Daughter of my Mothers by Sindri Freysson

Reader’s report by Sarah Bowen

The Second World War has inspired much literature, from poetry to autobiography and everything in between, and one might be forgiven for thinking that this source of inspiration has now been exhausted. However, Sindri Freysson provides us with a fresh angle with his novel Daughter of my Mothers, which came out in Icelandic in 2009. Not many English-speaking people are aware of Britain’s invasion of Iceland (to pre-empt a German invasion) and the rounding up of German nationals and suspected Nazi sympathisers there who were then held as prisoners of war in Britain and this is the angle taken by Sindri in this cleverly worked novel.

Sindri puts women firmly in centre stage; women who are victims of war, of their circumstances and find themselves at the mercy of men. The book opens with British forces landing in a small harbour town in the western fjords of Iceland to round up those who gave refuge to a German spy, Thomas Lang. Thomas has been captured and has blown the whistle on his friends and they are now to feel the full force of the British government. Ironically, the main character and narrator, 17 year old Kristín Eva Kröger, is Icelandic by birth and her only crime is to have been adopted as an infant by a childless German couple who fled the depression in Germany following the First World War. But Kristín Eva is rounded up, along with her parents and others. We follow Kristín Eva, her adoptive mother Hildegard, her aunt Bertha and other neighbours as prisoners of war to London where they are held in Holloway prison. Kristín Eva soon learns that many of her fellow prisoners are other foreign nationals of countries sympathetic to or subject to the Nazi regime. Many of these women are married to British men fighting in the armed forces while their wives languish in prison, their civil liberties severely curtailed. What these women have in common is their innocence and their need to find a way to survive under these harsh conditions – locked in their cells for 16 hours a day, 9 and a half of those hours in total darkness. Kristín Eva’s way to survive is to tell her story.

Told through the eyes of Kristín Eva the story leads us through these women’s lengthy imprisonment. She takes us on the journey the women themselves travel whilst in prison; she gives us the story of her adoptive parents and how they came to settle in Iceland, the story of her birth mother and how Kristín Eva came to be adopted by Hildegard and Frederick. This form of narration poses problems in that Kristín Eva is relating stories which either happened before she was born or when she was too young to remember. So she recalls what she has been told or she fills in the gaps with her imagination or uses details from films she has seen to paint a fuller picture of the scene she is recalling. At times this momentarily strikes an odd chord, but this is more than compensated for by the picture she draws of women as innocent victims of war and patriarchy and how they respond. Initially, I feared that Kristín Eva would not have enough to say to hold my attention but she has a range of interlocking stories to tell and I found myself reluctant to take a reading break from them.

By telling the stories of the two key women in her life, her birth mother and her adoptive mother, Kristín Eva finds her identity and her voice and she readily draws the reader into her world. As a 17 year old girl with a birth mother who had more babies than she could care for, Kristín Eva is intrigued by sex and she is not afraid to express this fascination. As the Bad Sex Award would indicate, this is an extremely difficult topic for any author to write well on but I don’t think Sindri would be up even for nomination. He covers the topic appropriately coming from the mouth of his young narrator. For example, as 11 year olds Kristín Eva and her friends stumble on a 1927 edition of a health and marriage guidance book which the young girls devour; she describes her first sexual encounter aged 15, from her current mature standpoint of nearly 18! So to give Sindri his due it must be remembered
that the narration comes from the mouth of a teenager and it is not intended to read like Lady Chatterley’s Lover.

My main criticism of the novel is that Sindri has clearly put a lot of work into researching this subject, much of which he includes in the narrative. Some of this detail is undoubtedly valid and necessary for the Icelandic reader, but as the book is largely set in the UK I think that some passages could benefit from some editing for the English-speaking audience.

*The Daughter of my Mothers* is well-written novel which makes for absorbing reading. The subject matter, the lot of ordinary people at the mercy of events greater than themselves, is powerfully yet pragmatically portrayed and it strikes a contemporary note given the debate in recent years over counter terrorism legislation and its emphasis on the lot of women as pawns of war. It would benefit from some judicious editing but this is a book well worth bringing to the English market.

