



***The Nightingale*, by Kristin Hannah**
Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy, November 2015

There's been a bounty of excellent novels set amid the turmoil of World War II. In particular, the Pulitzer winning *All the Light We Cannot See* has been the darling of critics and book groups everywhere. (It was reviewed here earlier this year and is a selection of my two book groups as well.) So just as one might wonder if yet another WWII-era book could capture our imaginations, along comes *The Nightingale*, by Kristin Hannah.

The Nightingale opens up in 1995 in Oregon; an unnamed elderly woman finds an identity card with a French name, stirring up old memories. The scene then shifts to a quiet French village, August 1939. The Germans are beginning their occupation of France. Antoine has gone off to enlist at the Front, leaving behind his young wife Vianne and their eight-year-old daughter Sophie. Vianne is determined to keep Le Jardin, their small farm, running.

Vianne's younger sister Isabelle, it seems, was born defiant. When Isabelle was four and Vianne fourteen, their mother died, leaving the girls in the care of their distant father. While Vianne sought refuge in her early marriage to Antoine, Isabelle was sent off to a series of convent boarding schools. At the start of the war, Isabelle returns to Le Jardin for sanctuary.

The different paths the two sisters take, navigating and surviving the war, makes for a compelling story line. Vianne is forced to board a Nazi officer, while Isabelle becomes part of the French Resistance. Both women in turn discover new-found strengths that carry them through their crises. And it isn't until the novel's conclusion that we readers discover which sister was the elderly woman at the beginning of the story.