can learn "to be a proper engineer," as he has always dreamed; maybe learn to fly an airplane. He tries to paint wonderful pictures of their future, but Jutta will not buy the lies. She tells him to lie to himself, if he wishes, but not to her. Ten hours later, Werner is on his way by train to the school.

## Etienne

Three days after Daniel and Marie-Laure arrive in Saint-Malo, Marie-Laure meets her great-uncle Etienne in a most unusual way. He invites her to his room on the fifth floor of the house by leaving a trail of seashells for her to follow. Welcoming her with a voice soft and low, like "a piece of silk," he introduces her to his treasures: 11 radio sets; hundreds of books; beetles in matchboxes; "a hundred more things she cannot identify." The room is tidy, and her great-uncle seems quite sane. While they sit and eat sandwiches brought up by Madame Manec, Etienne reads to Marie-Laure from Charles Darwin's *The Voyage of the "Beagle"*.

That same day, Marie-Laure's father is at the telegraph office. Through the window, he watches the arrival of more than a dozen Germans, including a field captain, to the Château de Saint-Malo. The mayor is waiting to greet the captain. Minutes later the shutters of an upstairs window are thrown open, and a crimson flag is unfurled over the lichen-streaked brick and secured to the sill.

## Jungmänner

Schulpforta is like a castle out of a storybook. The 400 cadets attending the school will be molded into men to serve the nation. "You will forgo comforts; you will live by duty alone. You will eat country and breathe nation," they are told. Portraits of the Führer "glower over every classroom," and the cadets study subjects such as poetics, mechanics, state history, and racial sciences. They also learn military history and hone their combat skills.

Werner has never felt "such a hunger to belong." Here his background does not matter. "Beneath the whip of the administration," they are all young men, mounds of clay to be molded.

Frederick, Werner's bunkmate, is also 14. He is a thin, reedy

boy with pale skin who loves birds. From his bunk, Frederick spots birds with his field glasses and keeps track of these sightings with marks on his bed rail.

## Vienna

Sergeant Major Reinhold von Rumpel is a 41-year-old treasure hunter for the Führer. He has a gift for cutting diamonds and for recognizing fakes at a glance. Before the war he was a highly regarded gemologist. Now he is a sergeant major responsible for overseeing the crating and cataloguing of France's confiscated treasures. These will be sent to Germany's high command.

It is rumored that the Führer is compiling "a wish list of precious objects from all around Europe and Russia." With that in mind, Reinhold von Rumpel is in Vienna to read old books about precious stones. At last he finds what he is seeking: the story of a legendary diamond called the Sea of Flames that was once possessed by a prince who could not be killed. He learns it may have been willed to the king of France in 1738 "on the condition that it be locked away for two hundred years."

## The Boches

The Germans, whom residents of Saint-Malo call *Boches*, have taken over the town. They are everywhere, buying up everything. The mayor sets up a curfew and bans loud music and public dances as a sign of mourning for fallen France. Rumors circulate about Hitler touring Parisian monuments.

The presence of these Germans triggers anxiety in Marie-Laure's father. He smokes more than ever and spends a great deal of time at the post office, waiting to use the telephone.

In the meanwhile, Marie-Laure spends time with Etienne when he is well enough, and she gets to know the house. The first floor is Madame Manec's domain. The second seems unused and full of faded grandeur. The third and fourth contain years of collected clutter. The fifth belongs to Etienne. The sixth features a large bedroom, once occupied by Marie-Laure's grandfather, and the small room where Marie-Laure and her father sleep.

In Madame Manec's kitchen, visitors come to share news from Paris, where life has become a nightmare of hunger and want.

## Hauptmann

In one of Werner's classes, the instructor of technical sciences, Dr. Hauptmann, draws a wiring schematic for a simple circuit for transmitting Morse code. He then directs cadets to select tools and parts out of the kits they have been given to assemble the circuit. They have an hour. Werner assembles his circuit in less than a minute, and when the instructor tests it, it works. Dr. Hauptmann then gives the cadets a new assignment, but it is a challenge meant for Werner. As instructed, Werner quickly assembles a simple motor from the parts designated by Dr. Hauptmann. The instructor then asks Werner's name and challenges him directly to make whatever else he can from the parts on his table.

## Flying Couch

All the guns in Saint-Malo are confiscated. Any Breton who fails to give up his weapons voluntarily will be shot.

Marie-Laure's father grows even more nervous and distracted. He works with single-minded fervor on building a scale model of Saint-Malo for Marie-Laure. His "manic diligence" makes her anxious. If they will be returning soon to Paris, as her father assures her, why will she need to learn the streets of Saint-Malo?

Marie-Laure continues to visit her great-uncle in his fifth-floor study. On some occasions he reads to her. On others they play Flying Couch, sitting side by side on the davenport and traveling to far-off places. As they fly over sea and land, Etienne describes what can be seen and felt and smelled. More than once they visit the moon and he offers Marie-Laure a bite of "moon flesh" that "tastes a lot like cheese." There's a touch of sadness in Etienne's voice when, at last, he announces, "Here we are. Home."

## The Sum of Angles

Werner is called to the office of Dr. Hauptmann. Upperclassman Frank Volkheimer is also present. Volkheimer is "a colossal boy" known as the Giant and is a legend among the younger cadets.

The professor of technical sciences asks if Werner can do trigonometry, which he can, and then presents him with a

problem to solve. He must use a particular formula to use two known points and the distance between them to determine the location of a third unknown point and correctly draw the triangle they create. When he does so successfully, Dr. Hauptmann says that, from now on, Werner will work in the laboratory after dinner every day. Volkheimer will keep an eye out for him.

## The Professor

One day, while Etienne is reading to Marie-Laure, he becomes unaccountably frightened. Hurrying down to the kitchen, followed by Marie-Laure, he retreats into a square hole under the floor boards in the kitchen. Rather than leave him with his fear, Marie-Laure sits and talks with him, the trapdoor open. She can feel him trembling, "as though some beast breathes all the time at the windowpanes of his mind." Her thoughts turn to her grandfather's bedroom, across from where she and her father sleep on the sixth floor. She asks about a little door she has discovered at the back of the room. In a few moments Etienne says "Come with me" and takes her up there. He opens the little door for her. Inside is a ladder leading up to an attic.

One whole part of the attic is some sort of machine, with "tubes, coils, switches, meters, at least one gramophone." Marie-Laure learns it is a powerful radio transmitter. After World War I, in which Etienne's brother, Henri (her grandfather), was killed, Etienne built it to broadcast his brother's educational recordings for children. The brother read scripts written by Etienne in a beautiful voice. These are the recordings that Werner Pfennig and his sister, Jutta, listened to so avidly on their radio. Etienne's brother was the French professor with the velvet voice.

## Untitled (Letters to Jutta)

In three letters to Jutta, Werner describes his work with Dr. Hauptmann and other activities at the school. He shares with her the Führer's glorious plans for Germany, retells the story of a soldier's legendary act of bravery and sacrifice, and talks about the German army's magnificent victories. The letters have been censored, with some sentences blacked out.

## Perfumer

Claude Levitte is an opportunist. His perfume shop on the rue Vauborel is a "straggling business" most of the time. War has brought opportunities to make money on the side. He smuggles butchered meat—lamb and rabbit—to Paris, where it is in great demand. He can make as much as 500 francs in a week. Sitting in his perfumerie, he spots another opportunity. The Parisian who has recently come to live with Etienne LeBlanc—the one who is always whittling little boxes—is pacing off the street outside, scribbling notes and making drawings of houses. The authorities of the city's occupation will be interested to learn about this, he decides.

## Time of the Ostriches

Marie-Laure has been shut up in Etienne's house for 121 days. Her father continues working frenetically on the model of Saint-Malo. The stories she hears of conditions in Paris, as told by Madame Manec's visitors, are "terrifying and difficult to believe." Etienne barricades himself in his brother's room, and Marie-Laure passes the time organizing his vast collection of seashells by size, species, and morphology, or form and structure. All over Saint-Malo, people live in fear of the unwritten rules that now govern their lives. Despite deteriorating conditions, no one speaks out, including the mayor. People hide their heads in the sand, like ostriches.

## Weakest

At Schulforta, an "overzealous schoolmaster" named Bastian is in charge of field exercises. He is hard and pitiless. He teaches the cadets that "the corps is a body" and its weaknesses must be driven out. One day he instructs a pigeon-toed cadet named Bäcker to point out the weakest member of the group. Bäcker points to a boy Werner identifies as "Ernst Somebody." Ernst is an ungainly boy; a slow runner. He is made to run the length of a field while being chased by the 59 other cadets. As Werner runs with the pack, he wonders if some part of him wants to see Ernst caught. However, the boy reaches safety just in time.

## Mandatory Surrender

The people of Saint-Malo are now required to turn in all radio receivers they possess. Etienne is holed up in his brother's room while Daniel and Madame Manec unplug and box up his many radios. Marie-Laure thinks about the machine in the attic but says nothing. Her father and Madame Manec don't seem to know it is there.

The next day it takes her father four trips to cart the radios away to 27 rue de Chartres by noon, as required.

## Museum

In Paris, Sergeant Major Reinhold von Rumpel visits the National Museum of Natural History early one morning. He is met by the assistant director and the mineralogist, Professor Hublin, and given a tour of the Gallery of Mineralogy. Afterward von Rumpel asks to see "collections that are not on public display." He is interested in one particular stone.

The assistant director and mineralogist deny such a collection exists. "You have seen everything we can show you," they tell von Rumpel. The sergeant major detains the Frenchmen in an office and informs them that he will wait until he gets what he wants. Hours pass and the German sits calmly watching as the other men become increasingly distressed. He mentions casually that he knows where their children go to school and their daily schedules. Daylight is fading when the two men give in and take von Rumpel to the vault where "a blue stone as big as a pigeon's egg" is kept under lock and key.

## The Wardrobe

Late at night, the same day the radios were confiscated, Etienne feels well enough to leave his brother's room. Marie-Laure has been listening for him and tiptoes out of the small room across the hall, where her father is fast asleep. She warns him about the confiscation and accompanies him the fifth floor. There are no shouts of anger, but Marie-Laure can sense Etienne's struggle to come to terms with the loss of his "old friends." Then Marie-Laure tells him that the radio in the attic is still there. Fearful of its discovery should anyone search the house, Etienne has Marie-Laure help him drag a heavy wardrobe in front of the little door leading to the attic, walling it off.

## Blackbirds

Werner's evening work in the lab with Dr. Hauptmann continues. He is helping Hauptmann design a special transceiver, a device that can both receive and transmit radio waves. This special transceiver must be able to measure the angle of the transmissions it receives. Werner cannot guess the purpose of the device. All he knows is that he is always "plugging numbers into triangulation formulas" or working to improve the machine's design.

Werner is in awe of Hauptmann's connections to men with power over life and death. It's intoxicating. He wonders if his sister, Jutta, has forgiven him yet and grieves over his absence. "Or has she calcified her feelings, protected herself, as he is learning to do?" he thinks. But Werner is not completely closed off from his feelings. He goes to great lengths to protect Frederick, who "moves about as if in the grip of a dream" and thinks of "birds, always birds."

## Bath

Two weeks before, on December 10, 1940, Daniel LeBlanc received a telegram from the museum instructing him to return to Paris at the end of the month. "Travel securely," it ends. Two weeks later Daniel buys a single ticket at the train station. While in line he spots a man whose pudgy, sweaty, multichinned face has grown too familiar: the perfumer. The man has been watching him.

He has been secretly testing the diamond he is hiding. It will not break when struck with a hammer, melt in a candle flame, or be scratched by a quartz pebble.

That night Daniel tells Marie after bathing her that he is leaving in the morning. He will be back in 10 days, at most. The model of Saint-Malo is complete. If she studies it while he is gone, she will know all the streets by the time he returns.

## Weakest (#2)

Cadet training continues into December. Bastian, the commandant, drives the boys through their daily outdoor exercises, pressing upon them the idea that there are two kinds of death: that of a lion, who fights, or that of a nobody, who dies easily. "How will you boys die?" he demands to know.

One windy afternoon, a small boy named Helmut Rödel picks out Frederick as the weakest among the group. Now it is Frederick who must run to escape the pack of boys. He is faster than the last boy, but this time the others seem to be running more fervently, anxious to find out what will happen if they catch him.

The snow hampers Frederick, and he is caught. But he will not admit to Bastion that he is the weakest. Bastion hands Rödel the hard rubber hose he always carries and orders the cadet to beat Frederick, to "do him some good." Werner's thoughts fly to Zollverein, Frau Elena, and Jutta. "Jutta, close your eyes," he thinks. After the beating Frederick can hardly stand but still will not admit he is the weakest. Werner will not risk looking at his battered friend as the cadets continue their run through the forest. The narrator tells the reader that Werner is now almost 15 years old.

## The Arrest of the Locksmith

Daniel LeBlanc is arrested outside of Vitré, a town in Brittany, hours away from Paris. Officials question him about the skeleton keys he carries, the tiny files and saws, and his notebook full of architectural drawings. They accuse him of plotting to destroy the Château de Saint-Malo, which is occupied by the Germans. Why they believe this is not clear, but it does not matter. He is imprisoned, given no lawyer, and denied access to paper or a telephone. On the fourth day he and all the other prisoners are loaded onto a cattle truck and driven east, toward Germany.

## Analysis

Part 3 paints a picture of the outbreak of war and the ever-mounting oppression of German occupation. In this section Marie-Laure and Werner settle into lives altered by war—Marie-Laure as a refugee in Saint-Malo; Werner as a cadet and protégé of Dr. Hauptmann at Schulpforta. Also introduced are the elements that will draw the two young people together. These include Daniel LeBlanc's possession of the Sea of Flames and von Rumpel's quest to find it; Werner's work with Dr. Hauptman; and Etienne's connection to the Professor broadcasts.

The journey to Evreux and Saint-Malo takes on the quality of a nightmare or a dark fairytale. It paints the picture of war from a

civilian's perspective. Daniel and Marie-Laure are among scores of foot-weary, frightened refugees. Their road is perilous, and the world seems to be burning. Tired and hungry, they have nowhere safe to rest and must take refuge in a barn where "spiders draw their webs" and "moths flap against the windows." Even worse, Marie-Laure learns that they are going to live with her great-uncle Etienne, who is "seventy-six percent crazy" and sees things that are not there.

As in a fairytale, the refugees at last reach the safety after their long, dark journey. Etienne's house is warm and welcoming. Madame Manec is like an aging fairy godmother who is a genius at cooking and puts up sweet canned peaches that taste like "wedges of wet sunlight." Her peaches have an important role to play later in the story. Etienne is an invisible but benign presence in the house, holed up in his room. And when Marie-Laure finally meets her great-uncle, he proves to be a warm, whimsical, and intelligent man who shares her interest in shells and in traveling the world through imagination.

Etienne's life story reflects several themes, symbols, and motifs. Entrapment and memories are the most obvious themes. In his mind Etienne is trapped by memories of the past. Physically he is unable to go outdoors so remains entombed in his house. Touching on the motif of self-protection, he hides from dreadful visions of things that are not there. Etienne's radios are both the source and the symbol for invisible links to the outside world, and the attic transmitter represents his vain attempt to reach his dead brother.

Werner is not as lucky as Marie-Laure and her father. In his efforts to escape the poverty of Zollverein, he ends up in the nightmarish Nazi training school at Schulforta. He leaves behind the warmth and love of Frau Elena and his sister, Jutta. He enters "a castle out of a storybook" that proves to be a prison. He finds his life wholly redirected and out of his control.

The thematic opposition of destiny and choice is explored during the entrance exams for the school. During the final test in which applicants must jump from a high platform, Werner does so without hesitation, despite his natural fear. He lands dead center in the Nazi flag held by four boys below. It is a symbolic moment in which he makes a choice that will determine his future. Yet readers wonder: Did Werner have a choice, given his ambitions and fear of the mines? Perhaps this was his destiny after all.

Werner's acceptance to Schulforta reveals the corrupt, anti-intellectual nature of the Nazi ideology. The examiners have

perverted the use of science to determine who is fit to be a cadet. They measure hair, skin, and eye color; the length and shape of the nose; the size and shape of the head; a boy's strength, stamina, and fitness; and most importantly, his courage and willingness to follow orders. These are the factors that interest them, not a boy's intelligence, education, gifts, or finer attributes. This is an accurate depiction of Hitler's approach to youth education. He proclaimed, "A violently active, domineering brutal youth—that is what I am after ... I will have no intellectual training. Knowledge is ruin to my young men."

Nevertheless, it is Werner's intelligence that is noted by Dr. Hauptmann, the technical science professor. Like Werner, Hauptmann has ambitions to do great things—though for the Reich—and sees a chance to do so through an alliance with this young genius. For Werner, Hauptmann represents the world of science and learning that he yearns to be a part of; a world of "firelit rooms lined with books ... places in which important things happen." Hauptmann's sponsorship foreshadows the time when Werner's gift will be appropriated to serve the Reich.

Lies begins to darken the relationships between Marie-Laure and her father and between Werner and Jutta. Daniel and Marie-Laure try to reassure each other with lies that the war and the German occupation will soon be over and things will be as they once were. These are lies without malice that fail to deceive because both father and daughter know they are not true. They are comforting fantasies that they hope may come to pass.

On the other hand, Werner tries to soothe Jutta's fears that he will become a Nazi like other boys they have known. He conjures the lies that he tells himself about all he will accomplish at the Nazi training school and all the wonderful things he then can share with her and Frau Elena. These lies push back the doubts that Werner feels "slipping in like eels." But Jutta sees them for what they are, and they become a barrier between her and her brother.

Part 3 introduces Sergeant Major von Rumpel, methodical and tirelessly persistent in his search for treasure that will please the Führer. He is the villain of the story: an antagonist who will stop at nothing to acquire the Sea of Flames. Von Rumpel's interest in the diamond foreshadows his presence in Saint-Malo and interference in the lives of Daniel, Marie-Laure, Etienne, and even Werner.

Part 3 also introduces Frederick's storyline. For a time, it will run parallel to Werner's as Frederick walks the path at Schulpforta that has been chosen for him. Yet unlike Werner, Frederick fails to fit in and never gives the impression that he cares to. He lacks Werner's "hunger to belong." His love of birds and gentle nature single him out as an oddball in the group. He is not weak, however. In fact, his most exceptional quality is his courage. He faces up to brutality at the hands of warrant officer Bastion and will not yield. He demonstrates strength of character beyond that of Werner, who will neither defend nor look at his friend when he is singled out to be beaten. When Frederick remains unbroken, the commandant's reaction foreshadows a final showdown that will forever alter Frederick's life.

Protecting the Sea of Flames is beginning to wear Daniel down. The possibility that it is truly cursed is eroding the foundation of logic and reason upon which he has built his life. He cannot believe that he holds the real diamond, yet he cannot deny that his loved ones have suffered misfortune, just as the curse promises. Even the geraniums beneath which he tries hiding the stone appear to wilt. As readers recall in Part Zero, an important piece of the story's puzzle falls into place. The reader now understands that Daniel deliberately leaves behind the diamond when he goes to Paris. And the model city of Saint-Malo is seen to serve a dual purpose: a teaching tool for Marie-Laure and a hiding place for the Sea of Flames.

As a final point, the connection that will bring Marie-Laure and Werner together is established in this section. The reader learns that the broadcasts that nurtured Werner's love of science originated in the attic of Etienne's house; the Professor is Etienne's gifted dead brother Henri, Marie-Laure's grandfather. How these two storylines converge remains to be seen.

## Part 4

### Summary

#### The Fort of La Cité

From the peninsular fortress just outside Saint-Malo, Sergeant Major von Rumpel views the bombed and burning city. He is

looking for one house in particular: Number 4 rue Vauborel. He finds it still intact. Once the fires have burned out, German troops will reoccupy Saint-Malo. Then he will go in.

Von Rumpel is now a very sick man. Cancer has spread through his body like a "black vine" waiting to "chok[e] off his heart."

### Atelier de Réparation

In the cellar of the Hotel of Bees, Werner assesses the damage to the radio equipment. It appears hopeless. Meanwhile, Volkheimer makes a valiant effort to dig out the mass of rubble blocking the staircase, but to no avail. Bernd the engineer is alive but horribly wounded.