**Overview**

*Daughter of my Mothers* is a cleverly worked novel that provides us with a fresh angle on the fate of prisoners in Britain in WWII. Sindri puts women firmly in centre stage; women who are victims of war, of their circumstances and find themselves at the mercy of men. By telling the stories of the two key women in her life, her birth mother and her adoptive mother, Kristín Eva, the main protagonist, finds her identity and her voice and she readily draws the reader into her world. *The Daughter of my Mothers* is well-written novel which makes for absorbing reading. The subject matter, the lot of ordinary people at the mercy of events greater than themselves, is powerfully yet pragmatically portrayed and it strikes a contemporary note with its emphasis on the lot of women. It is 460 pages, divided into 185 chapters, so each chapter is usually very short, some only half a page, which makes the novel fast paced and an enjoyable reading. Here is the chapter breakdown:

**Chapter breakdown**

**Ch. 1** A British warship comes sailing into the remote fishing village of Ísafjörður on a peaceful summer’s evening in June 1941 and docks at the pier. 60 soldiers march ashore and begin a well-practised military manoeuvre. Meanwhile the main character, 17 year old Kristín Eva, is dancing the night away in the village hall. The soldiers set up their machine guns and tear down the coat of arms of the British Consul, the representative of the British Empire.

**Ch. 2** Two British soldiers fetch Kristín Eva from the dance and arrest her. She is taken to her mother, Mrs Hildegard Kröger, who is under military guard in her kitchen. The house is full of soldiers searching high and low. Kristín Eva realises the British have come to arrest them because her mother and some others in the town had helped out a German refugee.

**Ch. 3** Hildegard asks her neighbour to take care of her two younger children who are asleep, blissfully unaware that their mother and sister have been taken prisoner. The soldiers escort the mother and daughter down to the ship. A few curious and malicious passers-by watch them go. Mother and daughter are locked in a steel cabin in the bowels of the ship.

**Ch. 4** The ship sails out of the fjord. Kristín Eva lies awake, thinking about her family and friends and realises she won’t be the same person when and if she returns. This change has been forced upon her and she has also been forced out into an unknown future.

**Ch. 5** The ship moors alongside a gigantic cargo ship. The women are moved from one to the other. Soon other prisoners join them, amongst them the gorgeous young Selma Zeller and Bertha.
Samúelsson, Mrs Kröger’s sister-in-law. Bertha and Hildegard have not been on good terms for many years but when Hildegard sees her broken and unwell following her arrest she immediately begins to make a fuss of her. Selma tells them that 3 men from Ísafjörður, her father Jakob, Einar, Bertha’s husband and Finnur the lighthouse-keeper, have also been arrested.

Ch. 6 Kristín Eva recalls how her mother and Bertha have constantly been fighting through the years. Einar had moved to America around 1912 where he worked on building the tunnel under the Hudson river and it was in New York that he met his German wife, Bertha, who he later brought with him to Ísafjörður. He set up a number of businesses in Ísafjörður, including a bakery. Bertha’s brother, Kristín Eva’s father, had been working as a baker in Germany and accepted a job in the bakery at Ísafjörður. His fiancée, Hildegard, followed him and they married. Bertha turned against her new sister-in-law the minute she set eyes on her. From that day there had been bitter feud between them.

Ch. 7 A soldier calls Kristín Eva “prisoner” and with this one word she feels her world is turned upside down: She feels she has not only lost her freedom but to some extent her youth as well.

Ch. 8 Kristín Eva is allowed to take a breath of fresh air outside the cabin and she accepts cigarettes and sweets from the British soldiers. She is battling homesickness and fear for her future.

Ch. 9 Kristín Eva explains the reasons for the arrest, how they had assisted Thomas Lang. He had come to Ísafjörður the previous year, looking for help from people he knew there. These people were not Nazis but they took pity on him and between them managed to keep him in hiding for a whole year. But when Thomas was finally caught he betrayed them all to the British. Kristín Eva had only met him briefly once and had not in any way been involved in helping him.

Ch. 10 Kristín Eva relates how her birth mother, Rósa, travelled to England when she was 23. She went with a friend to escape a bleak future in the narrow fjords back home and to indulge their yearning for adventure. They travel to Hull on a British fishing vessel early in 1914, determined to discover a whole new world.

Ch. 11 Kristín Eva relates how her foster mother, Hildegard, became pregnant a few years after she moved to Iceland but the baby died in utero a few days before it was due. It took the doctors 3 days to do a thorough d&c and she was told afterwards that she would never be able to have children.

Ch. 12 Kristín Eva relates how Rósa was a single mum when she gave birth to her, having already had 4 children. She’s resting in the maternity unit when her employer visits and suggests she let Mrs Kröger adopt the baby as she can’t look after her herself. Rósa does so because she has no real alternative. Kristín Eva recalls how by chance she’d found out that her adoptive father the baker was against the adoption.

