

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
KAREN ROBARDS

THE
**BLACK
SWAN**
OF
PARIS

READER'S GUIDE

A NOVEL



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Women served many important roles during World War II. This book features female characters involved in the resistance movement in occupied France. What other ways did women contribute to the war effort?
2. *The Black Swan of Paris* explores the many types of sacrifices people make during wartime. What did the characters in the novel sacrifice? How did they feel about these sacrifices, and those of others? Do you think you would make the same sacrifices in their shoes?
3. How did Genevieve's talent impact her life? What course do you think her life would have taken if she hadn't had that talent?
4. How did you feel about Genevieve's decision not to give up Vivi? Would you have done the same in her place?
5. How did you feel about Lillian's and Emmy's responses to Genevieve's decision not to give up Vivi? Given the era and circumstances, did you sympathize with their reasoning?
6. Did you agree with Genevieve's decision to join forces with Emmy in order to save Lillian, despite everything her mother and sister put her through? Would you do the same?
7. What did Genevieve learn about the bonds between mothers and daughters from Vivi—and Ana?
8. There are many books set in Europe during World War II. Did this book shed light on any aspects of the war you didn't know before? Did you learn anything new, and if so, what?
9. Which scene in *The Black Swan of Paris* affected you the most, and why?
10. Who was your favorite supporting character, and why?
11. What relationship in the book did you feel was the most moving?
12. If you were making a movie of this book, which actors would you cast?
13. Did you find the book's ending satisfying? What would you have changed, if anything?



BEHIND THE BLACK SWAN OF PARIS

World War II was the deadliest conflict in the history of the world. The number of casualties—sixty to eighty million killed—the enormity of the devastation, the sheer cost in human suffering, adds up to a tragedy so staggering that it's almost impossible to fully comprehend. Measured against such a vast canvas, individual stories can seem small and unimportant. But it was one of those individual stories that inspired me to write *The Black Swan of Paris*.



My father-in-law, Clinton Robards, died when my husband was very young, long before I ever got to meet him. But the tales he told of World War II—of joining the army as a teen in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, of crouching in muddy trenches while eating cold canned lima beans (which he hated) as bombs exploded overhead, of arriving in Paris shortly after its liberation to witness the fierce jubilation of its half-starved citizens—were the stuff of legend, repeated at family gatherings until they were as much a part of any celebration as my mother-in-law's famous custard pie. Wounded in the war, he never quite recovered his health, although he lived another twenty years. Toward the end of her own life, my mother-in-law, Frances, went to France to retrace Clinton's steps. My husband and I went with her. As we walked the Normandy beaches and looked across the stormy water toward England, I found myself wondering what those last terrible days of the war must have been like.

Then the eternal writer's question—"What if?"—began to whisper in my ear. Clinton, a musician, had left behind his record collection, in which the songs of Edith Piaf figured prominently. I had an instant vision of a young soldier, rattling in an open jeep through the war-torn French countryside, with Edith Piaf's voice warbling over the radio as a soundtrack.

What would have happened, I asked myself, if that young soldier had met Edith Piaf, or a singer like her? What if she had helped him? What if she was part of the Resistance? Which, in fact, as it turned out, Edith Piaf was.

Over many years, and many subsequent visits to France, these thought fragments kept swirling through my head. I rode the train from Cherbourg to Paris, stayed in the Paris Ritz, visited the Casino de Paris—all feature prominently in the book—and gradually Genevieve Dumont, my heroine, a Frenchwoman, a beautiful young singer reluctantly caught up in the war, was born. Meticulously researched, her story was born in truth, but as I wrote it, it became her own, and one I had to tell.

At some point, Frances slipped one of her few precious photos of my father-in-law in his uniform into my son's baby book so that the grandson Clinton never had a chance to meet might remember him. When I found it, not long after she died, it made me cry.

I'm including a copy of that old grainy photo so that you can see it for yourself. Thank you for reading the story it inspired—Genevieve's story—*The Black Swan of Paris*.

Sincerely,

Karen Robards



THE BLACK SWAN OF PARIS RECOMMENDED PLAYLIST

Lili Marlene

by Marlene Dietrich

You'll Never Know

by Dick Haymes

Moonlight Serenade

by Glenn Miller

When the Lights Go On Again

by Vaughn Monroe

As Time Goes By

by Dooley Wilson

We'll Meet Again

by Vera Lynn

La vie en Rose

by Edith Piaf

Non, je ne regrette rien

by Édith Piaf

Java Jive

by Ink Spots

I'll Never Smile Again

by Tommy Dorsey
and His Orchestra

J'attendrai

by Rina Ketty