Overhead, 10 tons of carbonized hotel and an untold amount of unexploded ordnance (ammunition) wait to crush the three men. Fire should have sucked all the oxygen from the cellar, but it has not. Werner wonders if their lives are being spared now because they have some greater price to pay for all they have done in the name of the Reich. Perhaps this is "a chamber in which to make reparations" or *atelier de réparation*, he thinks.

### Two Cans

Marie-Laure wakes up in the cellar, the little model house in her pocket. All is quiet. She cannot tell if the house above has burned down while she slept, if the town has been liberated, if Etienne is alive or dead, or if the Germans still hold the town and are going door to door, executing whomever they please. Searching the cellar, she finds two cans of food, though what they contain she cannot tell. She hopes they are Madame Manec's preserved peaches. Then she sits down to wait.

To keep her mind off her bladder, Marie-Laure thinks about the time her father took her to the Panthéon in Paris. Here, he introduced her to Foucault's pendulum, which demonstrates Earth's rotation. Her father explained that Foucault's pendulum would never stop. "After she had forgotten about it, and lived her entire life, and died," it would continue swinging as the Earth rotated.

## Number 4 rue Vauborel

Ashes cover Saint-Malo like snow. Sergeant Major von Rumpel makes his way through the blasted, burned-out city. At last he stands before the tall, slender house of Etienne LeBlanc. The windows of the façade are blown out, but that is all. Von Rumpel expects to find the diamond here. He reflects that sometimes "the eye of a hurricane is the safest place to be."

## What They Have

Still trapped in the cellar of the Hotel of Bees, the men take stock of what they have: three rations of food, two half-empty canteens of water, two stick grenades, and Volkheimer's rifle. Bernd is dying, and Werner is ready to give up. But Volkheimer "wants to make an argument that life is worth living." He shows Werner two bent screwdrivers and a box of fuses he has found. He wants Werner to somehow use them to fix the radio. It's what they have. "Think of your sister," he mouths to Werner.

## Trip Wire

Marie-Laure's bladder will not allow her to wait in the cellar any longer. Slowly, cautiously, she exits and makes her way to Madame Manec's tiny apartment, where there is a bedpan. She wonders what time it is.

Then, unsteady with hunger, she decides to open one of the cans of food, and locates a paring knife and brick in the tumult of the kitchen. Before eating she goes up to the third-floor bathroom, where water has been stored in the tub. She drinks as much as she can, knowing she will feel full more quickly if she does this first.

Finally, sitting on the third-floor landing, she prepares to pry open the can. At that moment a trip wire behind her jerks, a bell rings, and she knows someone has entered the house.

## Analysis

In Part 4 Saint-Malo is being bombed to rubble. Connections between people and the outside world have been severed, and communication has broken down. In addition, the forces of destiny and choice appear to be working in tandem, while the power of the Sea of Flames to spread fortune and misfortune

seems more than a legend. And more layers are added to the characters of von Rumpel, Werner, and Volkheimer.

In the cellar of the Hotel of Bees, the radio is smashed, leaving the three men cut off from the outside world and hope of rescue. Werner is still unable to hear. In house Number 4 rue Vauborel, Marie-Laure is similarly alone, cut off from anyone who can help her. Even so, she possesses symbolic connections to her great-uncle, Madame Manec, and father in the forms of Etienne's coat, the two cans of food, and the model house carved by her father. These suggest that Marie-Laure is being watched over somehow.

Nevertheless, Marie-Laure cannot help but think of Foucault's pendulum, which demonstrates and tracks the endless rotation of the Earth. In Marie-Laure's mind it represents the indifferent forces in the world that go on and on, careless of humans and their lives. The pendulum suggests inevitability, fate. The reader is reminded of Dr. Geffard's long-ago assessment of humankind: "Nearly every species that has ever lived has gone extinct ... No reason to think we humans will be any different!"

However, it is not a fatalistic attitude but resourcefulness that helps Marie-Laure locate food and tools for opening the cans. It prompts her to tamp down her hunger with water before eating. Back in the cellar at the Hotel of Bees, the reader is reminded that Werner is equally resourceful when Volkheimer presents him with two bent screwdrivers and fuses for fixing the radio. This introduces a ray of hope into their desperate situation.

At this point in the novel, destiny seems to be playing a powerful role in Werner's life. To escape a future in Zollverein's mines, Werner put himself in the hands of the Nazis. But as fate would have it, he is now buried alive, just as he might have been before. Trapped in the cellar of the hotel, he is suffering pangs of conscience and, for the first time in a while, he has nothing to do but think. He comes to the conclusion that he and his comrades are not yet dead because they are destined to pay for their past, for the choices they have made. They are entombed in a chamber "in which to make reparations." The reader does not yet know the details of their crimes. These are pieces to the puzzle that have yet to be revealed. However, Werner's train of thought suggests that destiny and choice may not oppose one another, but may work together to shape lives and events.

This idea relates to another driving force in the novel: the Sea of Flames. It is a symbol of unseen, irrational forces in the

world, and events in the story suggest these forces are real. The stone is no longer in Daniel's hands, and misfortune has befallen him. On the other hand, Marie-Laure, who now possesses the stone, has come unscathed through the bombing while her great-uncle Etienne has disappeared. Like an enchanted house, Number 4 rue Vauborel still stands as if in "the eye of a hurricane," as von Rumpel imagines it.

Von Rumpel's presence in Saint-Malo was foreshadowed in Part 3. However, how he will affect or already has affected the lives of Daniel, Marie-Laure, Etienne, and Werner remains to be seen. What is clear is that von Rumpel is now working for himself. As he waits for the smoke to clear so he can enter the citadel, he does not ponder securing the Sea of Flames for the glory of the Reich. He thinks about the cancer growing in him like a black vine. This suggests that, in desperation, he seeks the diamond for its curative powers. He is ready to risk violating orders and duty to obtain it.

Part 4 deepens the complexity of Volkheimer's characterization. Werner labels Volkheimer "the blade of the Reich," suggesting that the staff sergeant has much blood on his hands. Yet he continues to treat the dreadfully wounded Bernd gently, with compassion. Unlike Werner, the staff sergeant is not ready to die to pay for past crimes. He frantically attacks the mound of debris blocking the stairway exit. But for the first time, his brute strength cannot overcome an obstacle, and he turns to Werner for help. He reveals a childlike trust in Werner's genius to fix the radio when he brings him odds and ends scrounged from the debris. And when he says to Werner, "Your sister ... Think of your sister," he appears to understand the boy well and knows what will stir him to try.

## Part 5

### Summary

#### January Recess

The school is in recess, and Frederick invites Werner to spend it at his home in Berlin. It is clear to Werner that his friend does not blame him for his betrayal during the beating. The boy seems to understand that they each follow a specific, fated

course from which they cannot deviate.

Frederick's parents occupy the second floor of a five-story townhouse. It soon becomes apparent to Werner that Frederick's parents are rich and well connected. He also learns Frederick has no business being enrolled in Schulzforta. Soon after the boys arrive, his friend slips on a pair of glasses, revealing unacceptably weak eyesight. Frederick explains that he passed the school eye exam by memorizing the four eye charts the examiners might use. His father had obtained them and his mother helped him practice. He then shows Werner a forbidden book of birds authored by American ornithologist James Audubon—forbidden because "it's American and was printed in Scotland."

When Frederick's mother arrives, there is wine and cheese and small talk. Though the bruises from Frederick's beating still show, his mother makes no comment. However, before hustling the boys off to dinner at an upscale bistro, she applies powder to Frederick's face to conceal the marks. At the bistro a stream of people comes over to shake Frederick's and Werner's hands. They also ask Frederick's mother about her husband's latest advancement. She assures everyone that "Freddie has all the best there at that school." She confides to one woman that soon the Jewess living on the top floor of their building will be gone. The floor will be theirs.

Back at the townhouse, Werner asks Frederick if he ever wishes he didn't have to return to the school. Frederick replies, "Father needs me to be at Schulzforta. Mother too. It doesn't matter what I want."

### He Is Not Coming Back

It has been 20 days since Marie-Laure's father left for Paris. Day after day the girl has begged Madame Manec to take her to the train station. Hours have been spent writing letters and trying to petition occupation authorities to find her father. Etienne has written the museum officials, who say they are searching.

Now, angry and afraid, Marie-Laure withdraws from the world. She recalls her father's words long ago in Paris: "I will never leave you, not in a million years." She hardly eats and does not bathe, and "every second it feels as if her father slips farther away."

## Prisoner

One icy morning in February, the cadets are summoned by Bastion to participate in the torture and death of a prisoner. The man is skeletal and tied to a stake in the middle of the quadrangle. Beginning with the instructors, every man in the school is instructed to throw a bucket of water at the prisoner. The instructors, upper classmen, 16-year-olds, and 15-year olds finish. Now Werner's class takes its turn. Werner dreads the moment when he must participate and tries to think of other things, but only visions of entrapment come to mind. When his turn arrives, he does what is required. However, when it is time for Frederick to drench the dying man, he refuses. Three times, he is handed a bucket of water and ordered by Bastion to throw it. Three times he pours it out on the ground and says, "I will not."

## Plage du Môle

On the 29th day after Daniel LeBlanc's disappearance, Madame Manec insists on taking Marie-Laure out of the house. She hopes to bring the child out of the dark shell into which she has retreated like a frightened snail.

Madame Manec takes the girl beyond the town walls, to the beach. Marie-Laure worries about the Germans and the rumors that bombs have been buried on the beach. But Madame Manec reassures her, has her take off her shoes, and takes her walking along the shore. Marie-Laure discovers a new world of silky sand, pebbles, shells, barnacles, and seaweed. For three hours she explores, and "a months-old knot inside [her] begins to loosen." In her mind she sees the walled town with "its puzzle of streets," the beach, the coastline of Breton, and the outer islands as if they were no larger than one of her father's models.

Returning home, she presents her great-uncle Etienne with pockets full of treasures she has picked up on the beach.

## Lapidary

Sergeant Major von Rumpel knows the stone in the museum is not the Sea of Flames; it is a fake. After several weeks, he has located the lapidary who cut the fake stone. The man's name is Dupont. Now he must force him to reveal all he knows about other replicas and who has them. Dupont is given forged food-

ration tickets. When he tries to use them, he is arrested, and von Rumpel is notified.

## Untitled (Letter from Papa)

Marie-Laure receives a letter signed "Papa" that explains "we are in Germany now" and assures her he is well.

## Entropy

The dead prisoner is left tied to the stake in the quadrangle for a week before being carted away. During one of Werner's night sessions in Dr. Hauptmann's lab, Frank Volkheimer tells the young cadet that this type of execution happens every year. The victim is always "a Pole, a Red, a Cossack." Werner asks if it was decent to leave the man out there after he was dead. Volkheimer replies, "Decency does not matter to them."

Three times in nine days, Frederick has been singled out as the weakest and made to run further and further, with less of a head start. He is always caught and beaten, yet he never cries out or asks to leave. To his shame, Werner does not stop the abuse. He tries to lose himself in his work; to block out the knowledge that the school is an ever-more diabolical place.

One day in Dr. Hauptmann's class, the concept of entropy is defined as "the degree of randomness or disorder in a system." The idea is then linked to the mission of the Reich: to bring order out of chaos and winnow out "the inferior, the unruly, the chaff" that causes decay from within.

## The Rounds

Every morning, Marie-Laure and Madame Manec visit the beach, and Marie-Laure's collection of shells, pebbles, and sea glass grows. Upon returning from the beach, she follows Madame Manec as she makes her daily rounds to the market and the butcher's shop, and then to deliver food to neighbors in need. She also provides food for a veteran of the Great War named Hubert Bazin. In the war he lost his nose, left ear, and eye to shellfire, so he wears a mask over half his face. Bazin sleeps in an alcove behind the library in Saint-Malo.

Marie-Laure misses Papa, Paris, Dr. Geffard, her books, and other prized components of her past. Nevertheless, her visits to the beach and ramblings through the city with Madame

Manec have made life more tolerable. She once again takes pleasure in discovery and in listening to Etienne's stories from his past. In her mind she is also building a "three-dimensional map" of Saint-Malo, like the model her father left her.

She imagines that somewhere far away, beyond the borders of France, her father sits in a cell. A dozen of his whittled models line the windowsill.

## *Nadel im Heuhaufen*

One winter night, Dr. Hauptmann and Werner cross the frozen fields outside the school. They are going to test the pair of transceivers they have been working on for months. Ahead of them, Frank Volkheimer has been sent out to find an undisclosed, concealed spot from which to broadcast a radio signal. Werner is to use the two transceivers to locate this transmitter.

Werner spaces the two transceivers 200 meters apart and raises the antenna. He knows what radio band to search and picks up the transmitter's ping quickly. Then using the equation for triangulation, he figures where the ping is coming from, two and a half kilometers away.

Packing up the transceivers, Werner and Dr. Hauptmann begin the hunt. Werner feels elation at the prospect of all his work coming together. The numbers are becoming real; he is solving a problem. When they come upon Volkheimer, Dr. Hauptmann unholsters his pistol, telling Werner, "This close, Pfennig, you cannot hesitate." For one dreadful moment, Werner is certain his teacher will shoot Volkheimer, and something in his soul "shuts its scaly eyes." Then Dr. Hauptmann fires into the air. "This," he explains to Werner, "is what we're doing with the triangles."

The success of the test changes everything for Werner. He has pleased his professor. The pleasure of it lingers in his blood.

## Proposal

Nine women have gathered in Madame Manec's warm kitchen to grumble about deteriorating conditions in Saint-Malo since the occupation. It is not the first time. Marie-Laure sits in a chair by the fireplace and listens as their outraged complaining alternates with giddy laughter. Finally, Madame Manec gets up

and deadbolts the kitchen door. Then she makes a daring proposal. The people of Saint-Malo are the ones who make the world of the invaders run. Rather than just complaining, they could do something—small things; simple things. Three of the women want no part of any plan for resistance. They leave. Of the six who stay, Marie-Laure wonders "who will cave, who will tattle, who will be the bravest."

## You Have Other Friends

The persecution of Frederick by other cadets at Schulpforta escalates, while Werner retreats into Hauptmann's laboratory. Field tests of the transceivers continue, and Werner now is able to plot Volkheimer's location on a map in under five minutes. The project is being favorably monitored by several government ministries. Though Werner is told he is being loyal and good, he wakes in the dead of night, feeling he is betraying something.

One night Werner whispers to Frederick as they lay in their bunks, "You could go home, you know, to Berlin." He reasons that the cadets would aim their cruelty at some other target, and in a week or two Frederick could safely return. Rather than considering the advice, Frederick tells Werner it may be best if they were not friends anymore. Werner has his studies to think of, and their friendship has become a liability.

## Old Ladies' Resistance Club

Madame Manec's small group of ladies has been busy. Their acts of mischief and vandalism are designed mostly to annoy the Germans and upset their carefully controlled occupation. The eldest among them, Madame Blanchard, is given the task of writing "Free France Now" on every five-franc note the ladies can gather. The goal is to spread the message as the money is spent.

## Diagnosis

Sergeant Major von Rumpel has been happy for months as his responsibilities have increased. He is one of the few Aryan diamond experts in the Reich, which makes him a valuable asset. He dreams of the day when he will walk the aisles of the great Führermuseum in Linz with its gleaming cases full of the world's confiscated mineral treasures. Its crowning jewel will

be the Sea of Flames.

Von Rumpel has extracted valuable information about the blue stone's replicas from the lapidary Dupont. There are three fakes, all made by Dupont. Von Rumpel already knows one resides at the National Museum. Dupont cannot tell him who has the other two or who has the real stone.

In the meantime, von Rumpel has grown concerned about his health. When he visits the doctor for the swelling in his groin, the doctor says a biopsy is necessary.

## Weakest (#3)

One April morning, Werner awakens to find Frederick missing from his bunk. He does not show up for breakfast, poetics class, or field exercises. Conflicting rumors hint that some cruel, dire plot has been carried out.

Risking detention, or worse, Werner skips lunch and goes to the school infirmary. The nurse tells him Frederick has been taken to Leipzig for surgery. She will not tell him what happened, but the single bed in the infirmary is covered in blood from the pillow to the sheets to the metal bed frame.

Werner thinks of Jutta and knows he "will never be able to tell her about this."

## Untitled (Letter from Papa)

In another letter to Marie-Laure, her Papa tells he is part of a work gang building a road and he is getting stronger every day. He hopes that she and Etienne will keep sending parcels—something is bound to get through to him eventually. He assures he that he is "incredibly safe, as safe as safe can be."

## Grotto

On a summer day, Marie-Laure and Madame Manec visit Hubert Bazin behind the library. Unexpectedly, he invites them to a secret place beneath the city walls. They follow him on a winding path through narrow alleys Marie-Laure's fingers have never discovered on her father's model of Saint-Malo. The entrance—a gate in the ramparts—requires a key, which Hubert possesses. They descend into a grotto that reeks of the sea.

He shows Marie-Laure how the walls are studded with snails. She discovers mussels, sea stars, barnacles, and hermit crabs as well.

Bazin and Marie-Laure's grandfather used to play in the cave as children. Even at high tide, the water level never got more than waist deep. Long ago, Bazin tells the girl, city kennel keepers kept huge mastiffs in the cave and would release them onto the beach when the curfew bells rang. The dogs would keep sailors from coming ashore.

After exploring a while, the trio returns through the gate. Bazin privately asks Marie-Laure if she could find this place again. When she says yes, he presses the key into her hand.

## Intoxicated

By October 1941 it seems certain that Russia will fall to German forces. Werner is 15 years old. A new boy sleeps in Frederick's bunk, and Volkheimer has gone, possibly to the Russian front. The newest cadets are wild to prove they are ready to fight. To Werner, they seem intoxicated "on rigor and exercise and gleaming boot leather."

Werner thinks nostalgically of home, Frau Elena, and Jutta all the time. He especially misses his sister, yet at times he resents her stubbornness and her ability to recognize what is right. Her letters to him are always heavily censored; she asks questions that should not be asked. Werner knows that only his privileged association with Dr. Hauptmann and their project keeps him safe.

## The Blade and the Whelk

Madame Manec meets with a man called René in the Hôtel-Dieu dining room. While Marie-Laure listens, he gives Madame instructions on types of information that would be useful to gather for the resistance. Later, back at the kitchen, Marie-Laure and Madame Manec playfully choose aliases for themselves. Marie-Laure decides she would like to be called the Whelk. Madame, who is peeling peaches, decides she should be the Blade.

## Untitled (Letter from Jutta)

Jutta's letter to Werner hints at shortages of heat and warm clothing in Zollverein. She also sends him his old childhood notebook full of juvenile questions. Looking at it brings on an acute rush of homesickness that makes Werner clamp shut his eyes.

## Alive Before You Die

Madame Manec tries to convince Etienne to join in the ladies' resistance efforts. Marie-Laure listens to the exchange from outside the door to Etienne's study. Etienne wants no part of Madame's schemes. He has no wish to make trouble. "Isn't doing nothing a kind of troublemaking?" Madame Manec asks. She insists that he could use the radio in the attic to transmit coded messages to the outside world. The messages will come to them on strips of paper baked into bread by Madame Ruelle. Etienne labels the plan childish. In a last effort to draw him in, Madame Manec asks, "Don't you want to be alive before you die?" Etienne sends her away and goes back to his book.

## No Out

In January 1942 Werner asks Dr. Hauptmann for permission to go home. The doctor is taken aback. After all he has done for Werner—the chocolates, the special treatment, the protection—the boy thinks he can leave. The doctor informs Werner that "we serve the Reich ... It does not serve us." He then orders Werner to come to the lab as usual that night. There will be no more chocolates; no more special treatment.

## The Disappearance of Hubert Bazin

One morning, when Madame Manec and Marie-Laure bring soup to Hubert Bazin, he is not in his alcove behind the library. They come again the next morning and the morning after that, but he has not returned. No one can say where he went. At the next meeting of the ladies' resistance, only half the group shows up. They sense danger, and Madame Ruelle suggests they take a break from their activities.

## Everything Poisoned

Young instructors at Schulforta are being replaced by elderly townsmen, all of them in some way broken, unfit for fighting. The younger men are being sent to war. Throughout the school are signs that all is not well with the Reich. The flow of electricity to run lights and clocks is irregular. The showers and bunkrooms are often icy. Few cars are seen on the school grounds as all gasoline is going to the war effort. The school food is often wormy. New cadet uniforms are made of cheaper material. The cadets may no longer practice their marksmanship with live ammunition. Every six or seven days, two casualty assistance officers come to the refectory, where the cadets are gathered to eat, to inform a boy that his father has been killed. Yet all reports over the radio proclaim that victory is near.