Ch. 13 The cargo ship docks at Greenock in Scotland. Kristín Eva looks in amazement at the countryside and the enormous buildings around her, but is also horrified by the burnt out remains from the air raids. The seven Icelanders, men and women, are moved to a police station and then escorted by train to London.

Ch. 14 Kristín Eva recalls her earliest memories of Dresden where her parents lived for a short time. She has happy memories of ancient stately homes, magnificent churches and a vibrant cultural life. She also remembers noisy young men in brown shirts proudly wearing the Nazi cross on their sleeve.
The train pulls into London shrouded in fog. Derelict buildings are everywhere. The Icelanders say their brief good-bYES on the platform before the men and women are bundled into two separate army trucks.

Kristín Eva and her fellow prisoners of war are driven through London; their impressions and the reactions of others who see them in the Paddy Wagon are vividly portrayed. Then their arrival at Holloway prison is described and their judgement on the inmates they encounter.

The prison wardens take their personal possessions, jewellery and cosmetics and they are left to wait in cramped cubicles about the size of a coffin. When they are given a greasy broth Hildegard protests and tosses the bowl away from her. Kristín Eva is proud of her mother’s rebellious spirit.

The prisoners undergo an undignified body search. They are weighed and their fingerprints taken. They are given a cold shower before having a brief medical check. There is a description of Holloway prison. The women learn that they are to be held in A-block along with other “female spies and women associated with convicted spies or hardened Nazis”.

Kristín Eva describes her cold bleak cell.

Kristín Eva relates the story she heard of how Rósa and her friend arrive in Hull and make their way to the Hotel Minerva where they had heard they might get work. The hotel owner was only expecting to take on one girl but he agrees to ask around and finds a position as a domestic for Mr Probe who is the accountant at Thomas Wilson & Sons, the shipping company. They toss for it and Rósa loses.

The following morning Kristín Eva wakes up in her cell for the first time. Food is brought to her, a mouldy tasting porridge. Later she and the other Icelandic women are let out to meet the prison director and the chaplain.

The chaplain asks Kristín about her faith. She had lost her faith as a 14 year old when her best friend died of TB after months of suffering. Kristín Eva avoids answering his questioning directly.

The prison governor explains custody clause 18B to Kristín Eva, which validates their imprisonment. The clause permits the arrest of people who are suspected Nazi supporters, of people who might have cause to endanger the security of other citizens, and of people who are of “enemy nationality or have connections with such nationals”. Before she leaves he orders her to open her mouth while he carefully examines her teeth.

A horse-drawn ambulance is outside Mr Probe’s house when Rósa arrives and drives off with his very sick wife. He tells her he must accompany his wife to the hospital and gives her the house keys and asks her to start cleaning. She slips in to the large house and creeps around curiously and then sets about washing up. She is in the middle of this when the son of the house, James Probe, comes storming in. Rósa immediately feels strongly drawn to him. Mrs Probe dies during the night.

A prison warden outlines the main prison rules and regulations for the Icelandic women: when they may listen to the radio, how many books they may read a week etc. Kristín Eva realises with terror that she is to be locked in her cell for nearly 16 hours a day from then on.

Kristín Eva recalls her father’s rather sad childhood. He had lost his mother when he was a young boy and when he was 13 his father apprenticed him to a baker in Leipzig.
Ch.27  The women meet some of the other prisoners for the first time. One of them warns them that the bean soup is laced with bicarbonate of soda to suppress their libido, particularly to reduce the risk of them desiring other prisoners.

Ch.28  Kristín Eva recounts the history of Holloway prison, clear evidence of the narrow-minded Victorian mindset and the emphasis on punishment. Suffragettes were imprisoned there. At the start of the war the prison was cleared because of fears of air raids but then it was opened again to hold foreign women. Kristín Eva wonders whether the authorities believe the German women would get their just deserts if German bombs killed them.

Ch.29  Rósa becomes increasingly enamoured of young James Probe. He has great dreams, he longs for wealth, and he is passionate, talkative and ambitious. He enjoys her admiration and flirts with her but they keep their relationship secret in order not to arouse the suspicions of Mr Probe snr. He, on the other hand, is still grieving and goes to a medium a number of times a week.

