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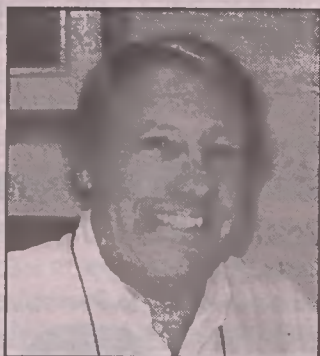
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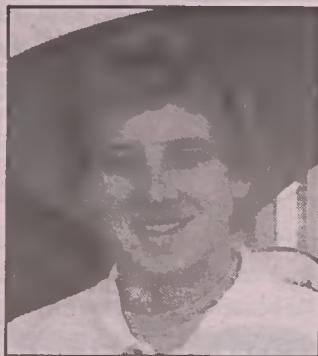
**SOFT WATER SOLUTIONS, LLC.**

**252.222.3220 or 252.725.7464**

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Bill Johnson  
Owner



Will Johnson  
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## Book Talk

*The Nightingale* by Kristin Hannah  
St. Martin's Press, NY, 2015

Reviewed by Ken Wilkins

### A tale of two sisters

I hope we never forget the evil that was Germany's National Socialist, or Nazi, party. It came to power under Adolph Hitler, a megalomaniac who used fear to lure an entire country far beyond what is comprehensible. Kristin Hannah adds to our understanding of that period with *The Nightingale*. Not, perhaps, the most literary of novels about World War II, it is nonetheless powerful and riveting. It is not common for books to keep me up as they used to decades ago, but this one did. I was sorry when it ended.

The novel starts on the Oregon coast, with the memories of a nonagenarian who is dying of cancer. Her memories, held dormant for decades, break their dam and flood her mind. The story is a flashback, but we are not privy to just who is remembering. This is a tale of two sisters, Vianne Mauriac and Isabelle Rossignol, as different from each other as they can be.

Their mother died when Isabelle was very young, and their father, who suffered from his experience in World War I (we'd now call it PTSD), was not capable of raising them. This led to a series of nunneries and boarding schools. The older, Vianne, really just wanted to fit in, while Isabelle was fiercely independent, not caring a whit what others thought.

Vianne and her friends did not include Isabelle in their lives, and that separateness drove the rest of the plot. The book opens with this: "If I have learned anything in this long life of mine, it is this: In love we find out who we want to be; in war we find out who we are."

The girls go their own ways, and Vianne finds herself married with a young daughter. The world is at the brink of war, and her husband has been called into service for France. He would be captured and away until the end of the conflict. Their village, Carriveau, is occupied by Germany, and an officer billets with Vianne and Sophie. Food is scarce and there is barely enough to sustain them. Hannah gives us a clear picture of life under occupation.

Isabelle, on the other hand, falls into the service of the resistance and eventually sets up an escape route for downed Allied airmen. She takes them via a series of safe houses to the Pyrenees, and then walks them across. This is perilous at best, and the Germans inevitably find out about "the Nightingale."

Vianne at first continues her path of trying to fit in, even to the point of helping the occupiers identify Jews in the community. When the horror of the final solution reaches Carriveau, Vianne at last finds out who she is. She arranges a network to save Jewish children, placing them in an orphanage and even keeping one herself.

*The Nightingale* is perhaps a bit predictable and even trite, but its depiction of the evil of Nazism and the personal costs of the war do add to our understanding of events of the middle of the 20th century. Hannah does a fine job of keeping us from knowing the identity of the narrator, and I will not spoil that for you here. The ending is very difficult, and a handy box of tissues is a necessity. Kristin Hannah has crafted a fine novel, not fine literature. *The Nightingale* is well worth the effort.