In March 1942 Dr. Hauptmann informs Werner that he is leaving the school. Hauptmann has been called to Berlin to continue his work there.

## Visitors

Two French policemen visit Number 4 rue Vauborel one evening. They have news of Marie-Laure's father. He has been convicted of theft and conspiracy and forced to do labor. They do not know which prison holds him. They ask to see the two letters smuggled out to Marie-Laure, and then to search the house. They do not say what they are looking for.

Marie-Laure does not trust the men. Their French is good, but their loyalties may not lie with France. Their search reveals nothing. Most importantly, they do not find the radio in the attic. When they come across three Free French flags rolled up in a closet, they advise Etienne and Madame not to keep them. Etienne burns the flags after the policemen leave and forbids Madame Manec to involve Marie-Laure in any further schemes.

## Untitled (Letter from Werner)

A heavily censored letter from Werner to Jutta hints that all is not well at the school. One of the lines that can be read says, "Frederick used to say there is no such thing as free will." He ends by saying he hopes Jutta will one day understand, closing with the words "*Sieg hei!*" ("Hail victory," the Nazi salute.)

## The Frog Cooks

The relationship between Etienne and Madame Manec has become strained. She still takes Marie-Laure to the beach most mornings, and then she disappears for most of the day. One evening she is later than usual, and Etienne inquires if she sank any U-boats today or blew up any German tanks. In reply Madame asks if he knows what happens to a frog that is dropped in boiling water. "It jumps out," she explains. "But ... put the frog in a pot of cool water and then slowly bring it to a boil ... the frog cooks."

## Orders

Werner is summoned to the commandant's office to receive an assignment. Dr. Hauptmann has arranged for him to be sent to a special technology division of the Wehrmacht (the German armed forces). For the assignment to be approved, the doctor has had to manufacture a story. He claims Werner has been attending Schulpforta under false pretenses; that he is 18, not 16. The doctor, however, has assured the commandant that no disciplinary action is necessary. Werner will be eager to offer his skills to the Reich.

## Pneumonia

In the spring Madame Manec becomes very ill with pneumonia. The doctor prescribes rest, aspirin, and aromatic violet comfits. Both Marie-Laure and Etienne nurse her day and night, but in Madame's voice, when she speaks, the girl can hear water, like "atolls and archipelagoes and lagoons and fjords."

## Untitled (Letter from Papa)

Marie-Laure receives another letter from Papa. Two of the parcels she has sent him have gotten through, but he has been allowed to keep only the toothbrush and comb. He is now working in a cardboard factory. He dreams of returning to the museum. Finally, he reminds her of the birthday gifts he used to give her and tells her to look inside Etienne's house if she wishes to understand why things have turned out as they have.

## Treatments

Von Rumpel is receiving treatments for his cancer, but they leave him sick, weak, and disoriented. A bundle arrives from Vienna containing everything a librarian there could find on the Sea of Flames. This information reminds him, "The keeper of the stone will live forever." He remembers his father's advice: "See obstacles as opportunities, Reinhold. See obstacles as inspiration."

## Heaven

It is June, nearly two years exactly since the invasion of France. Madame Manec's health is better, and she promises Etienne that she will no longer "fight the war by herself." However, in an outing to the market, Marie-Laure is certain that Madame exchanges envelopes with a woman she stops to greet.

Later she and Madame stretch out in a field of Queen Anne's lace east of Saint-Malo. Marie-Laure listens to the drone of bees, wasps, hoverflies, and a passing dragonfly. For a bit she and Madame talk about God and Etienne's lack of belief. Then Marie-Laure asks, "Don't you ever get tired of believing, Madame? Don't you ever want proof?" Madame tells her she must never stop believing. Then they talk of heaven and what it will be like. At last Madame says contentedly, "I expect heaven is a lot like this."

## Frederick

Werner has taken the train to Berlin to visit Frederick. The city seems gloomier and dirtier than before, though it may be that he is seeing it with different eyes. The maid, Fanni, lets him into the apartment. Frederick's mother is there but does not stay. She tells Werner that her son will not recognize him, and asks that he not try to make Frederick remember.

It has been a year since Frederick's beating, and he will never recover. He sits drooling at a table in his room. On the table are sheets of paper covered with thick, clumsy spirals "drawn by a heavy hand." When Werner greets his friend, he shows no recognition, and his eyes do not focus. Werner tells Frederick he is leaving Schulpforta and is being sent to the front. "You look pretty," Frederick responds. "You look very pretty, Mama."

## Relapse

In late June 1942 Madame Manec suffers a relapse. Though Etienne, the doctor, and Madame's friends try, they cannot save her. By two in the afternoon, she is dead. A man comes to carry her away in a horse cart. "Madame is dead," Etienne whispers.

## Analysis

Previously the reader has witnessed war from the perspective of refugees from Paris and residents of occupied Saint-Malo. Part 5 opens with a glimpse of civilian life in Berlin. These showy impressions, providing another perspective on Hitler's Germany, suggest the city's glittering vitality masks something noxious.

Berlin is the largest city Werner has ever seen, and it is enshrined in his mind as the capital of science. Frederick's home is a haven of luxury. Werner is treated to enormous quantities of food and drink and taken to the kind of restaurant he could only dream of before. Yet underneath all the hustle and bustle, the gaiety and lights, something unwholesome lurks. People—typified by Frederick's mother—laugh and drink too much, ask no questions, and maintain a constant, bright stream of activity, as if to keep from thinking or seeing what they have become part of.

The character of Frau Schwartzenberger shines a light on the ugliest element in this toxic environment: anti-Semitism. It is rampant in Nazi Germany, and the woman is a Jew living in a location coveted by Frederick's mother. She is quite frank in telling a friend that the Jewish "crone" will be gone by year's end. Frau Schwartzenberger already must wear the yellow star of David identifying her as Jewish and separating her (like all Jews) from the rest of the population. Aware of her perilous position, she fearfully enters the lift with Frederick and Werner, though the boys demonstrate no animosity. In fact, Frederick is warmly polite and Werner merely curious. Yet this incident and the mother's comment do not bode well for the Jewish woman and allude to the fate in store for millions of Jews in Nazi Germany.

Werner's visit to Frederick's home highlights important values the boys share. Both love science and respect authentic intellectuals and scientists, whether German or foreign born. Both have been drawn to a branch of science, and for

information, each has turned to non-German experts in their field. Werner, most notably, has looked to the French Professor; Frederick to the naturalist Audubon. And finally, both boys dislike Schulpforta but can see no way out. Frederick must remain there to please his parents; Werner must remain to escape Zollverein.

These shared values are the binding basis of the boys' friendship. However, the torture of a prisoner at the school reveals a difference in their moral character that drives them apart. Events at Schulpforta illustrate the ever-deepening corruptive influence of Nazi ideology on the cadets, and Werner learns how entrenched he has become in a military system that feeds on youth. When the time comes to douse the dying prisoner with a bucket of water, Werner deplores the act but does not hesitate. Self-interest dictates that he dutifully follow orders. On the other hand, Frederick stays true to his moral values and courageously refuses to douse the man. In consequence, conditions at the school worsen for Frederick. His response is equally selfless and courageous. To protect Werner, he openly severs their friendship. Werner's response to the moment is weak, though at a gut level, he feels that everything he loves is at risk; "that something huge and empty is about to devour them all."

Although Frederick is a strong believer in destiny, he makes a conscious decision to challenge fate. Toward the end of Part 5, the reader learns the terrible consequences of his choices. Though their life paths separate, Werner and Frederick's shared values will prove to be a strong emotional connection that time and war cannot break. This link will provide Werner a means of making reparations that, in turn, will transform Frederick's life once again.

Another emotional connection that cannot be broken exists between Werner and Jutta. Werner's involvement at the Nazi training school drives a wedge between them, but the bonds of love are not severed. Jutta is never far from Werner's thoughts. In his memories of her, she often serves as a moral constant against which he feels compelled to measure his actions and choices.

In Part 5 the reader begins to grasp that Werner's gift for mechanics has been used by Dr. Hauptmann and will be misused by the Reich. Hauptmann has hijacked the boy's skills and intelligence for his personal advancement. He is therefore frightened when called to Berlin in recognition of the transceiver device he is presumed to have developed. He

knows that without Werner, he would have accomplished nothing and may yet be found out.

Shortly after Hauptmann's transfer, Werner sees he is thoroughly trapped by the system. He has tried and failed to get out, and is subsequently shipped off to the front. The commandant who issues the order states that Werner will be offering his skills to the Reich. This foreshadows the use of Werner's radio tracking device to hunt down enemy transmissions and eliminate the sender. What had seemed like a game at Schulpforta will become deadly reality.

In the meanwhile, Marie-Laure has demonstrated the resiliency that will continue to help her as conditions deteriorate in Saint-Malo. For a time, she is angry at everyone and everything, including her blindness, for failing to find and rescue her father. But even as her anger peaks, she begins to study the model of Saint-Malo in earnest, learning its streets and landmarks. She is determined to exert her independence and find her own way in the world. This, she knows, would please her father and is a way of connecting with him in his absence.

Thanks to Madame Manec, Marie-Laure at last is permitted to go outside. The girl finds comfort and renewed confidence in excursions to the beach. These outings become a retreat from fear and worry over the whereabouts of her Papa. They also reawaken her love of mollusks, as the beach provides a treasure trove of sea shells for her clever fingers to find and examine. She brings samples to Etienne, which strengthens their bond while renewing the old man's connection to the physical world he once knew so well. The shells and other beach treasures stir memories of his childhood, when that world was safe and free of ghastly hallucinations.

Part 5 also introduces the character of Hubert Bazin. He is homeless and terribly disfigured by the war, a goblin-like man in appearance. But to Marie-Laure, who cannot see, he is an intriguing storyteller and her guide to the wondrous grotto beneath the ramparts of Saint-Malo. The fairytale-like cave, with its walls and rocks teeming with mollusks, captivates Marie-Laure. And like a storybook enchanter, Bazin gives her the key to the secret kingdom. This suggests that the grotto will play an important role later in the novel.

Von Rumpel's storyline continues with the added layer of his illness. He begins to associate the Sea of Flames with a cure. The visitors to Etienne's home in Saint-Malo suggest that von Rumpel has picked up a trail that will lead him to Marie-Laure and connects back to his presence in the city in Part 4.

The invisible lines that will eventually connect Marie-Laure and Werner draw closer when Madame Manec organizes a Saint-Malo resistance group. It will employ radio to pass messages to the outside world. This foreshadows a time when Werner will be ordered to find and destroy the source of enemy transmissions in the city. It also foreshadows a time when Etienne and his attic transmitter will become vital to the resistance movement.

Finally, the association between the Sea of Flames and misfortune continues with the death of Madame Manec. The reader knows—though Marie-Laure is as yet unaware—that the girl possesses the diamond and may be under its curse.

## Part 6

### Summary

#### Someone in the House

Marie-Laure sits very still on the third-floor landing, listening to someone enter the house. She does not know if it is day or night, or if he can look up the stairwell and see her. However, she does know if the intruder was a rescuer, he would be calling out for survivors.

While the intruder—von Rumpel—searches the first floor, Marie-Laure retreats up the stairs without a sound. Reaching the sixth floor, she enters her grandfather's bedroom, finds the huge wardrobe, and escapes into the attic through the false door Etienne has built into its back. "Protect me now, stone," she thinks.

#### The Death of Walter Bernd

Bernd is dying of his injuries. Yet he revives long enough to tell Werner and Volkheimer of the last time his visited his father while on leave. He had ridden all day on the train to get there, but his father kept repeating that he didn't have to stay; he could go off with his friends if he wants to. Bernd leaves, but he has nowhere to go and no friends to meet.

Soon after he finishes his story, Bernd dies. While Volkheimer buries him beneath heaps of bricks, Werner works on the radio

using screws, lengths of electrical cord, and a battery he has found.

## Sixth-floor Bedroom

Von Rumpel investigates the big bedroom on the sixth floor but finds nothing of interest. In the little bedroom across the hall, however, he finds the scale model of Saint-Malo. He knows from the smuggled letters Marie-Laure has been allowed to receive that this is what he has been looking for. In the last letter her Papa had said "look inside Etienne's house," and then repeated "inside the house." What he, von Rumpel, is seeking will be inside the model.

## Making the Radio

Using the materials he has found, Werner constructs a makeshift antenna and repairs the radio receiver. The first time he tries the earphones, they do not work. Above him, the bombed-out hotel "makes a series of unearthly groans."

After making some adjustments, Werner tries the earphones again. Suddenly he is transported back in time to when he was eight, back at Children's House and crouched next to Jutta, listening to static on his first radio.

As Volkheimer watches, Werner scans the radio frequencies. All that comes back to him is static.

## In the Attic

Von Rumpel has looked in the wardrobe and hobbled away. Behind the false door, Marie-Laure tries to slow her heart. The only place for her to go now is up the seven-rung ladder and into the garret. Carefully, quietly she creeps up and then crawls across the attic floor. When she reaches the chimney at the far end, she sits, her knees hugged to her chest, and "tries to breathe through her skin. Soundlessly, like a snail." Outside she hears gunfire and an exploding shell.

## Analysis

The theme of memories that drive characters' choices and actions is prevalent in Part 6 and provides glimpses into the inner life, hidden thoughts, and pasts of several characters.

Von Rumpel's presence in Etienne's house draws events closer to their climax and provides more puzzle pieces to fill gaps in the story.

Just before dying, Bernd tells his comrades the story of his last visit with his father. The tale is shaded with regret and profound loneliness. It reveals that Bernd is leaving the world with no connections to anyone. The one he wanted with his father never materialized, and he had no one else. He walked alone in the world. He ends up in an unmarked grave, buried beneath bricks. Bernd represents the countless dead with small but meaningful stories, who disappeared beneath the wreckage of war.

As Volkheimer buries Bernd, Werner works on repairing the radio in "an act of memory." As he works on testing, adjusting, and retesting the radio, he is eight again, back in Children's House with his sister. The comforting memory is suddenly merged with another of Herr Siedler and a great crimson Nazi banner. It is smooth and unsoled; a banner not yet tattered by war and sullied by betrayal of all the glorious promises it represents.

Sergeant major von Rumpel is quite obviously ill by August 8, 1944, and limps badly as he searches each floor of Etienne's home for what he terms "a dollhouse." Memories overtake him as he sits in the sixth-floor bedroom and studies the carved model of Saint-Malo. The sergeant major's memories of playing with his daughter add a touch of humanity to his villainous character. This image of a man who would patiently play games with his child shows von Rumpel as he was before war twisted him into a servant of the Führer.

Von Rumpel's presence in the house indicates that he traced the connecting lines between the Natural History Museum, Daniel LeBlanc, Marie-Laure, and Etienne in Saint-Malo. From lines in Daniel's last letter to his daughter, von Rumpel has deduced that the Sea of Flames is hidden in the model. This means he has been intercepting Daniel's letters on their way to Marie-Laure. Just how he has concluded that this model of Saint-Malo hides the little house and the stone remains to be explained.

When von Rumpel enters the house, reason and quick thinking once again save Marie-Laure. Because the stranger does not call out but enters with caution and begins searching, she determines he is not friendly. Her keen ears also pick up on a limp, and she recalls "a German sergeant major with a dead voice." As readers do not yet know why she makes this

connection, it suggests Marie-Laure and the treasure hunter have already met. Frightened as she is, Marie-Laure quickly makes sure she has everything of importance with her before creeping up to the wardrobe and through the secret door. The remembered voice of her father guides and steadies her. Once there she draws the door closed centimeter by centimeter, much like her beloved whelks close the door on their shells in time of danger. Now she is trapped and will have to fight or die if the stranger discovers her hiding place. Waiting and listening, she must consciously shut another trapdoor—this one in her mind—to push back a creeping terror that "rises from a place beyond thoughts."

## Part 7

### Summary

#### Prisoners

At dawn a "dangerously underweight corporal" named Neumann Two—to distinguish him from the driver, Neumann One—comes to pick up Werner at the school. They walk to the village. After the corporal gets something to eat, he gives Werner "some crumpled and filthy reichsmarks" (currency). From Schulpforta, the two take a train through Leipzig and get off at a switching station west of Lodz. All along the platform, a company of soldiers lie sleeping. Their uniforms are faded.

Several trains scheduled to pass through the station do not arrive. It is well after dark when a train approaches. However, it does not stop, and car after car rumbles past. Most are flatcars loaded with people and odd-looking sacks piled up along the front of the cars. "Prisoners," Neumann Two explains. But Werner can see that these people are not in uniform and look like scarecrows being transported west "to be staked in some terrible garden." With a shock, he realizes the walls of sacks are in fact walls of corpses.

#### The Wardrobe

For four days following the death of Madame Manec, Etienne remains holed up in his study. During this time, Madame's friends make sure Marie-Laure is well cared for. On the fourth

day, Etienne emerges, thanks the women for their help, and then sends them away. After securing the door, he next turns out the lights and retrieves an electric saw from the cellar beneath the kitchen floor. Climbing the stairs with Marie-Laure in his wake, Etienne goes into his brother's bedroom on the sixth floor. Working throughout the day, he cuts a rectangle in the back of the wardrobe and another through the door leading to the attic. Then he works to hook up the net of electronic wires that will bring the radio transmitter to life.

Later Etienne asks Marie-Laure how messages were delivered to Madame Manec. With the girl's help, he intends to continue her resistance work. Marie-Laure explains that she goes to Madame Ruelle's bakery and asks for "one ordinary loaf." When the baker asks "And how is your uncle?" Marie-Laure now will reply, "My uncle is well, thank you." This will tell Madame Ruelle that Etienne is willing to help them. Then Marie-Laure pays for the loaf with a ration ticket and brings it home. Etienne urges her to go to the bakery and come straight home.

#### East

A train takes Werner and Neumann Two through Poland into Russia. The train stops at dusk at a ruined village, and Werner is delivered to "a musclebound captain" and shown to a radio truck. It's unwashed, riddled with bullet holes on one side, and smells of "clay, spilled diesel mixed with something putrid." The truck contains radio equipment as well as compasses and maps, and in a battered case, "two of the transceivers he designed with Dr. Hauptmann."

Werner studies the equipment, assesses the problems, and then he gets to work. It is dawn when "a giant" approaches the truck and says, "Pfennig." It is Volkheimer.

#### One Ordinary Loaf

Marie-Laure has returned with her first loaf from the bakery. Inside is a tiny paper scroll with numbers. She and Etienne must wait until dark to transmit them. In the meantime, Etienne wires the house with an alarm attached to the outer gate. When it is opened, a bell rings on the third floor, in the attic, and on the gate. Next he builds a false back into the wardrobe that can be opened and closed from both sides.

That night Etienne starts up the radio and transmits the

numbers cooked into the bread. Then he shuts down the machine. He asks Marie-Laure if she remembers Madame Manec's story of the boiling frog. "I wonder," he says, "who was supposed to be the frog? Her? Or the Germans?"

## Volkheimer

Volkheimer tells Werner his job is to track down the Russian partisans who are using radio transmissions to coordinate attacks on the trains. In the truck they head out over roads that are little more than cattle trails. With them are the engineer, Bernd, and Neumann One and Two. Every so often they stop, and Werner sets up his equipment to scan the spectra of radio signals for "any voice that is not allowed."

This hunt for signals is far more difficult than the hunt back at Schulpforta. That was a game. Werner knew that Volkheimer's transmitter was broadcasting a signal. He could guess the signal's frequency. Out here he has no idea when, where, or if transmitters are transmitting. Day after day Werner picks up nothing, and Volkheimer grows more uneasy.

## Fall

Several months have passed. Etienne continues to broadcast the mysterious numbers, always at night. He has tried to crack their code, but to no avail. Nevertheless, when he bends his mouth to the microphone to read them off, he feels confident and alive.

He has taken to playing a bit of classical music before the broadcasts. This night he is playing Vivaldi. Marie-Laure, who has been sleeping, is awakened by the music. Etienne takes her hand, and together they dance beneath the attic's low, sloping roof.