Ch.30  In her cell Kristín Eva is in despair. Then she gets the idea of coining a new word each day and then she will be able to “introduce a new language to the world” if and when she gets out of captivity. Her first word is “valdnáð” (power-raid) which means to have your life torn away from you by merciless authorities, without regard for justice or the law.

Ch.31  After living with her parents for a while in Germany, Kristín Eva returns with them to Iceland aged 6 or 7 and tries to settle and integrate with the children there. One day while they are playing ball she complains that she never gets the ball and asks why. The other children tell her the baker and his wife only take care of her out of pity and that her real mother is a whore. Kristín Eva runs home crying but her mum doesn’t explain the accusations.

Ch.32  Kristín Eva tries to get used to prison life but finds it hard, especially as the prison authorities’ approach to cleanliness appears so inconsistent. They hardly get any soap or cloths and yet are required to scrub the floors the whole day long. Her mother, Hildegaard, tells her not to give an inch: “Incarcerated women should carry themselves like queens”.

Ch.33  Kristín Eva ponders her situation and finds it strange that in prison the one thing most of them have in common is their innocence. Generally innocence is the exception within the penal system, but in Holloway it’s the norm. She comes to the conclusion that they will be obliged to stay there forever, unless the politicians find a way to make use of their presence there.

Ch.34  Three months after Rósa started work in the Probe household she has fallen so much for James that they start to settle and integrate with the children there. One day while they are playing ball she complains that she never gets the ball and asks why. The other children tell her the baker and his wife only take care of her out of pity and that her real mother is a whore. Kristín Eva runs home crying but her mum doesn’t explain the accusations.

Ch.35  Andrés Thorsson, the Icelandic ambassador to London, visits the women in prison. He interviews them about their part in the Thomas Lang affair. He promises to make every effort to raise their plight with the British authorities, to make them see that none of these Icelandic women should be in prison and to have them freed. The women are all optimistic but Kristín Eva finds him too good to be true.

Ch.36  Kristín Eva recalls the story of her mother, Hildegaard, who lost her own mother when she was 5 years old and was sent to live with an aunt after her father remarried. She grew up there in
straitened circumstances, tries to get some further education by going to night school but by day she has to make ends meet by working in a greengrocer’s.

Ch.37 The women are let out into the prison grounds. Kristín Eva meets some of the other prisoners including German women married to British soldiers fighting for their country while their wives are locked up in Holloway. Kristín Eva is horrified at this treatment of them.

Ch.38 James Probe does not react well to the news of Rósa’s pregnancy. He curses her roundly and tells her to go back home to have her “bastard child” there. He has no intention of having a child with a working class foreign woman. He considers murdering Rósa but gives up on the idea and admits to his father that he has got their domestic help pregnant. Mr Probe cannot believe his own ears and refuses to have Rósa sent back home. He orders James to marry her and accept responsibility for his actions. At the wedding James’ elder sister makes her antipathy towards her new sister-in-law very clear.

Ch.39 The prison authorities finally give the women back their combs and hairbrushes which were taken from them when they were signed in. Kristín Eva has her hair checked for lice and does her utmost not to wince.

Ch.40 Some of the prisoners maintain having a few days in the sick unit is as good as a holiday. Kristín Eva hears an amusing anecdote of a bothersome Hungarian woman’s attempt to get signed off sick.

Ch.41 Kristín Eva coins a new word. She says that she longs so much for companionship in the cell that her heart hurts. The prison is a concrete world whose purpose is to humiliate.

Ch.42 The women go to Holy Communion in the prison chapel. Kristín Eva hears a rumour that the prison chaplain has previously abused women prisoners. Kristín Eva sees Vera, a beautiful young Russian woman, for the first time and Vera also notices Kristín Eva.

Ch.43 Rósa is so taken up with the baby she is carrying that for the first few months she is hardly aware of the war around her – at least not until an Icelandic sailor is accidentally shot just outside Hull. Her old friend is also shocked by the news and decides to return home to Iceland. Once she has gone Rósa finds herself completely alone with no one for support.

Ch.44 Vera finds Kristín Eva and immediately enthralles her with her personal charm and tales of her experiences. Vera has a volatile nature, and can swing from a real high to the deepest gloom in the blink of an eye. Kristín Eva longs to have her as a friend and preferably to monopolise her friendship completely.

Ch.45 Hildegard is called into the governor’s office. The Icelandic ambassador has sent the women some money, which Hildegard uses to buy spices and sweets. She is granted permission once a week to improve the flavour of the prison fare and gains the respect and admiration of the other prisoners as a result.

