



Four winds

By Kristin Hannah

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Genre and Subject

Historical fiction

Depressions – 1929

Farmers – Texas

Synopsis

From Kristin Hannah, the #1 New York Times bestselling author of *The Nightingale* and *The Great Alone*, comes an epic novel of love and heroism and hope, set against the backdrop of one of America's most defining eras—the Great Depression. Texas, 1934. Millions are out of work and a drought has broken the Great Plains. Farmers are fighting to keep their land and their livelihoods as the crops are failing, the water is drying up, and dust threatens to bury them all. One of the darkest periods of the Great Depression, the Dust Bowl era, has arrived with a vengeance. In this uncertain and dangerous time, Elsa Martinelli—like so many of her neighbors—must make an agonizing choice: fight for the land she loves or go west, to California, in search of a better life. *The Four Winds* is an indelible portrait of America and the American Dream, as seen through the eyes of one indomitable woman whose courage and sacrifice will come to define a generation.

Author Biography

Kristin Hannah is an award-winning and bestselling author of more than 20 novels including the international blockbuster, *The Nightingale*, *Winter Garden*, *Night Road*, and *Firefly Lane*.

Her novel, *The Nightingale*, has been published in 43 languages and is currently in movie production at TriStar Pictures, which also optioned her novel, *The Great Alone*. Her novel, *Home Front* has been optioned for film by 1492 Films (produced the Oscar-nominated *The Help*) with Chris Columbus attached to direct.

Kristin is a former-lawyer-turned writer who lives in the Pacific Northwest with her husband. Her novel, *Firefly Lane*, became a runaway bestseller in 2009, a touchstone novel that brought women together, and *The Nightingale*, in 2015 was voted a best book of the year by Amazon, BuzzFeed, iTunes, Library Journal, Paste, The Wall Street Journal and The Week. Additionally, the novel won the coveted Goodreads and People's Choice Awards. The audiobook of *The Nightingale* won the Audiobook of the Year Award in the fiction category.

Discussion Starters

1. “Hope is a coin I carry. . . . There were times in my journey when it felt as if that penny and the hope it represented were the only things that kept me going.” (1) What is the significance of the fact that it is an American penny? In what ways does hope anchor us in the moment, and in what ways does it push us forward? Do you or your family have any keepsakes that represent your family's hope for the future?
2. “But we women of the Great Plains worked from sunup to sundown, too, toiled on wheat farms until we were as dry and baked as the land we loved.” (1) The stories of women have largely gone undocumented throughout history, and this era is no different. It is changing, slowly, and women's courage and determination and victories are being brought to light. How are women's stories different? Why do you think they've gone unreported for so long? Do you think sharing these stories will make a difference to future generations?

4. In 1920s America, there was significant prejudice against Italians; we see that prejudice in Elsa's own family. What does Rafe represent to Elsa on the night they meet? Is it simply sex and loneliness? Or do you think there's something deeper involved? Another small defiance against her parents' small-mindedness? What does it say about Elsa that she went with Rafe so willingly?
5. Motherhood changes Elsa in almost every way. What does she learn by becoming a mother? What does she learn about motherhood from Rose? How does motherhood strengthen a woman? How does it weaken her? How does Elsa remain "herself" after giving birth? How does she change?
6. The adolescent years can be especially difficult on mothers and daughters. Did you dislike Loreda during these years? Did you understand her?
7. "Tony and Rose were the kind of people who expected life to be hard and had become tougher to survive. . . They might have come off the boat as Anthony and Rosalba, but hard work and the land had turned them into Tony and Rose. Americans. They would die of thirst and hunger before they'd give that up." (76) Do you think this attitude is a common thread in those who across generations have come to chase the "American Dream"? Why is land so important to that dream? How does one "become American"?
8. What bonds Loreda and her father? What dreams do they share? Do they intend to exclude Elsa, whom they perceive as just a workhorse? Or is she partially to blame for being ostracized? How does her lack of self-esteem color her relationships with her husband and eldest child?
9. "Even if they didn't speak of their love, or share their feelings in long, heartfelt conversations, the bond was there. Sturdy. They'd sewn their lives together in the silent way of women unused to conversation. Day after day, they worked together, prayed together, held their growing family together through the hardships of farm life." (90–91) Do you share a similar bond with the women in your life—either as a mother, a daughter, or a daughter-in-law? With your friends? Why do you think female bonding is so important to women?
10. Why does Rafe leave and what is he chasing out west? Do you have sympathy for how broken he felt by the poverty and hardship? Should Elsa have agreed to go with him? How does Elsa aim to fill his void, and why does she believe she loves him even after the abandonment?
11. How do Elsa and her family remain unbroken even while enduring crippling poverty, food and shelter insecurity, and living in a town that is hostile to them? Would they have fared better in Texas?
12. Discuss the shift in thinking that happens between generations—the freedoms longed for and the sacrifices required. The Greatest Generation was shaped by the Great Depression and World War II. They willingly sacrificed for each other and did what they could to help. How is the modern world different? How do we face our own dark times?
13. "Courage is fear you ignore." Discuss this. How do Elsa's and Loreda's actions embody this idea? Fighting for any kind of social equality or radical change often requires great personal sacrifice.
14. Why was it so important for Loreda to get her mother back to Texas, even if at such a high cost? How did she finally come to understand her mother and her choices through a new lens?
15. Did you find the end of Elsa's and her family's journey satisfying? Where do you think Ant and Loreda ended up? How do you see Loreda's life being like her mother's? How will it be different?

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