In the pleasure of the moment, Etienne lets the song play too long, leaving the transmitter's antenna up and dimly visible against the sky. But watching Marie-Laure, graceful and alive as she dances, reminds Etienne of better days "in what seems like lifetimes ago." He thinks, "This ... is what the numbers mean." This is why he risks transmitting them.

On the streets below rides the "bony figure of Death," a German with a list of addresses in his hand. He looks at the officers, the perfumer's rooms, and Etienne's house. Etienne thinks, "Pass us by, Horseman."

## Sunflowers

Werner sets up a transceiver on a dusty track flanked by miles of dying sunflowers. Bernd sets up the second out in the field. Their hunt has brought them to a desolate region of Ukraine. Suddenly, the monotonous static is broken by Russian voices. Werner quickly relays the channel to Bernd, who finds and uses it to measure the angle of the transmission. Werner uses this information to pinpoint the transmitter: One and a half kilometers, north northwest.

Crashing through the sunflowers, the truck speeds toward the coordinates. Volkheimer passes out weapons. Neumann One calls out the distances. A pretty cottage comes into view. The truck stops, and Volkheimer, Bernd, and Neumann Two proceed on foot. Werner is still listening to the broadcast when gunshots come through the headphones. Soon Volkheimer returns and instructs Neumann One to set fire to the house. He instructs Werner to salvage the equipment.

Inside are two dead Russians. Their equipment is inferior, but Werner loads it onto the truck. He thinks about the march of events that have led to this moment. Recollecting something Dr. Hauptmann once told him, he reflects on how his interests as a scientist have intersected with those of his time.

## Stones

Sergeant Major von Rumpel, his treatments completed, feels weak as he approaches a new assignment. In a warehouse outside of Lodz, in Poland, thousands of jewels—emeralds, sapphires, rubies, diamonds—are waiting to be evaluated. Most of the diamonds must still be pried from their settings in necklaces, bracelets, earrings, and cuff links. As one of the few Aryan diamond experts in the Reich, von Rumpel will work with a team of three other men in 10-hour shifts to pry stones from their setting, wash them, weigh each, and assess and record each stone's clarity. Von Rumpel does not have to ask where this wealth of jewels came from.

## Grotto

Months have passed since Madame Manec's death. Marie-Laure continues to visit the bakery and ask for "one ordinary loaf, please." Sometimes there is a scroll inside; sometimes there is not. Before returning home, Marie-Laure visits the

grotto where she can listen to the sound of the sea and the snails that cover the walls as they "suck and shift and squeak." She thinks of her father in his cell, of Madame Manec in her field of Queen Anne's lace, and of her uncle trapped in the chilly house by his memories.

## Hunting

Beginning in January 1943, Werner is increasingly successful in his hunt for illegal transmissions. The truck roves occupied territories with familiar names like Prague, Ljubljana, and Minsk—names of places he and Jutta recorded in their log of radio signals and broadcasts.

For Werner, locating the source of a transmission is simply a problem to be solved. The working conditions are not pleasant, but the work "is cleaner, more mechanical." It is "a war waged through the air," and the signals are little more than needles in a haystack that he must find.

Volkheimer is also on the hunt that winter for warm clothing. He scans any group of prisoners they pass, hoping to spy someone as big as he from whom he can take mittens, a shirt, a coat, or shoes that fit.

Months pass, during which the team of hunters receives no mail. Werner does not write to Jutta.

## The Messages

By summer 1943, every house in occupied Saint-Malo must have a list of its occupants posted on the door. Marie-Laure continues to visit the bakery. One morning Madame Ruelle slips her a folded piece of paper with the request that Etienne read its contents, too. It reads, "Monsieur Droguet wants his daughter in Saint-Coulomb to know that he is recovering well."

More notes come over the next few weeks. They announce births, deaths, illness, and the like. But Etienne cannot fathom their secret messages. He pictures a benign ghost of Madame Manec outside the house. Two sparrows come to her, and Madame Manec tucks them protectively in her coat.

## Loudenvielle

Sergeant Major von Rumpel has been summoned to

Loudenvielle in southern France to inspect some stolen jewels. They belong to a prominent person with ties to the Natural History Museum in Paris. At the police station, von Rumpel and the police captain examine one jewel in particular: a pear-cut diamond.

As von Rumpel waits for the captain to finish his own inspection, he entertains visions of the Führermuseum and can almost feel the faint power of the stone that promises to erase his illness. His treatments are over, but the nausea and the pain linger.

The stone proves to be a fake, but von Rumpel considers this progress. There are only two more stones to be found, and one will be real.

## Gray

In December 1943, residents of Saint-Malo have no heat and only green wood to burn. Food is scarce. Marie-Laure spends a great deal of time in the realm of memory when she was six and could still see. Everywhere there was color and there was food; Paris seemed like a vast kitchen. Now the world seems gray, and filled with gray quiet and gray nervous tension. Only for the short time when Etienne switches on his radio is there color. When the radio switches off, the gray rushes back in.

## Fever

Werner is very ill with a fever as 1943 becomes 1944. He has not written to Jutta in nearly a year. Still he does his job and continues to find illegal transmissions. However, even as the team continues to scour the countryside for signals, the German army is in retreat. The truck passes through smoking, ruined villages and by shattered walls and frozen corpses. The lack of order conflicts with the professed goals of the Reich to impose order, to pull up disorder by the roots.

## The Third Stone

The Gestapo has located a third stone north of Paris, in a chateau outside of Amiens. It was hidden there by the chief of security at the Natural History Museum in Paris. Von Rumpel is notified. To his disappointment, this stone, like the other two, is the work of the diamond cutter Dupont.

Now that he has located all three fakes, von Rumpel wonders what sort of man would be chosen to carry the real Sea of Flames. He is desperate to find the stone. It seems "all his luck is spent." His tumor is growing again. Germany is in retreat in Russia, the Ukraine, and Italy. Soon, men like von Rumpel "will be handed rifles and sent into the fire."

## The Bridge

A bridge in a village south of Saint-Malo is blown up as a German truck crosses it, killing six German soldiers. In the aftermath police go door to door, ordering all able-bodied men to come out for a day's work. Etienne obtains a doctor's note excusing him from this duty.

Soon after, Madame Ruelle passes along another code in a bread loaf, though she has heard the Germans blame the attack on antioccupation radio broadcasts. Etienne transmits the message but is troubled. He recalls the death toll of the previous war: 16 million. "March the dead in a single-file line," he tells Marie-Laure, "and for eleven days and eleven nights, they'd walk past our door." This is not a game they are playing, but life and death.

## Rue des Patriarches

Von Rumpel has located Daniel LeBlanc's former residence near the Natural History Museum. It is locked up, but someone sends money regularly to the landlady to cover the rent. Upon entering, he sees the apartment has been searched. Nevertheless, von Rumpel searches it once more to learn what he can about the locksmith and solve the puzzle of where he has hidden the stone.

He soon discerns that the locksmith has a blind daughter, and his attention is drawn to the meticulously carved scale model of the neighborhood. He sees how the model of the apartment house he now stands in is smooth and worn from much handling. He discovers it lifts easily free of the model. Studying the little house, he finds a tiny keyhole in the bottom that suggests the model is a container. Unable to open it any other way, von Rumpel sets it on the floor and smashes it with his foot.

## White City

Volkheimer, Werner, and the rest of the radio team are in Vienna, the White City. There are reports of resistance broadcasts coming out of a district called the Leopoldstadt. For five days nothing comes through Werner's transmitter but German propaganda broadcasts and pleas for supplies from German colonels. Werner senses "the fabric of the war tearing apart." He thinks the city's beautiful buildings are useless in the face of "sledges stacked with corpses."

At midmorning this day, the radio truck is parked by a garden while the team takes a break. Neumann One gives everyone haircuts. Later, as Werner monitors his transceiver and listens to nothing, he watches a little red-haired girl in a maroon cape play alone in the park, under the trees, as her mother watches from the corner. The girl is six or seven years old, with "big clear eyes that remind him of Jutta's." In a while the mother calls to the girl and the two disappear around the corner.

An hour later, Werner picks up something on his transceiver, tunes the second transceiver, and works out where the signal is coming from: an apartment house flanking the square. But the team finds nothing when they search, not even a simple radio. Volkheimer orders them to tear up floorboards. Werner looks over a bedroom clearly belonging to a woman. Then just as the sound of a single shot comes from the other bedroom, he spots a little maroon cape hanging on a doorknob. More shots follow.

He follows Volkheimer and the others into the bedroom where Neumann Two has shot the mother and little girl, who were hiding in the closet. "There's no radio here," Volkheimer says, and the team leaves. Back in the truck Werner leans over and "is sick between his shoes."

## Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea

For Marie-Laure's 16th birthday, Etienne surprises her with a Braille copy of Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, books one and two. She is both delighted and mystified. It has been three years and four months since her father left Saint-Malo. Books are generally not available and very expensive now. Etienne says that somehow the bookseller, Monsieur Hébrard, has obtained these. He explains, "You have made a lot of friends in this town, Marie-Laure."

Without delay, she settles down to read the story aloud from the beginning to her great-uncle.

## Telegram

A new garrison commander is now in charge of the Brittany district that includes Saint-Malo. On April 13, 1944, he sends a telegram to Berlin requesting assistance to locate and eliminate terrorist broadcasts in the area.

## Analysis

Through Werner's eyes, Part 7 provides a closer look at war from the perspective of soldiers at the front, resistance fighters, and prisoners. There are indications that the tide of war is turning against the Germans, and glimpses of the persecution of Jews. Also in this part, variations on the theme of connections show how people and events are drawing closer, setting the scene for the climax of the novel. At the same time, the reader learns how von Rumpel closes in on the location of the Sea of Flames. And finally, the consequences of choices are becoming evident to Werner, Etienne, and Marie-Laure.

The glorious war steamrolling toward victory depicted in Nazi propaganda is a far cry from reality. At the Russian front, Werner encounters lean, pale soldiers, exhausted and in shabby uniforms; exploded railcars and tracks; ruined houses; meager supplies; and hunger and cold. Moving with his team deeper into Russia and a relentless winter, he finds German divisions are in retreat. Frozen corpses litter the streets. Everywhere there is filth, disorder, and suffering. Nowhere does Werner find the splendid order promised by his instructors at Schulforta.

These conditions indicate the changing tide of the war as Germany fights on too many fronts with diminishing troop numbers and resources. Other indications include Volkheimer's growing desperation to locate the enemy transmissions sabotaging the war effort. Lack of supplies is another sign that Germany is in trouble. Volkheimer must resort to stripping Russian prisoners of their mittens, coats, or shoes in order to have adequate clothing. The loss of shoes in particular most certainly condemns the victim to die from the cold. In this and his dispassionate execution of resistance fighters, Volkheimer demonstrates ignoble aspects of his nature that put self-

preservation and blind duty before compassion or justice.

When the team zeros in on their first enemy transmission, they find simple peasants in torn pants and grimy jackets monitoring the transmitter. The men are not soldiers and are unarmed, yet they are killed all the same. While this scenario is repeated many times, Werner will always recall this first successful use of the transceiver he helped design and its shocking consequences. It will conjure a mental picture of sunflowers, vast fields of which the team cut through while hunting this prey. The memory of sunflowers was previewed in Part Zero's "Cellar" section, where roles are reversed and Werner and his comrades are being hunted by enemy fire.

In his first look at real war, Werner glimpses firsthand the inhumane treatment of prisoners, possibly Jews. A train hauling open flatcars is crammed with human scarecrows who have no choice but to sit on their dead. This example of brutality is matched by later images of Russian prisoners being herded half-clothed through the snow. These incidents recall the torture of the prisoner at Schulforta in Part 5. That exercise now seems more than a yearly school ritual. It seems designed to create the brutal men, indifferent to human suffering, necessary in Hitler's Germany. This calls to mind Volkheimer's statement to Werner concerning the dead prisoner: "Decency does not matter to them." Readers might now wonder to whom this comment really applies—the Germans or their victims?

Werner tries to process all that has happened up to the first slaughter of resistance fighters. He thinks how everything in his life seems to have led to this event, beginning with the death of his father. The end result is dismally far from his bright dream to be a great scientist in Berlin. He finds the only way he can continue his work as ordered is to approach locating transmitters as an intellectual exercise. He must turn it back into the game it was at Schulforta.

Several important connections are further developed in Part 7. In the case of Volkheimer and Werner, a connection is broken when the older cadet becomes a soldier is reestablished, either by coincidence or the authority of Dr. Hauptmann. Volkheimer resumes the role of Werner's protector, shielding Werner as best he can from hardship and tending him when he is ill. Other connections involve Etienne and Marie-Laure. In his support of the resistance, Etienne establishes invisible links to the free world and finds himself "at the nexus of a web of information." As months pass, he and Marie-Laure are brought closer by their shared involvement in the resistance movement.

Etienne's growing affection for the girl connects what he is doing—the numbers he is transmitting—to his hope for a better future for her. He is also becoming a surrogate father to Marie-Laure, symbolized by his gift of *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*. This Braille book links back to Daniel and now connects the girl to her great-uncle.

A more sinister connection is being made by von Rumpel as his search for the Sea of Flames continues. The sergeant major begins to wonder about the clever series of locks that secured the diamond in the Natural History Museum. This leads him to investigate the locksmith, Daniel LeBlanc—the only remaining person who might be trusted with the diamond. With this connection made, von Rumpel edges closer to Saint-Malo, Marie-Laure, and the jewel.

The telegram at the end of Part 7 summons Werner and his comrades to Saint-Malo. The reader knows the enemy transmissions they are ordered to seek are coming from Etienne's transmitter. With this connection, the storylines of Werner and Marie-Laure are inching closer. For Werner, Marie-Laure, and Etienne, the consequences of their choices are coming into focus. Werner sees that he has contributed to a process that kills innocent people. The horrific death of an innocent child and her mother in Vienna will haunt him in the future. Etienne has a similar realization. The consequences of his transmissions are life and death; broadcasting numbers is not a game. He tries to impress this idea on Marie-Laure, who wants to be assured that, at least, they are the good guys.

Von Rumpel is sent to Lodz to examine a treasure trove of jewels. He briefly wonders where they all came from before recalling where he is. Then he realizes where they came from: Lodz's Jews. Lodz is located in central Poland. Before September 1939, when Germany invaded Poland, Lodz's Jewish population was one of the largest in Europe. In less than a month after German occupation of the city, plans for a ghetto in which to confine the Jews were initiated. By February 1940, the Jews were being herded into the small area with only a few minutes to pack up whatever they could carry. On May 1 the ghetto was closed and sealed. With the Jews now under tight control and fearing for their lives, it was easy to strip them of their valuables. They were then forced to pay for their food and housing with slave labor. Many were subsequently deported to death camps.

Finally, Madame Manec makes a brief appearance in this section as a benign ghost or guardian angel. It's perhaps

significant that she appears to Etienne outside the house, indicating that it will be safe for him to venture out. The two sparrows that come to her possibly signify Etienne and Marie-Laure. Whether a memory or a spirit, Madame is still connected to Etienne and trying to protect him and his great-niece.

## Part 8

### Summary

#### Fort National

On the afternoon of August 9, 1944, the shelling of Saint-Malo abruptly stops. About 4:00 p.m., a single shell from an American field howitzer, improperly ranged, sails over the city and hits the northern parapet of Fort National. Nine of the 300 French captives are killed instantly.

#### In the Attic

Without the bells of St. Vincent's church, Marie-Laure cannot gauge how long she has been trapped in the attic. Her thirst and hunger are acute. Yet she dares not leave or make a sound. The intruder has not left.

She hears him use the toilet on the sixth floor, right below her. His groans and mutterings alert her that there is something wrong with him. Moments later she hears the springs of her mattress squeak.

The attack on the city starts up again. Driven by her hunger, Marie-Laure decides she must risk opening one of the two cans of food with the paring knife and brick. She ignores the voice of her father in her head reminding her of the intruder below. She uses the whistling scream of the shells and their detonation to mask the sound of the brick striking the knife.

The can contains cooked green beans. With the water they have been boiled in, she quenches her thirst.

#### The Heads

Werner cannot get the radio to work. All he can raise on it is

static. Perhaps the cellar is too deep or the rubble above them blocks any signal. Perhaps there is something broken in the radio that he has not spotted. The battery inside it is nearly dead. After that the only power source left will be the American 11-volt battery he has found. That can supply one more day of static or one more day of light from Volkheimer's field light.

Volkheimer sits with his rifle beside him. He has taken to turning his field light on to shine on two shelves in the far corner of the cellar. The shelves are lined with eight or nine white plaster heads, skillfully fashioned. Werner imagines he can still see them when the light is turned off, "silent and watchful and unblinking."

## Delirium

When von Rumpel awakens, the sheets and his clothes are soaked sweat. He is weak and cannot see well. Crawling to the end of Marie-Laure's bed, he studies the model of Saint-Malo. Outside the window the city is burning and smashed, but this house still stands, untouched. And it is the one house missing from the model.

He knows for certain that Etienne did not have the model when he was arrested and sent to Fort National. The only other possibility is that the blind girl has it.

In von Rumpel's fevered mind, the fact that the real house still stands is proof that the stone is here, and it is proof of its power. He is dying, and the stone offers life. He must keep looking and will start again in the kitchen. This time, he will search more methodically.

## Water

Marie-Laure hears the creak of mattress springs and the sound of the German going downstairs. Outside it has begun to rain. She thinks of the two buckets of water just inside the door of her room and decides to risk leaving the attic to get a drink. The sound of the rain will mask her movements, if she is careful. She tucks the empty bean can in her pocket.

Cautiously, she creeps out of the attic and the wardrobe doors. She crosses the bedroom to the hall. In her bedroom she can smell traces of the German, a sweet odor with something rotten underneath. She finds one of the buckets and drinks her fill. Then she fills the bean can with water.

As she crawls back toward the doorway, Marie-Laure hears the man three or four stories below. He is ransacking one of the rooms. Then her hand touches something familiar—her book! Clasping the book to her chest, she makes it back to the wardrobe, slips inside, and closes the doors gently behind her.

## The Beams

The shelling of Saint-Malo continues. In the darkness of the cellar, Volkheimer tells Werner the story of his great-grandfather, a sawyer from Prussia who helped cut down the trees that supplied masts for ships. Werner tells him that, where he is from, the trees they dug up were prehistoric ones, in the form of coal. "I was desperate to leave," Volkheimer says. When Werner replies, "I was, too," Volkheimer asks, "And now?"

## The Transmitter

With hopes that someone somewhere has a radio that will hear her, Marie-Laure starts up Etienne's strange machine. Then, with the microphone in one hand, she opens her book with the other, finds the lines with her fingers, and begins to read aloud.

## Voice

Werner and Volkheimer have been trapped for four days. As Werner fiddles with the transceiver, trying to find anything other than static, a girl's voice suddenly speaks into his ear. She is reading something.

Werner listens intently, fearful of losing the signal. Then abruptly the girl stops reading and says in an urgent hiss, "He is here. He is right below me." Then the broadcast goes silent.

In the darkness Werner finds Volkheimer and tells him what he has heard. But the man is unmoved; he seems to have given up. Like Werner, he is starving to death.

## Analysis

In Part 8 the storylines of Marie-Laure and Werner are on the brink of converging. In addition, the reader gains more insight into the character of Volkheimer, which in turn highlights similarities between his character and Werner's. Marie-Laure's resourcefulness comes into play once again with decisions

that ultimately will save her life. And finally, von Rumpel's obsession to find the Sea of Flames shines a light on the battle between rational and irrational forces in the world. Though Werner has patched up the radio enough to receive transmissions, it picks up only static until Marie-Laure begins her broadcast. At last a direct connection is established between the two characters. Marie-Laure, alone and in danger, is reaching out to the world, not unlike her great-uncle Etienne long ago with his broadcasts of Henri's recording. When the girl's transmission reaches Werner, it casts him back in memory to Children's House, listening to the Professor and "clinging to a dream he does not want to leave." Picking up the broadcast while entombed in the cellar electrifies him with hope. At this point the reader may also hope that this connection means the two characters are fated to meet and, therefore, to survive.

Once again, destiny and choice seem to be working in tandem. The invisible lines connecting these two characters originated long ago. On the one side, there is Henri, Etienne, and their recordings that reach Werner in distant Zollverein. On the other there is Henri's son, Daniel, his granddaughter, Marie-Laure, and a war that drives the two to Etienne's home in Saint-Malo. Yet Werner and Marie-Laure's choices now determine the path for their final meeting. Life, the author suggests, is influenced by both factors.