Ch.46 Kristín Eva recalls the account of the raids on England by Zeppelin airships in January 1915, raids which shook the nation and cast doubt on the might of the British army and caused the man in the street to question the wisdom of the class system. Heavily pregnant, Rósa has no fears about airships, only that she is now so large she is beginning to look like one.
Ch.47  Hildegaaard’s influence in the prison increases. Prisoners have started to go to her for advice, with their confidences and she gains a circle of admirers. She is dubbed “the woman with answers”. Kristín Eva is amazed by this new side to her mother.

Ch.48  Vera shows Kristín Eva knife scars on her body which came from her jealous ex-husband. She recounts to Kristín Eva fairytale-like stories of her life and her loves. Kristín Eva is not sure whether she is telling the truth or lying through her teeth, but she is enchanted by Vera and her stories.

Ch.49  Rósa’s waters break and she is rushed to hospital. When the labour starts the town is in darkness and the delivery room is lit with candles. The reason for the blackout is an air-raid on Hull. While the bombs fall and the town shudders Rósa struggles to push her child into the world. Tens of people have died and buildings bombed by the time her little boy is born.

Ch.50  Kristín Eva notices that the women who have not given up the struggle still pay attention to their appearance, try to do their hair and apply a bit of powder.

Ch.51  When Kristín Eva was 7 years old an old woman in Ísafjörður calls her over and invites her into her home. The old woman shows Kristín Eva a photograph of a man and tells her that he is her real father. Kristín Eva doesn’t believe her because she believes the baker to be her father, but the old woman is convinced. She tells her that her father drowned.

Ch.52  Vera regales the women with the tale of her father’s death aboard a French passenger ship. Kristín Eva finds it hard to believe her and feels she is “stealing” her own story of her father’s drowning. When she later casts doubt on other stories of Vera’s, Vera flies into a rage and almost slaps Kristín Eva.

Ch.53  James and Rósa’s new-born son gives her no end of pleasure but scares James. He is totally absorbed in his daydreams of becoming rich quick and Mr Probe senior devotes most of his time to spiritualists.

Ch.54  Kristín Eva confides in her mother her suspicions that Vera makes most of her stories up. Hildegaaard believes her and becomes wary of Vera.

Ch.55  Kristín Eva recalls when her father, the baker, served in the army in WW1. He was wounded by a piece of shrapnel in the leg in one battle and his thigh was deformed as a result. Kristín Eva saw it once by chance as a child and found it revolting.

Ch.56  Kristín Eva is lying awake in her cell wondering whether incarceration is not the worst punishment man has ever devised for others. She vows she will survive, she will not let her imprisonment break her spirit.

Ch.57  The air-raid sirens wail. Kristín Eva wishes a bomb would land on the prison so that the women can scramble over the ruins to freedom. She imagines a German invasion.

Ch.58  Kristín Eva and Vera are on their way to the bathroom together. Vera says how she likes to take care of her pussy but Kristín Eva becomes shy and unsure of herself. Vera teases her with her flirting and provokes her, asking her if she’s ever been with a woman. Kristín Eva has no idea what she’s talking about but Vera assures her that women can be with women and they can masturbate one another. Kristín Eva can’t believe what she’s hearing but is curious at the same time.
Ch.59 Kristín Eva is thinking about everything Vera has told her and becomes sexually aroused. She touches herself, masturbates and climaxes. She struggles with a mixture of conscience and the desire to do it again.

Ch.60 Kristín Eva recalls the time she lost her virginity when she was nearly 15 years old. The boy worked repairing fishing nets but dreamed of setting up a business making mirrors. He was shy, timid and inexperienced. Kristín Eva’s first introduction to love-making is clumsy, embarrassing and somewhat comical.

Ch.61 Mr Probe tries to get his son and daughter to attend a spiritualist meeting with him but fails. Rósa agrees to go out of curiosity. There are prayers, hymns and a medium who calls upon some names but no flying objects or spirits appear as Rósa was anticipating. At the end of the meeting she sees Mr Probe surreptitiously pass an envelope to the medium.

Ch.62 Kristín Eva admires how many remarkable women the Brits have unwittingly rounded together in the prison. One used to be a famous gymnast in Germany, others claimed to be aristocrats and one was definitely a countess from the Rothschild family, dressed in a silk dressing gown. The smell of opium cigars was said to waft from her cell sometimes.

Ch.63 Kristín Eva talks about her father the baker who had been transported the previous year to prison quarters on the Isle of Man. He was an old-fashioned and strict father who had smacked her many a time, almost beat her sometimes. He became even stricter with her as a teenager when she became sexually aware.

Ch.64 In prison there are women who have broken down, who cry or wail most of the time, and Kristín Eva reproaches them for giving up. Some have more reason to break than others; one was imprisoned for 6 months for stealing a rare book from her lover and some months after she was released she was arrested again and stuck in Holloway for having a German father.

Ch.65 Kristín Eva was always an avid reader; the library at Ísafjörður is her favourite place. However, at home books were virtually contraband; her father considered immoderate reading as bad as frivolity and unnecessary for women, with the result that she hid books all over the house. In prison books are allowed out on a week’s loan maximum, to be returned whether finished or not, with the result that prison is home to countless number of half-read books.

Ch.66 When her son is eight months old, Rósa discovers that she is pregnant again. At the same time her husband, James, is called up for service. Mr Probe tries to pull strings to have him exempted but when it comes down to it he discovers that these men in authority who he knows have no wish to do him any favours. James is sent to the front in a black mood, full of ill-feeling towards his father and his wife.

Ch.67 A Hungarian woman, notorious for being pushy and disagreeable, looks out for Kristín Eva in prison and snoops into the reasons why she and her mother are imprisoned. Kristín Eva gets the idea of selling her the lie that she and Selma were inadvertently responsible for the death of a British soldier who was about to rape her, and, in order to hide the body the other women resorted to sawing the body up and eating it so it would disappear altogether. When it came to the crunch the women couldn’t stomach eating the soldier and gave the soldiers who were searching for him in Ísafjörður pieces of steak. Much to Kristín Eva’s delight the Hungarian woman swallows her story hook, line and sinker and never again tries to meddle in the affairs of the Icelandic women!
Kristín Eva was 13 when her father decided she should leave school and start work at the bakery. It seems to Kristín Eva that she has been banished in some way and every morning she feels miserable as she opens the bakery and watches her contemporaries on their way to school.

Rósa’s sisters-in-law both lose their husbands at the battle of the Somme and decide to move back in with their father. They treat Rósa as though she was still the domestic and tell her she must see to all the cooking and cleaning in the house. Rósa puts up with this insult and with their cheek but mulls over how she can get her revenge.

By mistake Kristín Eva is locked in the wrong cell for part of the day, this incident disconcerts her and she fears she is becoming institutionalised and that her mind is no longer living inside her body.

Kristín Eva can’t stand prison fare and spends most of her time thinking about food. She has become extremely thin, her hair is falling out and her periods have become irregular. She feels she is dying in stages.

Mr Probe loses his job but doesn’t tell anyone, he just carries on going to work every morning as though nothing had happened. One day as Rósa is walking round Hull, heavily pregnant and with young James in the pram, she sees Mr Probe sitting on a bench next to his wife’s grave. Rósa tells her sisters-in-law about this and they confront their father. He admits to having spent all his savings on mediums, in an attempt to get in touch with his wife and when his savings were gone he began to “borrow” money from the shipping line, which he then couldn’t pay back. At the end he put two of the mediums on the payroll at the shipping line and had sex with one of them, on the grounds that his wife would appear to him through the body of the medium. The shipping line fired him and will seize the house or report him to the police. He is bankrupt.

The women are weighed weekly but must have their backs to the dial so they can’t see their weight. Selma thinks this is done so the women can’t see that they are losing weight, that they are undernourished.

The second of Kristín Eva’s lovers was a seaman who she met at a dance. He had a bad reputation as a ladies’ man but still succeeded in sweeping her off her feet. They made love in the churchyard, boatheds, in half-built houses, and he fills her waking moments. Her mother, Hildegaard, suspects Kristín Eva of something malicious, flies into a rage and beats her daughter to a pulp. When her sores get infected Kristín Eva has no choice but to ask Hildegaard to cleanse them, which she does with suction cups and iodine. Kristín Eva decides her lover is not worth it and drops him.

Hildegaard returns from Communion in the prison chapel with the news that the Germans have attacked the Soviet Union. She hopes the British and the Germans will join forces against communism but Vera dismisses that hopeful idea; the Germans have set in motion their own suffering by fighting both the British and the Russians simultaneously. Kristín Eva doesn’t care who attacks whom so long as they are released from prison.