In Part 8 Volkheimer explains why he came to the Nazi training school at Schulforta. His reasons, it turns out, are not so different from Werner's. He was desperate to escape what seemed at the time a dull, backward life. When Werner says he, too, was desperate, Volkheimer asks, "And now?" His question reminds the reader of his better qualities. His regret is like Werner's own.

In an earlier conversation, Werner asks if Volkheimer knew the stories boys told about him, "the Giant." Volkheimer's answer highlights something else he shares with Werner. He says it isn't much fun being feared and always being asked how tall he is. It seems Volkheimer's great size made him an outsider, much the same way Werner's intelligence and special skills set him apart. Perhaps Volkheimer recognized this similarity, which helps explain his protectiveness toward Werner. This adds another touch of humanity to Volkheimer's complex characterization.

Another similarity between the two men comes to light before Werner picks up Marie-Laure's transmission. The situation in

the cellar seems hopeless, and Werner wonders if they even deserve to be saved after what they have done. Volkheimer seems to be entertaining similar thoughts as he sits in a chair staring at white plaster heads on two shelves. There is something reproachful about the way they stare back with blank eyes, silent, watchful, and unblinking. They are like stand-ins for those killed by his hand.

In the attic of Number 4 rue Vauborel, Marie-Laure once again demonstrates her resourcefulness and courage. Food and water have become a necessity. After mentally arguing with her Papa, she boldly takes matters into her own hands, knowing she will die if she does not. Ultimately she realizes someone out there must have a radio and that someone might hear her and come to her aid. Recalling what she knows about Etienne's strange machine, she turns it on and then begins to read.

The rational and irrational forces of the world collide inside the house. In the attic Marie-Laure holds imaginary conversations with her Papa in which he adopts the irrational view that the Sea of Flames' legendary powers have kept her safe. Their make-believe exchange suggests that the supernatural can no longer be ignored; that indeed, it may exist and influence outcomes as much as actions based on logic and reason. By now von Rumpel would fully agree with this idea. He is near death and zealously clings to the belief that the diamond possesses curative powers. He sees the fact that Etienne's house is still standing as proof of the stone's magic. At this point in the story, rational and irrational forces are on equal footing. They can drive events in one direction or the other.

## Part 9

### Summary

#### Edge of the World

In a flashback to May 1944, Werner is haunted by the image of the red-haired child in the velvet cape shot in Vienna. He seems to see her everywhere along the road the radio team now travels on their way to France. Werner is still ill and unable to keep down solid food.

At dawn they reach the northern rim of Brittany, with the

walled city of Saint-Malo in the distance. At the checkpoint Werner exits the truck and crosses the beach to stand at the edge of the continent. It feels right somehow, as if this is the end point he has been moving toward since leaving Zollverein.

Inside the walled citadel, Volkheimer meets with a German field colonel. He explains that an enemy network seems to be at work, broadcasting encoded numbers, followed by announcements of births, deaths, baptisms, and engagements. After, there is music. Their meaning is a mystery. Volkheimer assures him the source will be found quickly.

## Numbers

Von Rumpel sees a doctor in Nuremberg who gives him four months—120 sunrises—to live. The sergeant major goes to a dinner party that night, where other attending officers talk about different numbers: the Eighth and Fifth German armies are retreating north through Italy, and the Tenth army might lose Rome. Some 100,000 men and 20,000 vehicles are involved.

While at the dinner table, the sergeant major is notified of a phone call. A man named Jean Brignon has information about Daniel LeBlanc. Over the phone he tells von Rumpel that the locksmith was arrested in January 1941 and is accused of conspiracy. The informer was Claude Levitte, a Malouin. LeBlanc was also photographed taking measurements in Saint-Malo. Brignon has not been able to trace LeBlanc's current whereabouts. Von Rumpel, however, reasons that LeBlanc would flee to Saint-Malo only if someone he trusted lived there.

## May

The last days of May are beautiful in Saint-Malo, reminding Marie-Laure of the last days of May in Paris, 1940. When Marie-Laure visits the bakery, Madame Ruelle greets her as usual, but the girl can sense something has changed. Madame Ruelle's voice seems galvanized, and she may have been crying. "Tell your uncle," she says, "that the hour has come. That the mermaids have bleached hair."

Marie-Laure can only guess what the message means. She knows her uncle has been hearing rumors on his radio that a great armada has been gathering. She goes to the grotto to think things over. In her head she hears her Papa repeat the

words Madame Ruelle has said: "They are coming, dear. Within the week."

## Hunting (Again)

The radio team is scouring the towns of Brittany, trying to hunt down the illegal transmissions described by the German field officer—Etienne's. They are having no luck.

The team is stationed in the requisitioned Hotel of Bees. Werner and Bernd share a room on the top floor. At night, in Werner's imaginings, the dead girl from Vienna haunts the halls, hunting him. Airplanes "crawl across the sky" along the coast but are too far away to identify as friend or foe.

## Untitled (Letter to Jutta)

Werner is well enough at last to write Jutta. He tells her of seeing the sea and describes its many colors. "It is my favorite thing, I think," he writes, "that I have ever seen."

## "Claire de Lune"

The radio team is working the southern section of the walled city near the ramparts. Volkheimer drowses on a bench in the truck. Bernd is up on the parapet, where he is supposed to be monitoring the first transceiver. He is, in fact, asleep under his rain poncho. Suddenly, the static in Werner's headphones is replaced by a voice with a Breton accent relaying messages to "Madame Labas" and "Monsieur Ferey." The broadcast ends with the announcement "Next broadcast Thursday 2300," followed by strains of music.

Werner is transfixed. The quality of the transmission and tenor of the voice are those of that long-ago Frenchman, the Professor. The music is also the same. Werner checks to see if anyone else has heard. Volkheimer is asleep. Bernd fails to key his microphone, to say he has heard. The two Neumanns, sitting in the truck cab, are oblivious. In this moment Werner realizes he has a choice. He removes his headset and reports that no signal has been picked up.

## Antenna

While half of northern France is in flames and fighting on the beaches of Normandy devours men on both sides, Saint-Malo remains untouched. The occupying army positions an 88-millimeter cannon on the ramparts.

It's now Thursday. Three nights have passed since Werner heard the broadcast. Studying Saint-Malo from a third-floor window of the hotel, he has a hunch that one of its many tall chimneys is being used to mask the radio's antenna. He hurries out to walk the streets in the area. At about 2300 hours, he spots the antenna unfolding above Number 4 on rue Vauborel.

## Big Claude

Von Rumpel has found the man who reported Daniel LeBlanc's odd measuring activities to the authorities. Claude Levitte, the perfumer, is eager to share what he knows with the German. He points out the house on rue Vauborel where Daniel stayed with his uncle.

## Boulangerie

Werner returns to Number 4 rue Vauborel a day after discovering the antenna. He fantasizes about ringing the bell and asking to be admitted; to meet the Frenchman. He would tell him that before the war he listened to the Frenchman on the radio.

As he stands at the corner, watching the house and imagining these things, the door opens. Instead of an old Frenchman, out steps "a slender, pretty, auburn-haired girl with a very freckled face." Moments later Werner realizes she is blind.

Captivated, he follows her to the bakery. On a bench outside sits "a goitrous and sallow German" reading a newspaper. Werner waits for the girl to come out of the bakery. His hands are shaking, and he can't seem to catch his breath. In his mind this girl represents the "pure they were always lecturing about at Schulforta."

## Grotto

Instead of going straight home from the bakery, Marie-Laure goes to the grotto. But this time she is followed. She is just

inside the gated area where mastiffs were kept long ago when a male German voice says, "Good morning, mademoiselle." He then asks why she comes here and will not let her leave until she answers a question about her father. He says her Papa is in a prison 500 kilometers away.

Marie-Laure can feel him reach for her. In panic she slams the gate shut in his face. He slips and falls, giving her time to turn the key in the lock. He protests that he is "just a lowly sergeant major [t]here to ask a question." Inside the kennel she crouches and wonders if the ironwork is too narrow for the man to squeeze through.

## Agoraphobia

It has been half an hour since Marie-Laure left for the bakery. She is usually back not less than 23 minutes later. Her great-uncle has timed her.

After 32 minutes have passed, Etienne imagines Marie-Laure lost, hit by a truck, seized by a mercenary, or taken by the Germans because they found out about the bread.

At 34 minutes, Etienne puts on his hat and shoes, and "stands in the foyer summoning all his resolve." He fears the outdoors. Its open spaces are too bright; the sounds too loud. There are corpses stirring in the shadows. It's been 24 years since he last ventured out.

Now 35 minutes have passed. Etienne opens the door and steps outside.

## Nothing

Von Rumpel has Marie-Laure cornered behind the kennel gate in the grotto. He continues to question her about her father, his reasons for measuring buildings, and what he might have carried away for the museum—what he might have left with her.

Not knowing if the German can see her, Marie-Laure takes the bread loaf from her knapsack, breaks it open, and takes out the little scroll of paper. She then slips the paper into her mouth and begins to chew. Feeling alone and forsaken by God, she at last shouts out angrily, "He left me *nothing* ... Just a dumb model of this town and a broken promise."

On the other side of the gate, the German falls quiet.

## Forty Minutes

Etienne makes it to the bakery. Seeing him, Madame Ruelle knows immediately something is amiss. Together they try to think where Marie-Laure could have gone. Etienne fears that he has traded all those numbers for her life.

Etienne knows that Marie-Laure goes to the sea. Suddenly he thinks of the grotto where he, Henri, and Hubert Bazin used to play. Followed by Madame Ruelle, he runs, traveling "the paths of his youth, navigating by instinct." In the grotto, he finds the girl, intact, crouching with the remains of the bread loaf in her lap. "You came," she says. "You came ..."

## The Girl

Werner cannot stop thinking of the girl and wondering who she is. Perhaps she is the daughter of the Frenchman whose broadcasts Werner has not revealed. He wonders if Volkheimer knows of his deception.

On August first, the two Neumanns are reassigned to serve on the front lines in the defense of Saint-Malo. The radio team, reduced to three members, continues its work that night. Werner knows the Frenchman will broadcast again at 2:12 a.m. He will have to switch off the transmitter or pretend he hears only static.

## Little House

Etienne tells Marie-Laure she can no longer go outside. He will make the daily visit to the bakery, though in his mind, the walk is "a gauntlet of a thousand dangers."

Marie-Laure's thoughts turn again and again to the questions she has been asked about her father and anything he might have told her or left her. On the sixth day of August, it occurs to her that the key lies in the odd lines from her father's last letter: "I'm sorry it turned out like this. If you ever wish to understand, look inside Etienne's house, inside the house." She also realizes that she has answered the German's question after all: "Just tell me if your father left anything with you." She recalls her response: "Just a dumb model of this town."

Marie-Laure scrambles up the stairs to her bedroom, finds the model house of Number 4 rue Vauborel, and with trembling fingers, solves its puzzle. When she turns it over, a pear-

shaped stone drops into her hand.

## Numbers

The battle for Brittany has begun. Liberation is only days away, but the liberating forces need to know the location of the antiaircraft guns in Saint-Malo. Madame Ruelle tells Etienne that he must find and plot the guns' coordinates on a map and then broadcast the numbers. This will be his last chance to help. Tomorrow the Germans will be rounding up all the men of the city and imprisoning them at Fort National.

Etienne feels trapped in a spiderweb that binds him more tightly every moment. Nevertheless, he nods that he will do it.

## Sea of Flames

Now that she has found the diamond, Marie-Laure struggles with what to do. She recalls its mythical properties: its keeper will live forever, but those he or she loves will be cursed. The stone may have been the source of much sorrow already—her father's arrest, the disappearance of Hubert Bazin, the death of Madame Manec. She is certain it is the thing the German seeks.

In the end she decides to keep the stone a secret. She returns it to its hiding place in the model house and drops the house into her pocket.

When it is almost dawn, Etienne leaves on his mission, as promised to Madame Ruelle. He assures Marie-Laure that he will be quick; he'll only be an hour.

## The Arrest of Etienne LeBlanc

Etienne has already broadcast the coordinates of one antiaircraft battery: the rampart beside the Hotel of Bees. He only needs to take the bearings of two more.

Etienne is feeling strangely good as he carries out his mission. Then, as he approaches the bulwark of the ramparts, a limping man in uniform steps out of the shadows and comes toward him.

## 7 August 1944

Marie-Laure wakes to the boom of big guns firing nearby. Soon she discovers that her great-uncle has not yet returned and tries not to panic. Instead, she checks that the trip wire to the front gate is still intact. Then she fills two galvanized buckets with water and carries them up to her bedroom, and fills the tub on the third floor with water. Finally, she checks the little house she has been keeping under her pillow and returns it to its place in the model. Then she settles down to read a while.

In the afternoon, Claude Levitte, the perfumer, comes to the door. He is there to convince Marie-Laure that she must come with him; evacuation orders have been issued, and she must get to a shelter immediately. Her great-uncle has asked him to help her. She is to leave everything behind and come with him. He mentions that the men of the city are being detained but does not say Etienne is one of them.

Marie-Laure senses a trap; someone has put the perfumer up to this. Refusing to go with him, she closes and bolts the door. After a few moments of indecision, Claude Levitte goes away.

## Leaflets

Inside the Hotel of Bees, Werner, Bernd, Volkheimer, a German lieutenant, and the team of eight Austrians in charge of the cannon eat a meal served on hotel china. On the seaward side of the hotel, the big 88-millimeter cannon waits in its fortified position on the ramparts.

After the meal, Werner slips upstairs to a window with a view of the sea, the city, and the red glow of a battle just out of sight to the east. The Americans, he knows, "have them pinned against the sea." He feels this moment is a borderland between "whatever has happened already and whatever is to come." He thinks of the girl and is glad that at least he has protected her secret and kept her safe.

As he is about to close the window, he spots a plane flying over the citadel. It drops "a flock" of white paper leaflets that fall over the city. They urge the inhabitants of Saint-Malo to "depart immediately to open country."

## Analysis

The tension builds in Part 9 as events accumulate toward the story's climax. All the key players are in Saint-Malo, and there are signs that liberation of the citadel is near. Von Rumpel picks up the last pieces of the puzzle connecting the Sea of Flames to the model of Saint-Malo in Etienne's house. Soon after, Marie-Laure is awakened to her peril as holder of the Sea of Flames. In a turning point for Werner, he grabs the chance to reclaim his soul. For love of Marie-Laure, Etienne overcomes his fears of open spaces. And throughout, the influences of destiny and free-will choice continue to work in tandem to shape events.

From conversation at a dinner party attended by von Rumpel, the reader learns how the German war machine is breaking down. Later in Saint-Malo, the baker's wife, Madame Ruelle, happily whispers to Marie-Laure, "the hour has come ... they are coming." Before long, American planes cruise the sky off the coast of Brittany. Then Allied bombs begin demolishing rail stations, and occupied towns begin falling to Allied forces. The demand for German men to replace the wounded and strengthen the front lines is overwhelming. All of these are signposts pointing to Germany's imminent defeat.

This pending doom adds tension as von Rumpel closes in on the location of the Sea of Flames. After losing its trail in Paris, von Rumpel learns what happened to the museum's locksmith after the bombing of Paris. The trail now leads to Saint-Malo. The sergeant major correctly assumes Daniel was in the city prior to his arrest because he trusted someone living there. With the help of the Saint-Malo perfumer, Big Claude, von Rumpel connects Daniel and the Sea of Flames with Etienne's house. Already he knows from Daniel's intercepted letters that the diamond is hidden somewhere "inside Etienne's house." Marie-Laure unwittingly supplies the German with the final clue to the diamond's whereabouts when, in the grotto, she says her father left her with "a dumb model of this town."

This exchange with von Rumpel foreshadows the moment when Marie-Laure at last comprehends what "look inside Etienne's house, inside the house" means. When she does, she also realizes the peril she is in; this is what the limping German is after.

During their grotto confrontation—before Marie-Laure's epiphany—the girl again demonstrates remarkable courage, quick thinking, and resourcefulness. The scene has the quality

of a dark fairytale. Von Rumpel is a cruel ogre who traps her in the cave and uses her blindness as a tool to frighten her. The manner in which he blocks her escape route and tries to reach out for her is nightmarish. Yet Marie-Laure keeps her wits, swiftly locks herself behind the grotto gate, and consumes the scroll of codes he may be after. This cool-headedness and courage will serve her later when Big Claude comes to abduct her from Etienne's house. In both instances, Marie-Laure becomes like her beloved whelks, withdrawing into a safe place and determined to survive in a harsh world.

Werner's finer qualities reassert themselves in Part 9. He has been struggling with shame and guilt for quite some time. Memories of Jutta and Frederick prick his conscience and remind him of things he once believed in. He is haunted by the child murdered in Vienna. Finally, his fever—born of exhaustion, soul sickness, and remorse—burns away the layers of self-deceit that have protected him from the truth: He has betrayed everything he once cherished. Upon reaching Saint-Malo, he is ready to turn in a new direction.

Finding himself at the edge of the sea, Werner feels this is "the end point [he] has been moving toward ever since he left Zollverein." In his subsequent letter to Jutta, he seems to have awokened like a fairytale character bound by a dark enchantment. His eyes are open, just as the Professor counseled long ago. He tells Jutta he is feeling clearheaded now and describes the sea in terms of childlike wonder. Knowing Werner is fated to be trapped in the hotel cellar in just a few days, the reader wonders: Have his eyes opened too late?

When Werner picks up Etienne's broadcast, the voice so like the Professor's calls him back to Children's House, when "the cords of his soul [were] not yet severed." Here is the turning point, when Werner knows he has a choice to make. He thinks of Frederick, who believed there were no choices in life but then made a life-changing choice with the words "I will not." Disregarding his duty, Werner does not report the transmission to Volkheimer. His disobedience casts him in a new and dangerous role as an enemy of the Reich.

Werner's decision draws him to seek out Etienne's house with hopes of meeting the Professor. Instead he finds Marie-Laure. While she is unaware of it, a tangible connection to Werner is now established. It is one-sided and only visual, and as such, fragile and incomplete. For Marie-Laure it goes unnoticed, while it makes an indelible impression on Werner. On the same

day, von Rumpel makes a similar connection, drawing dangerously closer to Marie-Laure in the grotto. The reader's awareness of future events leaves open the question of how this connection with Werner will help her.

In Part 9 the reader gets a closer look at the terrible fears spawned by Etienne's agoraphobia. This makes his fight to overcome the condition and search for Marie-Laure all the more courageous and admirable. Clearly his love for the girl has grown into fatherly protectiveness. Etienne's arrest at the end of this section explains his absence from the house during the bombing of Saint-Malo. It may be assumed that the unnamed limping German who approaches him is von Rumpel.

Throughout this section, the influences of destiny and free-will choices continue to work in tandem to shape events. For example, the reader knows Volkheimer harbors doubts about the moral path he has followed in service of the Reich (revealed in Part 8, "The Beams"). Nevertheless, it is clear at this time he fully intends to fulfill his duties in Saint-Malo. He assures the German colonel that the enemy radio transmissions will be found and their operators eliminated. His destiny and theirs is dictated by his duty to the Reich.

Yet Volkheimer rebels against duty when Werner conceals picking up the enemy broadcast. A description of the moment suggests that the staff sergeant chooses to ignore the deception. The narrator states, "Just behind Werner, Volkheimer's eyelids remain closed." This does not mean he is asleep or unaware of what has transpired. Later Werner will suspect that the staff sergeant knows. Volkheimer's decision will significantly alter future events.

The Sea of Flames is tied up in the push and pull between destiny and free-will choice. Both forces have brought the stone to Saint-Malo and placed it in Marie-Laure's hands. Logic tells her to get rid of it or give it to the German. Yet if the curse is real, the stone must not fall into other hands—not even her great-uncle Etienne's. It also may be protecting her, as her father seems to have believed. Yet, as Dr. Geffard once told her, "Wars might have been fought over it." Round and round her thoughts go, rational beliefs once again wrestling with the irrational. The questions for the reader are: Has destiny placed the diamond in Marie-Laure's care? Or can she exercise free will and rid the world of its curse? If destiny and choice work together, then perhaps the answer to both questions is yes.

Doerr's use of language contributes to the sense of building tension in Part 9. He conveys the agony of waiting for both

major characters with long sentences punctuated by "and." Waiting for her great-uncle in "7 August 1944," for instance, Marie-Laure fills buckets and carries them and sets them in a corner and thinks and then fills the bathtub with water. Eating in the hotel, knowing a battle is coming, Werner observes that the Germans sit on sandbags and Bernd falls asleep and Volkheimer talks and the Austrians chew steadily. The repetition conveys the numbing tedium of waiting along with an anxiety so great the characters can hardly organize their own thoughts. It is also another link between the characters who are about to meet.

## Part 10

### Summary

#### Entombed

Still trapped in the cellar, Werner is listening again to Marie-Laure's voice on the radio, reading. Impulsively he clamps the headphones on Volkheimer, hoping to rouse him. Volkheimer's breathing is slow, and he is motionless. Werner explains that this is the transmission they were hunting for. The source was not a network of terrorists, but only an old man and a girl. Now, she is begging for help, saying, "He is here. He will kill me." Werner feels he has saved the girl only to hear her die. He asks Volkheimer if he knew all along that Werner had picked up the girl's signal. But Volkheimer appears not to hear or understand Werner. He is either dying or has resolved to die.

#### Fort National

Imprisoned at the fort, Etienne begs his jailers to let him go to his niece in Saint-Malo, but to no avail. Then an errant American shell hits the fort. Etienne stops talking. He retreats into memories of the town, his brother Henri, and the LeBlanc house haunted by the ghosts of Henri and Madame Manec. He recalls the hours spent on the davenport in his study, traveling the world in books and stories with Marie-Laure. But now, he thinks, all those memories are burning up with the city.

### Captain Nemo's Last Words

The German is still in the house on rue Vauborel. By noon on August 12, Marie-Laure has read seven of the last nine chapters of *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* over the radio. When she is done, she will decide what to do about the German and the stone.

She wonders what would happen if the goddess took away the curse on the stone. Would things become as they were? Would her Papa return?

### Visitor

Von Rumpel has been four days in the house on rue Vauborel. He hears a voice call from outside, "You in there!" Crawling to the window, the sergeant major looks out to see a German infantry corporal. The man tells him that the troops are evacuating and going to the fortress at La Cité. All of Saint-Malo will be "inside the bomb line" after a brief cease-fire tomorrow. Von Rumpel thanks the corporal and sends him on his way.

### Final Sentence

In the cellar of the House of Bees, Volkheimer does not stir. Werner is past any sensation of hunger. Emptiness and fullness are now the same.

Werner has heard no transmission from the girl for an hour or more. After what he assumes is the last sentence of the novel, the transmission is shut off. In the darkness that envelops him, the specter of the little Viennese girl descends from the ceiling to sit amid the rubble. She begins to count off on her fingers a list of minor infractions for which one might be punished. As she ticks them off, the little girl gradually ages and transforms into the old Jewess, Frau Schwartzenberger, who once lived in Frederick's townhouse.

Werner listens and tries not to understand the truth behind her words. Like Captain Nemo's *Nautilus*, he feels he has been sucked down into a whirlpool. Like his father, he has descended into the pits. His youthful ambitions and his wartime shame have become one and the same.

Frau Schwartzenberger walks toward him, transforming back into the girl. But the hole in the center of her forehead leads to

blackness that teems with hundreds of thousands of souls. They stare up "from alleys, from windows, from smoldering parks."

## Music #1

The siege of Saint-Malo seems never-ending. It's after midnight on August 13, and Marie-Laure has survived in the attic for five days. She has been without water for a day and a half, and without food for two. Though she still has the last can of food, she does not open it. Instead she finds one of Etienne's records, places it on the spindle, turns up the volume, and positions the arm and needle at the outer edge. Then she turns on the record player, and the piano music begins.

Making her way to the top of the ladder that leads into the attic, Marie-Laure sits down to wait for the German to hear and come for her. She holds the paring knife in her hand.

## Music #2

Beneath the ruins of the Hotel of Bees, Werner is asleep. Volkheimer is passively monitoring the radio. He expects to hear nothing but static. Suddenly, the static "coalesces into music"—the beautiful strains of Debussy's "Clair de Lune." The music galvanizes Volkheimer into action. He awakens Werner and has him hook up the field light to the radio battery. By its dim light, he constructs a makeshift bunker in the back corner of the cellar out of blocks of masonry, pieces of timber, and fragments of shattered wall. Then, pulling Werner behind the barricade, he ignites the fuse of a grenade and throws the explosive at the spot where the stairwell once existed.

## Music #3

Either in a memory or a dream, von Rumpel is watching his daughter Veronika. She kneels at the foot of the bed, beside Marie-Laure's model city, and marches a doll bride and doll groom along a street, toward the cathedral. A doll dressed in black waits on the steps. Then Veronika begins singing in a voice that sounds like the notes made by a piano.

Abruptly there is silence. Von Rumpel sits up. Somewhere above him, a young man begins to speak in French. He is talking about coal.

## Out

Volkheimer's grenade has opened a hole through which "a shaft of starlight slices." He attacks the opening with a rebar, or steel rod, widening the gap until he and Werner can escape. From outside, they see that only two walls of the hotel are still standing. The houses beyond are in ruins.

The two men stagger for the wall of the ramparts. Then Volkheimer hands Werner his rifle and tells him, simply, to go. He himself must find food. Werner wonders again if Volkheimer knew his secret all along.

Werner moves through the wreckage of the town until he finds Number 4 rue Vauborel. All the windows are blown out, but the house still stands.

## Wardrobe

Von Rumpel searches Henri's bedroom, trying to locate the source of the voice that filters through the ceiling. Inside the wardrobe, he spots something missed before: "trails through the dust" drawn by fingers or knees. As he reaches deeper into the wardrobe, the tripwire sounds the bells above and below for the front gate. Startled, he jerks back, knocks his head on the wardrobe, and lands on his back. The candle rolls away, toward the window and the curtains.

Downstairs, the front door creaks open, and someone comes in.

## Comrades

Cautiously, Werner makes his way upstairs through the ransacked house. On the sixth floor, he finds a girl's small bedroom. He sets down Volkheimer's rifle to get a drink from one of two buckets of water in the corner. Behind him, a voice says, "Ah." It is von Rumpel, and he is holding a pistol.

Werner recognizes the sergeant major as the German outside the bakery on the day he followed the girl. Von Rumpel recognizes Werner as well and assumes they are on the same quest. He aims the pistol at Werner's chest.

Down the hall, the curtain is burning. From the room comes a muted clatter of "something bouncing down a ladder and striking the floor." Momentarily distracted, von Rumpel lets the

tip of his pistol dip. Werner lunges for the rifle.

## The Simultaneity of Instants

From behind the wardrobe, Marie-Laure hears the sound of scuffle followed by a shot. Footsteps hurry into the room, and there is a splash and a hiss; the smell of smoke and steam.

Moments later, Werner is running his fingers over the back of the wardrobe, trying to figure out its secret. Simultaneously, life goes on in the war-torn world, separate from and oblivious to the events in rue Vauborel. Volkheimer sits in a ruined apartment, eating tinned yams. The imprisoned Etienne considers that if he and Marie-Laure survive the world, they will travel to anyplace she wants to go.

Werner can hear Marie-Laure on the other side of the wardrobe. He asks, "Es-tu là?" (Are you there?)

## Are You There?

Fumbling to translate his thoughts into French, Werner tells Marie-Laure that he has not come to kill her. He has been listening to her on the radio and has heard her music. That is why he has come.

Marie slides open the wardrobe, and Werner helps her out.

## Second Can

Werner explains to Marie-Laure that there will be a cease-fire at noon; he can get her out. Then he tells her that she is very brave. Marie-Laure responds that bravery has played no part. All her life she has been called brave, but she has merely awakened each day and lived her life, however it unfolded. Werner says it has been years since he lived his life. However, today, perhaps he did.

Werner comments that a man once used her transmitter to broadcast lessons about science. Marie-Laure responds that the voice was her grandfather's; Warner confesses, "We loved them."

Marie-Laure then fetches the last can from the attic and gives it to Werner to open. Inside are Madame Manec's sweet canned peaches.

## Birds of America

Marie-Laure shows Werner the transmitter in the attic. In addition to the wonder of the machine, there are books blanketing the lower floor. He imagines a lifetime of reading, learning, and "looking at this girl."

Among the books he finds a copy of Audubon's *Birds of America*. Remembering Frederick, he asks to keep a page of the book. Then he and Marie-Laure take refuge in the cellar, waiting for the shelling to stop. Werner wishes they could hide there till the war ends. In a while they fall asleep.

## Cease-fire

The guns have stopped firing. Before venturing out the house, Werner gives Marie-Laure a white pillowcase to hold high when the time comes. Outside, there are only blasted buildings and piles of rubble. It's very quiet.

Marie-Laure leads Werner on a brief detour to the grotto. Inside, she "takes some small wooden thing and sets it in the water." Once Werner assures her the little house is in the ocean, Marie-Laure is ready to leave.

On the streets again, Werner leaves Marie-Laure when the way to safety is clear. He must go the other direction. They say good-bye, and she places something in his hand. Werner watches her walk away until she is out of sight.

In his hand he holds the key to the grotto that she has pressed there.

## Chocolate

That evening, Marie-Laure is reunited with Madame Ruelle. Within the safety of a requisitioned school, they and the other refugees are fed chocolate confiscated from the Germans. In the morning, Fort National is taken by American forces, and Madame Ruelle finds Etienne among the freed prisoners. Three days later the last of the German forces surrender, and the siege of Saint-Malo is over. Etienne takes Marie-Laure away from the city to a hotel, on the way to Paris.

## Light

Werner is captured by French resistance fighters just outside Saint-Malo and turned over to the Americans. He and other German prisoners spend the night in a hotel courtyard encircled by razor wire. Volkheimer is not among these prisoners.

That night, Werner cannot keep down his food. Over the next few days, as the prisoners are marched to Dinan, he is unable to eat. By the first of September, he cannot get to his feet, and he is transported by truck to a tent full of dying men. For a week he lies with the hard corners of the little wooden house—retrieved from his duffel bag—clamped in one hand.

Then one night, Werner gets up and leaves the tent. Inside his duffel are the little model house and his old notebook. He passes the sleeping American at the door of the tent and, in the moonlight, heads for a field. He is going home to Germany.

Three months before, the German army had seeded the field with land mines. Werner now steps on one and "disappears in a fountain of earth."

## Analysis

Part 10 brings events to a climax. It opens with each character facing almost certain death. Irrational thoughts creep easily into their imaginations, while memories cast them back to better times and places. For Werner, guilt takes on the shape of the dead Viennese girl in a horrific hallucination. Nevertheless, hopelessness gives way to defiance as characters make a last effort to live, drawing strength from music reaching them on radio waves. And as events reach their peak, the storylines of Werner and Marie-Laure at long last converge.

In the cellar of the Hotel of Bees, Volkheimer is unresponsive, apparently "resolved to go." Werner hears defeat in the staff sergeant's shallow breaths. Over the radio, the final sentence of *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* is read, and Werner feels hope slip away when the transmission is cut off. His hunger "peters out like a flame for which no fuel remains," and all he can do is sleep. At Fort National, Etienne is helplessly held prisoner while artillery shells smash into the city. In the attic of Etienne's house, Marie-Laure is glad she has reached the end of the book. She is ready to die, though she

plans to go down fighting. In the rooms below, von Rumpel feels "the murderous bloom inside his body" corrupting every cell and wonders how he has failed to find the diamond.

Collectively for these characters, the situation appears hopeless. Under these circumstances, the scales upon which rational and irrational forces are balanced tip. In their physically and spiritually weakened state, the mind of each character becomes fertile ground for dark, strange imaginings. Volkheimer convinces himself that the plaster heads on the shelves will kill him if he moves. Werner sees the dead girl from Vienna descend through the ceiling. She sits before him, ticking off a list of transgressions for which Jews and prisoners were punished, and she gradually transforms into Frau Schwartzenberger. In her attic Marie-Laure links the book's final line, "We'll die together, Ned, my friend," to the end of her life. She also embraces the notion that the Sea of Flames is cursed and wonders what would happen if she returned it to the goddess. In contrast, von Rumpel entertains the idea that the stone was never real but only a hoax.

Into these mental wanderings, memories also slip. At Fort National, Etienne closes his eyes and crawls away into the past. Yet far from his usual nightmares, these are comforting memories of childhood, Henri, his home, Madame Manec, and recent years with Marie-Laure. Nevertheless, he knows all the landmarks symbolizing these memories are burning in Saint-Malo. He also knows that, in the war-torn world, memories everywhere are burning and "the universe is full of fuel."

Werner falls into an abyss of memories in which "ambition and shame becom[e] one and the same." Like being sucked into a maelstrom, he descends in "a one-way dive from Zollverein" to end at the bottom with the mother and girl from Vienna. The bullet hole in the girl's head seems to lead to a well of lost souls, victims of the war whom no one will remember.

Marie-Laure's inspired moment to broadcast the Professor's record stirs better memories in Volkheimer and von Rumpel. Volkheimer's mind is awakened by music to memories of home, a forest at dawn, and walking with his great-grandfather through pines "as tall as a cathedral." This becomes a catalyst for action that liberates him and Werner from their tomb. Similarly, the music casts von Rumpel back into warm memories of his daughter Veronika. When it ceases, he is roused to go in search of its source.

In playing the recording, Marie-Laure has decided to go out fighting. It's a courageous act of defiance that travels on

invisible radio waves to inspire Volkheimer and Werner. They, too, will go out fighting. Their escape is somewhat miraculous, as is Werner's arrival at rue Vauborel just in time to stop von Rumpel from finding Marie-Laure. This suggests that the girl is truly protected by the stone, and this protection extends to anyone who can help her.

In the house on rue Vauborel, the storylines of Marie-Laure and Werner converge at last. In the words of the *New York Times* reviewer, "the blind transmitter . . . meets the ever-listening receiver." In this moment the themes of communication and connections, remembrance, and destiny versus choices are woven together. For example, communication via radio established long ago creates the vital connection that will lead the two young people to this place and time. Etienne's memories of Henri, which inspire the old broadcasts, become Werner's memories of the Professor. These and memories of Jutta reawaken Werner's conscience and rekindle his fundamental decency. With his eyes once again open, he makes decisions that lead him to Marie-Laure when she needs him most.

A few odd puzzle pieces show up toward the end of Part 10 and still must be fitted into the novel's larger picture. These include the key that Marie-Laure presses into Werner's hand, the presence of the little model house in Werner's duffel bag, and the page that Werner tears out of Etienne's *Birds of America* book. Why did Marie-Laure give Werner the grotto key? Why did he retrieve the little house? Did he discover what it contained? What did he intend to do with the bird picture? What will happen to these things now that Werner has become yet another casualty of the war?

Finally, in "The Simultaneity of Instants," the reader is reminded that the stories in this novel represent all the stories that otherwise go unnoticed and unrecorded. The stories told here are distinct, yet linked in some way. Like all unheralded stories, they are small but individually significant, and collectively a part of history.

## Part 11

### Summary

#### Berlin

In January 1945 only four girls are still living at Children's House: Hannah and Susanne Gerlitz, Claudia Förster, and Jutta Pfennig. Jutta is 15. In January Frau Elena and the girls are taken to Berlin to work 10-hour days in a machine parts factory.

Living conditions reflect the disintegrating Reich. Food is scarce and strictly rationed. All spring the enemy bombers come to reduce more of Berlin to rubble. Bodies litter the streets. Then the factory runs out of material and is shut up, and the mail stops. In March Frau Elena and the girls are sent out to help clean up the streets after bombings.

Before leaving for Berlin the previous fall, Jutta had two letters telling her of Werner's death. Now she hears about German boys deserting the army only to be hunted down and shot. By April all that anyone talks about is the approaching Russian army. The women fear what these "barbarians" will do to them and their daughters. Jutta hears that "mothers are drowning daughters."

In May, three drunk Russians find the abandoned printing company where Frau Elena and the girls live. As the men come up the stairs, Frau Elena prepares the girls as best she can, telling them to stay calm. She says she will go with the men first, so that after they'll be more gentle.

The rapes are "strangely orderly." The girls do not cry out. The three men take Frau Elena and each of the girls in turn and then leave.

#### Paris

When Etienne and Marie-Laure come to Paris, they rent the same apartment where Marie-Laure grew up. Daily Etienne scans the newspapers for the lists of released prisoners and listens for news on the radio. Every morning, the two walk to the train station, where a procession of "the wasted and wretched shamble off the trains." Daniel LeBlanc is never among them.

Most days Dr. Geffard, the aging mollusk expert from the museum, accompanies them to the station. Marie-Laure sits wedged between her great-uncle and the old scientist. She also visits the museum, and the director assures her they are searching hard for her father and will provide for her housing

and education in the meantime. The Sea of Flames is not mentioned.

In the spring Berlin surrenders, and survivors of the German camps expose the hidden horrors of Nazism.

All through summer, Marie-Laure, Etienne, and Dr. Geffard wait for Daniel LeBlanc to come home. Then, one noon in August, Marie-Laure leads them to the Jardin des Plantes. There she announces she would like to go to school.

## Analysis

Part 11 provides a portrait of war's end in Germany. It also provides closure to this period in the lives of Jutta and Frau Elena. Their stories serve as reminders of the millions of German citizens victimized by Hitler's war whose stories will never be told. The section also brings Marie-Laure back to Paris and provides closure to the account of the girl and her father.

The fall of Berlin signaled the end for the Third Reich. Soviet troops seized the city, Hitler committed suicide on April 30, 1945, and Germany surrendered unconditionally eight days later. Once Russian forces took over the destroyed capital, German women fell victim to mass rape by Soviet soldiers.

In the description of conditions leading up to the rape of Frau Elena, Jutta, and the other girls from Children's House, the reader glimpses the horrors of daily life in 1945 Berlin. Living with hunger, deprivation, and filth has become the norm. Order is breaking down, as evidenced by the train cars loaded with laboriously collected copper, zinc, and steel "left on sidings for no one." Corpses litter the streets. Boy soldiers younger than Werner who desert their posts in fear are shot in the streets.

Terrifying rumors precede the arrival of Russian troops and prove to be true. In the painful depiction of the multiple rapes that occur, Frau Elena is heroic in her fight to protect and help her girls survive physically and spiritually. The ordeal reveals her unexpected depths of wisdom, emotional strength, and courage. By example, she guides her girls through perhaps the darkest moment of their young lives.

Curiously, the Russian soldiers show no emotion during the act. All are thin and war weary. Two are younger than Werner. It is up to the reader to interpret their purpose. The rapes may be, as Jutta decides, an act of cold revenge for all the Russian

dead.

In Paris, Marie-Laure eventually comes to the realization that it is time to acknowledge her father's death and move on. She still grieves and will never forget her father. But as "a disabled girl with no home and no parents," she must learn how to make her own way in the world. Her courage, intelligence, and self-confidence shine in her decision to go to school, get an education, and build her own future.

While storylines in this section once again seem disconnected, Werner, though dead, links them at their core. Thoughts and memories of Werner thread Jutta's account, and without him Marie-Laure would not have survived to return to Paris.

## Part 12

### Summary

#### Volkheimer

Frank Volkheimer lives in West Germany, in the suburbs of Pforzheim. He lives in a third-floor walk-up, and installs and repairs rooftop TV antennas for a living. He is alone and haunted by memories of his childhood home and "the eyes of men who are about to die." In his mind, "he kills them all over again."

This night, before going to bed, he retrieves his mail from the box downstairs. There is a packet from a West Berlin veterans' service organization. Inside are photographs of three different objects: a canvas soldier's bag, a little model house, and a rectangular notebook with the word *Fragen* (questions) on the front and *W.P.* inked in the bottom corner. A letter explains that these items were collected in 1944 by "a United States Army prisoner-of-war processing camp" in Brittany. It asks if he knows to whom they belong.

Memories of Werner come back—how small he was; how white his hair; how his ears stuck out; what he could have been if he had lived. In Volkheimer's memory, he was just a boy, as they all were; even the largest of them.

## Jutta

In 1974 Jutta is married and living in Essen with her husband, Albert Wette, and their six-year-old son, Max. She is a sixth-form algebra teacher. Albert is an accountant. On a Thursday evening in early June, she is at home with Max and Albert when an unexpected knock on the door startles her. In the doorframe, when she answers, stands a giant.