Rósa’s husband, James, returns from the war following the news that his father is bankrupt. He is livid with his father and shouts at him for wasting his money on mediums. Mr Probe is desperate to calm his son down and comes up with a business idea – to set up a company which helps people contact their loved ones on the other side. He would just need to recruit and train some mediums who would work at a sort of call centre which people could visit to ask for news of their lost
loved ones. The company would be called the Royal British Spirit Phone Company. James is within an inch of beating his father up but instead he storms out without saying good-bye to his family and goes straight back to the front. Rósa gives birth to her second child, a boy that she names Theodor.

Ch.77  Kristín Eva dreams she is a 17 year old boy and not a 17 year old girl, wonders what pleasures she would enjoy if she were of the opposite sex.

Ch.78  Kristín Eva contemplates a picture of King George VI which hangs in the prison and wonders whether he has any power, whether he can get them out of prison. The thought that she is ranked as a state enemy is incomprehensible to her, an enemy of the Crown, an enemy of the king.

Ch.79  Most of the prison wardens are short-tempered; they bark their orders and punish the prisoners for the slightest offence. It seems to Kristín Eva that the wardens’ purpose is to turn the prisoners into machines, to make them automatons. And yet she senses that the wardens’ harshness is a brittle mask, that the source of their power is rooted in their own insecurity and stupidity.

Ch.80  The Probe family leave their wonderful house and move into a brick-built shack in the poor area of Hull. The destitution, noise and filth awaken strong emotions in Rósa who has first-hand experience of poverty from Iceland. Her sisters-in-law respond badly to these changes in their life and become even more bitter and vicious.

Ch.81  One of the prison wardens hears Kristín Eva complain about prison food and intimidates her by being unnecessarily vindictive. Kristín Eva and Vera talk about the fact that trying to be submissive and appeal to the wardens is not worth it.

Ch.82  Kristín Eva is feeling increasingly persecuted; she remembers in the early days of her imprisonment being told that sleeping pills are crushed into their evening cocoa and bicarbonate of soda is added to their soup. She wonders what other medication is secreted in prisoners’ food, whether she can even trust her own senses. Maybe she is just lying somewhere drugged to the eyeballs and each day is simply a bad dream.

Ch.83  Vera teaches Kristín Eva the f*** word and she considers collecting all the rude words she knows and putting them together in a book, The Book of Banned Words.

Ch.84  James, Rósa’s husband, comes home on short leave early in 1918, a ghost of his former self, more melancholic in nature and scarred by the harsh realities of the front line. He doesn’t speak to his father, hardly utters a word to his sisters and is distant and cold towards Rósa. He is totally disinterested in his two sons, James and Theodor. He doesn’t show Rósa any warmth or affection except in bed at night. Two months after he goes back to the front Rósa discovers that she is pregnant for a third time. She writes to James to tell him the news but receives no reply until late autumn. By then he is stationed in Arkhangelsk in Russia, with a British regiment which was sent there to back the White Army in their battle against the communists. He writes to her of a world of rape, raid, murder and torture. He casts doubt on the paternity of the child she is carrying. A fortnight later Rósa gets a letter from the British military authorities to say that her husband, James, is missing in action and presumed dead. Rósa gives birth to a daughter, Elísabet Aníta, on Armistice Day – a single mother of three, far from home.

Ch.85  On summer nights Kristín Eva can hear a cry of terror coming time and again from the depths of the prison. The other women say they don’t hear anything. Kristín Eva begins to wonder whether there’s a secret cell somewhere and the sounds reach her through the ventilation system. After a few
sleepless nights the cries start to get on her nerves, she realises she can’t rescue anyone else other than herself at best. To get some peace she makes herself earplugs by tearing pages out of the Bible.

Ch.86 Three widows, three children and Mr Probe snr. now live cheek by jowl in three small rooms, stripped of their dignity and their possessions. Mr Probe continues to decline, he becomes gaunt, plays Schubert constantly on their old gramaphone player and doesn’t go out of the house. The mediums who he paid vast sums of money to never visit but he takes this in good part, saying “They’ll talk with me when I’m dead.”

Ch.87 Kristín Eva dreams of the time when the war is over and she is freed, she dreams of the Icelandic mountains and the fresh breeze which strokes her cheek as she sleeps.

Ch.88 Mr Probe becomes more eccentric and isolated with each passing month, which saddens and concerns Rósa greatly. He tells her about the time he saw the vaudeville automaton, Enigmarelle, at the Hippodrome some ten years ago. He maintained that this automaton prefigured a mass production of robots who would do all the dirty work that no one else wanted to. That would give people’s souls the time and space to forge links between the living and the dead. Rósa fears he is losing his mind.