Volkheimer has brought her Werner's duffel bag. He tells her what little he can about Werner's last days in Saint-Malo; that "he might have fallen in love." Jutta does not want to hear and does not want to remember. There are some things that cannot be healed, that cannot be put right.

## Duffel

Jutta avoids looking through Werner's duffel until much later in the evening. Inside is a thick envelope containing her brother's childhood notebook, and a tiny model house wrapped in newspaper. Paging through the notebook of Werner's questions, drawings, schematics, and lists brings back a flood of memories. Tucked in the pages is an old sealed envelope addressed to "Frederick." Jutta recalls the name from Werner's letters and that this is the boy who "sees what other people don't." He was a dreamer, like Werner, destroyed by the war.

## Saint-Malo

On June 26 Jutta and Max say good-bye to Albert and board a train for Saint-Malo. In Jutta's purse are Werner's notebook and the model house. They reach the walled city around midnight.

The next morning she and Max visit the beach. Taking in its immensity and emerald-green beauty, Jutta experiences the same awe her brother had felt. She and Max next climb the tower of the Place Chateaubriand, where they are staying. Even from that high vantage point, Jutta can detect no signs of the bombing in the perfectly restored city.

After lunch they visit the abandoned ruins of the fort. It is overgrown with weeds, and the destruction from the final siege has not been erased. Signs along a trail explain points of interest, but there is no plaque noting the number or names of Germans who died there.

On the second morning of their visit, Jutta takes the little model house into the Place Chateaubriand's historical museum. The man behind the counter gives some thought to the model, and then closes his shop and guides Jutta and Max to the LeBlanc house on rue Vauborel. It is now a holiday house for tourists. Jutta questions him about a blind girl who lived there during the war and wonders why her brother would have had a reproduction of the house. Thinking the blind girl would know that answer, the man offers to provide Jutta with her address.

At the moment, Max interrupts to tell Jutta that he thinks the little house opens up.

## Laboratory

Marie-Laure is a well-respected authority on mollusks, lives in Paris, and manages a small laboratory at the Museum of Natural History. Before her great-uncle Etienne died at the age of 82, they traveled. They also spent thousands of francs on an investigator to learn what happened to Daniel LeBlanc. The details were few. He was imprisoned in Breitenau, a labor camp, in 1942. He may have died of influenza in 1943, at a subcamp in nearby Kassel, Germany.

Marie-Laure still lives in the same apartment where she grew up. She has a daughter, Hélène, who is now 19. She is financially secure, sometimes lonely, but knows happiness in life and in work.

On a Wednesday evening in July, her work in the laboratory is interrupted by a woman wishing to see her—a woman with pale skin and white hair. The woman wants to ask Marie-Laure about a model house.

## Visitor

Jutta brings Marie-Laure the little model house. She asks if Werner took it from her. Marie-Laure thinks how the boy saved her life three times—by not exposing Etienne's radio transmitter, by eliminating the threat of the sergeant major, and by helping her out of the besieged city. She replies, "No."

Jutta tells Marie-Laure that Werner died. Marie-Laure is not surprised. He did not fit the postwar characterizations of the brave, dashing resistance fighter or the coldly detached, perhaps psychopathic German soldier. He had been "a faint

presence." Yet she had sensed the fundamental kindness in his soul. Marie-Laure tells Jutta, much to the other woman's surprise, that Werner revealed he and his sister used to listen to her great-uncle's broadcasts.

Jutta gives the little house to Marie-Laure and departs with Max. Before she leaves, Marie-Laure promises to mail Jutta the one recording of her grandfather that has survived. This was about the moon, and Jutta recalls it. Marie-Laure thinks Max might like it.

## Paper Airplane

Jutta and Max find their way back to their hotel. The city streets are quiet, and the windows they pass are lit with a television's blue light. To Jutta, it seems the city has forgotten the war. It is "the absence of all the bodies" that allows it to forget. The city now looks like the fanciful drawings she made as a girl.

Back at the hotel, Max makes a paper airplane from hotel stationery. Opening the balcony doors, he sails it out over the street.

## The Key

In her lab, Marie-Laure ponders why Werner went back for the little house. She wonders if he dropped the stone in the sea or in his pocket, or returned it to its hiding place in the house. Finally, she opens up its panels and something falls into her palm. It is the grotto's iron key.

## Sea of Flames

The formation of the diamond began in "the molten basements of the world." As a blue stone in a river, it caught "the attention of a prince," who recognized its worth. Now at the end of its travels, it lies somewhere among the pebbles of the sea, "mantled with algae, bedecked with barnacles," and "crawled over by snails."

## Frederick

Frederick and his mother live in an apartment outside West Berlin. His father died in the war, and his mother has been

hiding herself and what happened to her boy ever since. Few friends are left, and she is lonely. Frederick fills the days making messy pencil drawings of spirals. His mother still must feed him.

One Wednesday, a letter comes for him from a woman in Essen. It contains a smaller envelope that is wrinkled, sepia colored, and old. Frederick's name is written on it in small, cursive letters. It is from the woman's brother, Werner. Inside is a folded print of two birds in full color.

Recalling her son's love of a long-ago book of birds, Frederick's mother smooths out the print and places it before him. Though he tilts his head a moment, he soon returns to his spirals.

After supper that evening, they sit on the raised deck outside, as usual. She intends to try showing Frederick the pictures again. Suddenly an owl "as big as a child" sweeps out of the darkness and lands on the deck railing. Frederick stares hard at the bird until it flies off. His mother whispers, "You saw it?"

He stares a while at the darkness, and then says, "Mutti?" His body becomes rigid and his hands grip the arms of the chair. Then he looks at his mother with unblinking eyes and asks, "What are we doing, Mutti?"

## Analysis

In Part 12, the far-reaching influence of a single life is epitomized by the search for the inheritors of Werner Pfennig's personal effects. People with nothing in common but their connection to Werner are drawn together. Memories that have been locked away are released. At the same time the reader sees that, while the war is decades in the past, it remains a toxic presence in the lives of survivors. And finally, the fate of the Sea of Flames is revealed.

In 1974, Volkheimer is a lonely man, middle-aged in years but old in spirit. Memories of the war haunt him; memories of his childhood home hurt. But upon receiving the photographs of Werner's effects, he recalls a friendship with a young boy whose potential the war destroyed. Loyalty to that friendship drives him to meet with Jutta face to face. Volkheimer's gentle presence in her home and patience with her boy, Max, show his finer qualities have survived the war and its aftermath.

Jutta has carefully locked away her memories. Though she

loves her brother, she is ashamed of his association with Schulpforta and the Nazi Party. Perhaps tellingly, she has married a man who was only nine in 1945 and escaped the war years unscathed and untainted. She does not want to remember, but she cannot turn away from the duffel that Volkheimer brings and the memories it may contain.

Similarly, Marie-Laure feels as if "a molten kernel of memory" has been dropped in her hands when Jutta brings her the model of Etienne's house. She suffers vertigo as other memories seem to swirl about the room. Before opening the model to see what is inside—she fears it is the diamond—she recalls Dr. Geffard's claim that only the strongest person would be able to give up something so beautiful.

Doors on memories related to Werner are repeatedly thrown open throughout Part 12. The contents of his duffel are the catalyst. Touching the photo of Werner's notebook, Volkheimer recalls how small he was and how young—in fact, how young they all were. He also recalls Werner's gifts and what the boy might have become. Opening the notebook, Jutta relives her days with Werner at Children's House and recalls his curiosity, innocence, and potential. Marie-Laure holds the model house and remembers Werner's "faint presence," and his soul that "glowed with some fundamental kindness." Later, when she opens the model and finds the grotto key, she knows her assessment was correct.

Marie-Laure's gift to Jutta—the last of Henri's recordings—closes the circle connecting all the players in this story. Through the magic of invisible radio waves, Etienne's records of Henri once reached Werner and Jutta in the voice of the Professor. This started Werner on a journey in pursuit of science. Connection after connection led him to Marie-Laure. Now the chain of events have linked Volkheimer to Jutta, who at last meets the granddaughter of the Professor so revered by her and her dead brother.

One last story is woven into this denouement: that of Frederick. When Jutta thumbs through her brother's notebook, she finds the envelope addressed "For Frederick" containing a bird picture torn from Etienne's *Birds of America*. Jutta recalls Werner's description of Frederick: "He sees what other people don't." She thinks about her brother and what the war did to all dreamers. Like a boy under the spell of a dreadful enchantment, Frederick's mind has been locked away for 30 years, since his beating at Schulpforta. Werner hoped that a picture of one of Frederick's beloved birds would be the key to

break the spell and unlock the prison door. This brings to mind Daniel LeBlanc's firm belief that every problem has a solution; every lock has its key.

The bird picture reaches Frederick three decades after Werner's death. Yet it embodies an act of atonement for Werner's betrayal of their friendship. Demonstrating that it is never too late to try to make things right, the picture—coupled with the timely appearance of an owl—triggers a response in Frederick that is hopeful.

The Sea of Flames has represented irrational forces in the world. Its most powerful attribute is its legendary curse. Over the course of the story, the efforts to either hide or find the diamond are driven more by this mythic power than its monetary value. Yet in its epitaph in Part 12, the diamond seems no more extraordinary than a piece of coal. The description of the diamond's origins and formation echoes the Professor's long-ago recorded description of the origins and formation of coal. As described, over millions of years the plants that become coal are processed and buried deep in the earth, while the components of diamonds rise up from "the molten basements of the world." In cold darkness, these respective sources of burning and shining light are formed. This notion also echoes the Professor's description of the human brain living in darkness but producing a "mind full of light."

Symbolically, the irrational forces that the Sea of Flames embodies seem to be dormant as the stone "stirs among the pebbles" somewhere in the sea. Algae and barnacles disguise it. Snails crawl over it, like sentries guarding a secret. Possibly the Earth Goddess is pleased now that the Sea God has received his gift at last.

## Part 13

### Summary

On a Saturday morning in March, an elderly Marie-Laure and her grandson, Michel, walk through the Jardin des Plantes. Ice still skims the puddles in the gravel paths. Eventually, they reach the gazebo at the top of the hedge maze and sit to rest.

As Michel plays "Warlords" on his computer, Marie-Laure imagines the millions of electromagnetic waves traveling in and

out of machines like this, crisscrossing the air. She envisions how they fly invisibly over this city of Paris and beyond, traversing "the scarred and ever-shifting landscapes we call nations." She wonders if souls might travel these same paths, ever-present but invisible; as if the air itself reverberates with the record of every word spoken and every life lived.

## Analysis

In Part 13 Marie-Laure shows the reader the wondrous advancements in electromagnetic wave communication. She imagines the air now thick with torrents of invisible messages flying over cities, battlefields, and nations. She goes on to imagine the souls of the dead woven into this rich, unseen tapestry of communication. Energy that was life, words, and deeds charges the air like electricity, its sound "faded but audible if you listen closely enough."

In this way, memories live on like invisible waves of light, and everyone who has ever lived adds their stories to the air's invisible tapestry. After loved ones pass from the world they may exist again in things of beauty, tangible and intangible, like flowers and songs.

This is the essence of Doerr's novel. Life is made up of connections composed by communication and memories, and these connections are woven into our individual histories. Yet sometimes connections are unrecognized. We can never know all the people whose lives we have touched any more than we can fully discern the many lives that have touched ours. Yet there are no unimportant lives among these intertwining stories, only those that are unseen. They are the invisible connections that occupy the realm of "all the light we cannot see."

## “” Quotes

*"The keeper of the stone would live forever, but ... misfortunes would fall on all those he loved."*

— The Warder, Part 1

This is the curse attached to the fabulous Sea of Flames diamond hidden deep in the vaults of the Natural History Museum. Marie-Laure first hears of it from the museum's old, hunchbacked warder during a children's tour of the museum. The diamond and its legendary curse play a key role in the novel, and pursuit of the stone and the immortality it promises serve to drive the plot forward.

*"Why not ... just take the diamond and throw it into the sea?"*

— Marie-Laure LeBlanc, Part 1

This question is posed by Marie-Laure to the old warder as she and other children listen to the legend of the Sea of Flames. As the story goes, the diamond was a gift created by the Goddess of the Earth for her lover, the God of the Sea. When it fell into the hands of a prince instead, the goddess cursed the stone and whoever kept it.

Thinking over this part of the tale, Marie-Laure asks her question. It is an early example of her innate ability to think clearly and logically, a quality that serves her well throughout the novel. It also foreshadows the decision she will make toward the end of the story, when she throws the legendary diamond into the sea.

*"They'll say ... that you're from nowhere, that you shouldn't dream big. But I believe in you."*

— Frau Elena, Part 1

Frau Elena, the Frenchwoman who manages the Children's House in the mining town of Zollverein, is speaking to Werner. He is an orphan whose father was killed in the mines. When he turns 15, he will be expected to work, and perhaps die, as his father did. Yet Frau Elena sees in Werner the potential for a finer future. "I think you'll do something great," she tells him prophetically.

She does what she can to encourage his natural curiosity and

his love of mechanics. This leads, in time, to his acceptance to the elite school at Schulpforta. She also teaches him to speak French—a gift that will prove useful years later in his encounter with Marie-Laure in Saint-Malo.

*"Open your eyes ... and see what you can with them before they close forever."*

— The Professor, Part 1

At the Children's House, Werner and Jutta listen to late-night broadcasts on the radio. One night they chance upon the velvet voice of a Frenchman whom they dub the Professor. In his broadcasts the Frenchman speaks of "the very things Werner is most curious about." Werner is enthralled as his mind is opened to the world of science and possibilities. The Professor's admonishment to "open your eyes" sparks in him an impatience to learn and explore all he can before it's too late.

Werner never forgets the Professor or his advice. It becomes a guiding principle in his life. Years later in Saint-Malo, he discovers that this life-changing voice came from the radio transmitter he has been sent to destroy. He must then make a critical choice. Exposing the location of the radio will likely mean the death of the Professor and a betrayal of so much that has significance for Werner. Failing to expose the transmitter will be a betrayal of his duty as a soldier.

*"Nearly every species that has ever lived has gone extinct, Laurette. No reason to think we humans will be any different!"*

— Dr. Geffard, Part 1

From Dr. Geffard, Marie-Laure has been learning about branches of marine evolution and the sequences of the geologic periods. She is gaining a sense of the vastness of time and the brief role humans have played in it. This puts the

brevity of existence in perspective for Marie-Laure and relates to her thoughts in later life about the souls of those who once lived. In these later, more hope-filled imaginings, souls of those who have passed infuse the air with the essence of the life they lived and the words they spoke. She muses that, in this way, we do not disappear, but "rise again in the grass. In the flowers. In songs."

*"Walk the paths of logic. Every outcome has its cause ... every predicament has its solution."*

— Daniel LeBlanc, Part 3

Daniel LeBlanc has fled Paris with Marie-Laure, heading for the house of François Giannot in the town of Evreux. But the house has been burned down; the owner is gone.

Back on the road again but uncertain where to go, the two refugees take shelter for the night in a deserted stable. Exhausted and fearful, Daniel is mulling over his options, fighting to think clearly. He runs his life on logic; on the idea that every problem has a solution, "every lock its key." Sometimes he fears that superstitions like those surrounding the Sea of Flames may be true; that a human life may be overwhelmed by some dark, uncontrollable destiny. He fights this fearful notion with reason and belief that the correct decision will lead to the best outcome. The trajectories of many lives are forever changed by Daniel's decision to proceed to Saint-Malo.

*"Don't tell lies. Lie to yourself, Werner, but don't lie to me."*

— Jutta, Part 3

Jutta's brother has been accepted to the Nazi training school at Schulpforta, and she is trying to warn Werner that he will be transformed like two other youths at Children's House who joined the Hitler Youth and became hateful bullies. She wants to save Werner from this future before it's too late. Already there are signs that the goodness in him can be corrupted. Out

of fear he has smashed their precious radio because it was capable of picking up transmissions deemed illegal by the Reich. However, Jutta already has heard broadcasts that paint horrific pictures of Germany's war. She knows their countrymen are committing atrocities and are viewed as devils by the outside world—the opposite of everything the German propaganda machine says.

Blinded by his ambition to become a great scientist, Werner has no wish to listen to Jutta. He pushes back his own doubts and tries to calm her fears with grand visions of all he will learn and accomplish at the school. However, young as she is, Jutta sees clearly and understands that Werner's pictures are lies. Years later Werner will wonder at her wisdom and ability to see things he could not.

*"A scientist's work ... is determined by two things. His interests and the interests of his time."*

— Dr. Hauptmann, Part 3

Dr. Hauptmann is speaking to Werner in this quotation. Early on at Schulpforta, Werner's innate talent for mechanics and engineering come to the attention of the technical sciences instructor. He enlists Werner's talent to develop a device for tracking down the source of radio signals. In this Werner's interests as a scientist and the interests of his time intersect. However, this results in a corruption of everything Werner believes in. He is a genius at fixing and enhancing radios. He treasures the world of music and knowledge that can travel radio waves from anywhere, point to point. Now his knowledge and skill is being used to find and destroy the machines that opened up the world of possibilities to him.

Nevertheless, Werner is seduced by his ambition and the promise of Schulpforta and Dr. Hauptmann's firelit room lined with books. He knows that it is in places like this that important things happen, not in an orphanage in Zollverein. He will allow his gifts to be appropriated and used by an evil regime.

*"We live in exceptional times."*

— Dr. Hauptmann, Part 3

Dr. Hauptmann is speaking to Werner as he recruits him for developing a radio tracking device. He has explained that, as a scientist, Werner's interests must coincide with those of his time. As these times are exceptional, Werner will be called upon to do exceptional things.

This phrase is a mantra Werner repeats to himself in times of doubt. It soothes his conscience and bolsters his confidence. However, the phrase takes on an increasingly sinister meaning as the true nature of these "exceptional times" and of the war it has produced become clearer to him.

*"Your problem, Werner ... is that you still believe you own your life."*

— Frederick, Part 5

Frederick speaks to Werner during the January recess from Schulpforta, during which Frederick invites Werner to his home in Berlin. Werner asks if Frederick ever thinks about not returning to the school where he has been targeted and tormented by instructors and fellow cadets.

Much like Werner's sister, Jutta, Frederick is wise beyond his years and sees things as they are. He attends Schulpforta because his parents wish it, to bolster his father's power and position within the Reich. He feels he has no choice but to return.

Frederick understands that Werner is fooling himself and believes he is making choices that will fulfill his deepest desires. He sees that his friend is willfully blinding himself to the moral corruption in which he is becoming mired at Schulpforta.

This moment suggests that the fate of each boy is set and that neither can escape it.

*"I will never leave you, not in a million years."*

— Daniel LeBlanc, Part 7

It is the winter of 1942. At this time Daniel is speaking to Marie-Laure in her memory. He first made this promise to her in Paris one Tuesday afternoon before the war and their flight to Saint-Malo. Over the years the promise has taken on a darker meaning for Marie-Laure.

In 1940 her father vanished from her life, arrested by the German police and imprisoned somewhere. At the time of this memory, two years have passed, and her life in Saint-Malo has become increasingly difficult and lonely. Marie-Laure has escaped into a dream of life in Paris with Papa and their days at the museum. She hears her father promise he will never leave her.

Time and again, she will recall this promise. The memory does not fade, but as time passes the promise becomes tainted by the possibility of betrayal—that her father has lied to her. Still she holds onto the hope that her father will be true to his words in the end. And he does in a way, for she never forgets him.

*"March the dead in a single-file line, and for eleven days ... they'd walk past our door."*

— Etienne LeBlanc, Part 7

Etienne is speaking to Marie-Laure one night after broadcasting codes over his attic transmitter in support of the resistance. He is describing to her the 16 million dead from WWI.

To honor the memory and bravery of Madame Manec, who has died, Etienne has taken on the task of transmitting the codes. To help him, Marie-Laure fetches the codes from the baker's wife and smuggles them home in a loaf of bread. However, their resistance activities are becoming increasingly perilous—the German occupiers know that the radio broadcasts are coming from Saint-Malo.

On this evening in early 1944, the life-and-death nature of these transmissions becomes real to Etienne. He suddenly sees his participation in the resistance as more than a

symbolic way of honoring Madame Manec. People will live or die based on the information he is broadcasting. He has seen war, knows what it is like, and wants Marie-Laure to understand this too. She has to see this is not some kind of game. Marie-Laure, in turn, tells her great-uncle that she hopes they are "the good guys."

*"To shut your eyes is to guess nothing of blindness."*

— Narrator, Part 8

With this observation, the narrator invites readers into Marie-Laure's world in which sound defines her reality instead of sight. Like a radio transceiver, she receives communications from the world at large in the ribbons of sound that invisibly thread the air.

However, on this night in August, four days after the first bombs hit Saint-Malo, Marie-Laure becomes a transmitter of sound. She is trapped and alone in the attic of Etienne's house. Below, the German treasure hunter von Rumpel ransacks every floor, seeking the Sea of Flames. Firing up Etienne's transmitter Marie-Laure begins to read, sending out her own ribbon of sound and hoping to be heard and rescued.

*"Frederick said we don't have choices ... but in the end it was Werner who pretended there were no choices."*

— Narrator, Part 9

During Werner's long-ago stay with Frederick at his home in Berlin, his friend suggested that they were fated to follow an inescapable life path; that there was no point in fighting it.

Nevertheless it is Frederick who defies fate and deliberately steps off that path. Demonstrating great moral courage, he repeatedly refuses to throw water on a dying prisoner at Schulpforta. Though he suffers terribly for his choice, unlike Werner, "the cords of his soul" are never severed.

On the other hand, Werner persists in the fantasy that, in pursuit of his dreams, he is choosing his path. In reality he is being swept along, with his choices made by others and his gifts used in the service of evil. Werner's moment of awareness comes during his time in Saint-Malo. He understands that the radio transmitter he has come to destroy was the source of broadcasts that opened up the world for him as a child. To cause its destruction would be a betrayal. Now Werner sees he must make a choice, take a risk, and do what he believes is right.

*"Every hour ... someone for whom  
the war was memory falls out of  
the world."*

— Marie-Laure LeBlanc, Part 13

In 2014 Marie-Laure is 76. Sitting in the Jardin des Plantes in Paris with her grandson, she reflects on the past. People like her are passing from the world, taking with them small, personal stories of the war that only they know. In this way her thought points back to the novel's title as a metaphor for the invisible stories of ordinary people that are buried in the past. Marie-Laure then wonders if all those lives and all their stories move on to inhabit the air in invisible waves of sound that swirl about the living. She likes to think this is so for all those she has loved and lost, and she takes the idea one step further, silently asserting that the dead "rise again" in the grass and the flowers, and in songs. They are not forgotten.

## Symbols

### Radio

The radio symbolizes the power of a machine to do good or evil, depending on the hands that operate it.

In the novel, radio transmissions have the power to form invisible links between people and ideas. It becomes the

source of beauty, wonder, and truth: beautiful music and science lessons. It is radio that first connects Werner with the French Professor and then with Marie-Laure. Without that link, nothing wonderful could happen in the novel. There would be no eye-opening revelations for Werner thanks to the Professor, no protection for Marie-Laure thanks to the Professor's connection to Werner, and no final salvation and redemption for Werner thanks to Marie-Laure. For Werner's sister, Jutta, the radio symbolizes a conduit for truth beyond the borders of Germany. To Etienne LeBlanc, his many radios symbolize his fragile relation with the outside world.

In Etienne's broadcasts of his dead brother's science lessons for children, the radio becomes a link to a voice from the past. These broadcasts memorialize Henri and keep his ideas alive. On a larger scale the radio represents all of the invisible stories of people that, as Marie-Laure imagines, might still "fly about, faded but audible if you listen closely enough."

The radio also provides opportunities to spread lies in the form of propaganda, and to destroy connections. As Werner hunts for resistance fighters via their transmissions, the understanding that he is using his beloved technology for a harmful purpose gnaws at his soul. He is especially haunted by the senseless murder of a mother and child in Vienna as a result of his work.

## Sea of Flames

The Sea of Flames symbolizes the irrational elements in the world that challenge a rational worldview. It represents the antithesis of the guiding principles of logic and reason by which Daniel LeBlanc, Marie-Laure, and Nazi treasure hunter von Rumpel live.

The Sea of Flames is a fabulous diamond over which wars might have been fought. It carries a legendary curse: Its keeper will live forever, but misfortune will befall all those he loves. Events in the lives of Daniel, Marie-Laure, and von Rumpel seem to affirm the legend. As principal locksmith for the Paris museum where the stone is kept, Daniel holds the keys to the vault and is technically keeper of the diamond. Daniel's father dies in WWI, his wife dies in childbirth, and his daughter loses her sight. In Saint-Malo he entrusts the diamond to Marie-Laure, and next all those she loves fall victim to misfortune.

Nazi treasure hunter Reinhold von Rumpel hunts the stone in desperate hopes that the legend is true. He traces the precious jewel to Saint-Malo and is killed as he attempts to seize it from Marie-Laure.

The Sea of Flames tempts Daniel, Marie-Laure, and von Rumpel to believe in the fantastic and mystical. Its legend incites their hopes and fears. The stone represents superstition and forces in the world that cannot be explained. Its presence in the novel generates a sense of dark magic and possibility. Its curse challenges the humanistic life stance that all things begin with human beings; they alone shape and give meaning to their lives.

## Mollusks

For Marie-Laure, mollusks represent tenaciousness and endurance—qualities she needs amid the danger and chaos of war. They also represent a bond between Marie-Laure and her uncle.

From her days with Dr. Geffard at the Natural History Museum, Marie-Laure has developed a love for mollusks. They are fascinating creatures she understands and can identify by touch. She learns to order their shells by size and morphology, or formation. Later, surrounded by the disordered world of war, she passes the time trapped indoors exploring and ordering the shells in Etienne's study. The mollusks, like familiar friends, help her to endure "the slow rain of hours."

Marie-Laure admires the mollusk's ability to withstand the assault of outside forces; to thrive in a harsh world, battered by the sea and attacked by birds. It is armored, impervious, and tenacious, clinging to its rock and living "moment to moment, centimeter to centimeter." In Saint-Malo, Marie-Laure looks to these qualities as a guide for surviving wartime stresses and peril. She even lightheartedly adopts the code name "the Whelk" when she joins Madame Manec in the resistance movement.

Shells represent a bond that, once established, grows strong between Marie-Laure and her uncle. Marie-Laure's favorite mollusk is the whelk. Coincidentally, it is the first shell in the trail of shells Etienne sets out like breadcrumbs to lead Marie-Laure to his fifth-floor room for the first time. She has told

Madame Manec of her interest in seashells, so Etienne chooses this whimsical method of introducing himself. Shells are also the first gift from the outside world that Marie-Laure brings home to Etienne. They remind him of better times when he and his brother Henri played on the beach as boys.

## Themes

### Remembrance

Memory plays a powerful role in the lives of the characters, driving choices and actions as the story unfolds. These memories are indispensable links between the characters and their past. Some serve as a source of inspiration or comfort. Others offer escape from the present. Some produce a prick of conscience, and one supplies a life-saving clue to a mystery. In all cases the act of remembering provides insight into each character's inner life and hidden thoughts.

For example, Werner retreats from the brutality and moral corruption at Schulpforta into nostalgic memories of childhood, Frau Elena, and Jutta. Later as a soldier, he evokes technical sciences instructor Dr. Hauptmann's remark, "We live in exceptional times," to reassure himself that what he is doing is necessary and right. However, his confidence is undermined by a recalled moment in which his sister Jutta asks, "Is it right ... to do something only because everyone else is doing it?" And at last, recollection of the radio Professor's admonition to "open your eyes" reminds Werner—now the radio hunter—of a time when science meant wonder and possibility. This memory stirs Werner to look honestly at what he has become and to change the direction of his life before it is too late.

Like Werner, Marie-Laure retreats into the past as conditions worsen around her. She recalls days spent with her father or Dr. Geffard at the museum, and special moments with her Papa. These memories bring comfort and sustain her. Other memories inspire Marie-Laure and give her courage. These are drawn from her beloved book by Jules Verne, *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*. Remembered lines steady her when she is frightened and, at times, motivate her to act in imitation of her heroes, Captain Nemo and Dr. Aronnax. Perhaps her recollection of a line from one of her Papa's

letters serves her best. "Look inside Etienne's house, inside the house," it says, which leads her to the Sea of Flames and ultimately saves her life.

Sergeant Major von Rumpel's memories mostly remind him of a life principle drilled into him by his father. They sustain his optimism, renew his patience, and bolster his determination to locate the Sea of Flames even as he is dying. Recalled maxims such as "See obstacles as opportunities ... obstacles as inspirations" reassure him that his quest will not fail if he perseveres. When his search seemingly dead ends in Etienne's house, he hears his father's voice telling him, "You are only being tested." Occasional memories of his daughter allow readers to glimpse the humanity that occupies a small place in von Rumpel's character.

The power of memory also shapes the life of Etienne. Memories of World War I haunt him and drive him into a life of seclusion. Yet memories of his brother, Henri, compel him to call out to the world through his radio transmissions. These cries reach Werner through the voice of the Professor, which in turn provides Werner with a memory that saves his soul.

When the novel takes readers into the lives of the characters Volkheimer, Marie-Laure, and Jutta in the 1970s, Doerr's grand theme is embodied in memory. From the title on, his goal is to hold up the lives of those whose actions lie outside of history's record and represent the "light we cannot see." It is memories of Werner that drive Volkheimer to contact Jutta and for Jutta to find Marie-Laure and bring the story full circle. Even Frederick is seemingly woken from his catatonic stage by the print of birds Werner has saved. As Marie-Laure reflects at the story's end, perhaps souls travel the same paths as electromagnetic waves, faded but "audible if you listen closely enough." People who can remember the war die, but they rise again "in songs"—in memory.

## Entrapment

Many guises of entrapment are explored in the novel: physical, spiritual, intellectual, and emotional. A response to feeling trapped motivates the choices of several key characters and drives the action of the plot.

Werner's life-changing decision to enter the elite Nazi training

school is strongly influenced by his fear of being trapped in the mines of Zollverein. His dreams of becoming a great scientist in Berlin would die in the mines, and it is likely he, too, would die just like his father. At the school, however, Werner is morally ensnared. He must bottle up his humanity if he hopes to achieve his goals. Later in Saint-Malo, he is trapped in the utter darkness of a hotel cellar, not unlike the fate he tried to escape in Zollverein. It is a lightless tomb, both physically and spiritually.

While Marie-Laure might have been trapped on many levels by her blindness, with the help of her father she escapes its dark confines through the gift of touch. However, in German-occupied Saint-Malo, she finds herself shut in by her father's fear, not permitted to leave Etienne's house. Later she is physically cornered by Sergeant Major von Rumpel, first in the grotto and later in the attic of her great-uncle's house. Von Rumpel, in turn, is trapped by a disease that is consuming his body.

Other characters whose lives are threaded with this theme include Etienne LeBlanc, who is gripped by horrific memories of World War I. He entombs himself in his house in Saint-Malo for more than 20 years. His nephew, Daniel—Marie-Laure's father—dies after being imprisoned by the Germans. And all the people of Saint-Malo are trapped by the war and German occupation. In all cases, determination to escape not only drives the plot but also reveals an array of qualities, good and bad, that help to define these characters.

## Communication

Throughout the novel, Anthony Doerr explores how connecting lines of radio transmissions bind characters together. This theme drives the plot. Through the new medium of radio, a wealth of music, science, propaganda, truth, and messages of defiance could be broadcast near and far, to be heard and shared by people as never before. People who might never meet could be bound together by these transmissions, and in some cases the connection could have life-changing consequences.

The line of communication most vital to the plot is established before the war, when Werner repairs a radio and begins listening to the outside world. One very special broadcast links

Werner in Zollverein, Germany, to the voice of a Frenchman in Saint-Malo whom he calls the Professor. This unique connection is an invisible thread binding Werner to the house of Etienne and his grand-niece, Marie-Laure. Long before Werner comes to Saint-Malo on the hunt for enemy transmissions, the Professor's broadcasts establish a connection that will change the course of Werner and Marie-Laure's lives.

Werner's radio is a source of other communications and connections. Voices of the Third Reich reach out through propaganda broadcasts to mold the minds of children at the orphanage. These same voices will reshape and unify the consciousness of the entire nation. Their deceit is counterbalanced by foreign voices that deliver the truth to those courageous enough to listen, like Werner's sister. When Werner smashes the radio to prevent Jutta from hearing illegal broadcasts, his act signals the breakdown in communication between brother and sister as well as Werner's willful disconnection from the truth.

Werner works hard at Schulpforta to create a device for tracing radio transmissions. He is, in a sense, rebuilding his smashed radio, but this one will serve the Third Reich. Consistent with the Reich's malevolent goals, the device will be a means of destroying communication and severing connections. As a soldier, he will seek out and follow the invisible waves, tracking them from Russia to Vienna and on to Saint-Malo.

Several connections among characters originate with broadcasts from Etienne's transmitter in Saint-Malo. The first is a result of Etienne's anguished attempts to comfort the soul of his dead brother, Henri. These are the broadcasts that reach Werner in Germany. When Etienne broadcasts for the resistance, he connects to people whose lives are saved or lost as a result. And when Marie-Laure uses the transmitter to call for help from the attic, the line of communication established years ago makes its most important connection. Werner hears her call and comes to her rescue. He hears it over a broken radio that he repaired, the same way in which he first heard the Professor in far-off Zollverein.

## Destiny versus Choice

Do humans have free will to shape their lives and write their own history? Or is the course of a human life governed by fate? These thematic questions thread through the story. Doerr does not answer the questions but offers readers both sides of the debate.

On the side of choice, Doerr suggests that humans are responsible for their own destiny; they make choices that pave the way of their life paths. This is a human-centered, or humanistic, view of existence. Among characters in the novel, Daniel LeBlanc holds this philosophical view. He believes in walking the paths of logic; every problem has its solution just as every lock has its key. He grounds his choices in reason and rejects the possibility that their outcomes are influenced by outside, supernatural forces.

Though less sure of these convictions, Marie-Laure tries to follow her father's lead and relies on reason and logic to guide her decisions. She also patterns her thinking after that of Dr. Aronnax, a character in *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, who holds fast to the principles of science and logic.

Werner makes conscious choices that redirect his life path. For example, he chooses to attend Schulpforta to escape death in the mines of Zollverein. Though he glimpses something ugly in the entrance exam for the school, he does all he can to secure his acceptance. While at the school, he stubbornly ignores the corrupt Nazi ideology that is warping the minds and souls of cadets. In his mind's eye, he focuses on the technical sciences of his learning, certain that his choices are shaping a finer future.

Each of these characters is presumably in charge of his or her fate. But with the fabulous cursed diamond, the Sea of Flames, Doerr introduces the idea that invisible forces beyond human control may shape destiny. The stone's presence in the story challenges the notion of a human-centered existence free of supernatural influences. For example, Daniel is entrusted with the troublesome stone and, as the diamond's curse promises, misfortune touches those he loves. His duty to keep the stone out of German hands drives his decision to flee to Saint-Malo. Though he assures his daughter that it is only a stone, he wonders about the curse and may have ultimately believed it. When he is summoned back to Paris, he leaves the diamond

with Marie-Laure on the chance it may protect her.

With this and other stories woven into the novel, Doerr leaves open the thematic questions concerning destiny and choice. At times both seem to play equal roles, and the line between the two forces blurs. This blurring is particularly evident in Part 8, when the Sea of Flames appears to be influencing the outcome of the plot. It's up to the reader to consider the evidence and draw a rational conclusion.

the night bombing of Saint-Malo, trapped in a dark cellar. It is night when he wanders out onto a beach and is killed by a landmine.

Other shadings of this motif are found in descriptions of the Sea of Flames and in the colors that infuse Marie-Laure's imagination and dreams. This motif also plays a strong role in the Professor's recorded lesson on light, which opens up the world of science to Werner.

## Motifs

### Darkness, Light, and Color

The motif of darkness, light, and color is used to heighten the effect of a variety of events and ideas in the novel. As Marie-Laure goes blind, her world darkens, but she "sees" much that remains invisible to other characters. She perceives the glow of kindness and goodness in people like Etienne and Werner. Her father "radiates a thousand colors." She senses the sick darkness within von Rumpel. In her mind the world of war is gray, but her great-uncle Etienne's radio transmissions fill it with light and color. As conditions in Saint-Malo worsen, Marie-Laure's fears are washed away out on the beach "by wind and color and light."

For Etienne, light forms the foundation of his post-WWI fears. He and his brother Henri were hunted by enemy lights, and eventually one found Henri. This is what haunts Etienne. Even now, 20 years later, he fears that "a light you are powerless to stop will turn on you and usher a bullet to its mark."

For Werner, darkness predominates as an element in his life. Physically he echoes light with his snow-white hair, blue eyes, and pale skin. In later years Marie-Laure recalls a light of goodness emanating from his soul. Yet his life is filled with darkness. His father dies in the darkness of the mines, and darkness is the future that awaits him in Zollverein. Under cover of night, Werner and Jutta listen to illegal broadcasts on the radio. Werner descends morally into darkness when he attends the Nazi training school. He nearly loses his life during

### Lies

Lies in one form or another advance the plot from beginning to end. They take various forms. White lies are meant to comfort and protect others. Propaganda and lies meant to deceive, however, form barriers to communication and connections between characters.

Some lies are innocent in intent. Marie-Laure's father tells her white lies to comfort and reassure her. Though well meaning, these lies become barriers to trust. For example, upon arriving in Saint-Malo, Daniel assures Marie-Laure that the rumbling sound she hears is the ocean, not a marching army. Yet knowing her father sometimes lies to calm her fears, Marie-Laure is not certain she can believe him.

Upon acceptance to the Nazi training school, Werner tells himself this is his path to escape a dismal future and achieve his dreams. Blinded by ambition to become a great scientist in Berlin, he refuses to see that the Nazis will hijack his gifts and corrupt his dreams. Though his sister Jutta challenges his self-deception, Werner clings to the lie until he is trapped in a role that violates everything he believes in. His willful self-deception results in a breach in his relationship with his beloved sister.

The Nazi regime lies to everyone through propaganda. With a deliberate mix of fact and fiction, it weaves a shining, dynamic picture of life under Hitler and the Third Reich designed to seduce the young minds of cadets at Schulforta. Through the power of radio, they similarly seduce all Germany. Propaganda is a barrier between the people and truth.

In Saint-Malo Werner resorts to a lie in order to protect Marie-Laure and, he presumes, the French Professor. He knows the enemy transmitter his team is seeking is in the house where

she lives and where the Professor resides as well. Werner tells Volkheimer that his equipment has not picked up any trace of the transmitter—a lie for which he could be shot. Readers understand the intent behind this lie, and Volkheimer's willingness to accept it helps to deepen the character of "the Giant."

## Self-Protection

Throughout the novel, the motif of self-protection is perceptible in characters' motives and decisions. Time and again it underlies the steps they take to control their destiny and remove themselves from harm's way.

Werner is the foremost example of this. He fears the future if he remains in Zollverein. He will most certainly be sent into the mines to die like his father. So he blinds himself to the purpose of the Nazi training school at Schulpforta. It offers escape and protection from what seems a worse fate.

At Schulpforta, Werner learns to cling to the group for survival. He develops a hunger to belong and fights to keep doubts at bay. Kind and gentle by nature, he also learns to block off his feelings. He stops questioning why his gifts are being used by the Nazi instructor, Dr. Hauptmann. He watches passively as his friend Frederick is beaten, as instructed, by another cadet. As a soldier, he follows orders to find and destroy enemy radio transmitters and their operators. Believing he has no choice if he wants to survive, he sacrifices his humanity. In contrast, cadet Frederick resists giving in to the pressures and indoctrination at Schulpforta. Frederick is never severed from his soul and stands up to what he perceives to be morally wrong at Schulpforta. He even tries to protect Werner by publicly ending their friendship. In this way Frederick is stronger than Werner. Remaining true to his core beliefs is Frederick's form of self-protection. Though he is physically destroyed, he has protected what is most precious to him.

The motif of self-protection plays out in several other characters. In moments of danger, Marie-Laure imagines herself to be like a whelk that withdraws into the safety of its shell, holds on tenaciously, and lives moment to moment. Eccentric Etienne hides in his home in Saint-Malo for 20 years, emerging at last when his fear for Marie-Laure's safety overrides his need to protect himself from the terrors of the

outside. And finally, self-protection is a driving force behind Sergeant Major von Rumpel's frantic search for the Sea of Flames and its promise of immortality.

## 📖 Suggested Reading

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