Ch.89 It is very hard to get hold of paper in prison. It seems the prison authorities want to do all they can to prevent the prisoners from writing, but they turn a blind eye when the prisoners get hold of paper illicitly. The Icelandic ambassador gets paper for the women but when Kristín Eva tries to write a letter to Iceland she is dumbfounded. It is as though prison life has robbed her of her ability to express herself.

Ch.90 Kristín Eva’s thoughts return to Iceland, in her mind’s eye she sees the narrow fjord, the tall mountains, the grassy slopes, the choppy sea and the white-topped glacier. Prison is the antithesis of nature, she thinks to herself.

Ch.91 Kristín Eva discovers that two distinct personality traits are very useful to have in prison; one being self-control and the other patience in the face of absurdity.

Ch.92 It is Christmas 1919 and Mr Probe dies following a short illness. Rósa gets the notion that one of her sisters-in-law has poisoned their father, either to bring a close to his endless grief or to reunite him with his much-loved wife. She tries to supress her suspicions and finds that his death is a powerful reminder of the value of life.

Ch.93 The Germans conduct air raids on London three times in a short period. During the raids the prisoners’ cells are opened and during one raid Kristín Eva creeps out of her cell along to her mother. But she is not the only one, other women have gone to her for comfort while the bombs are raining down. So Kristín Eva goes to Vera who calms her with an amusing story from her childhood when aristocratic people came from all over Europe to her home during the hunting season.

Ch.94 Kristín Eva ponders why sex is never mentioned in the novels she has read; why female heroes appear to lack libido in a sexless world.

Ch.95 Kristín Eva looks at herself in a mirror and sees the face of imminent death there.

Ch.96 The jangle of the wardens’ keys reminds Kristín Eva of cymbals. She pictures all the wardens lining themselves up, swinging their bunches of keys and they begin to play the Storm Clouds cantata by Arthur Benjamin from the film The Man Who Knew Too Much.
Ch.97 The crew of the Iceland fishing ship, Vinland, are docked at Hull when they hear about an Icelandic woman, Rósa, who is living in the poor part of town with three children. The crew members decide to visit her and offer her and her children passage home to Iceland. Rósa decides to accept the offer but young James refuses to go. Rósa was going to ignore his protests but her sisters-in-law convince her that she need not force the boy to go with her and that they will take good care of him until she can come back for him once she’s settled. Bewildered and unsure, Rósa agrees to leave him behind with them for the time being – which proves to be the worst decision of her life.

Ch.98 After a long delay and much argument, Kristín Eva finally gets fresh bed linen in place of the old sheets which were all torn and full of holes. The warden who hands her the linen is very insulting to her.

Ch.99 London is hit by a heat-wave and the women trudge around the prison grounds in sweltering heat. Kristín Eva has a nightmare about melting into the prison walls. To her being incarcerated feels like rape.

Ch.100 When Kristín Eva uses the pot in her cell for peeing, she feels someone is spying on her. She feels she has been disgraced.

Ch.101 A prisoner is allowed to hold a piano recital in prison. The music enthralls the women and soon one of them gets to her feet and asks another to dance. Then the women all jump up and start dancing. The wardens are at a loss as to what to do and Kristín Eva feels that the women have rebelled for a few minutes, that they’ve defied the system and won a victory.

Ch.102 Rósa has returned to Iceland with two children, Theodore and Elísabet Aníta, and rumours about her spread around Ísafjörður. She can’t get any work and is only offered housing temporarily. Her father pushes her to allow an elderly childless couple to take the two children in until her situation improves and she can care for them herself. Rósa is at a complete loss and agrees to this. She gets work with the local merchant in a small shop in a nearby village. He tries to seduce her. She hasn’t been with a man for three years, she is sad and lonely and hopes to find a man so that she can get her children back. She is drawn into a physical relationship with him, but all her hopes are dashed when he tells her that he is emigrating to America. Shortly after, she discovers that she is pregnant with her fourth child - an unmarried woman in a narrow-minded and judgemental society. The new merchant gives her the sack.

Ch.103 The Icelandic women have a session with a soothsayer in prison. Hildegaard is unimpressed with her predictions. Bertha, Selma and Kristín Eva are about to leave the session but Kristín Eva decides to give it a go for a bit longer. The prediction she is given is ominous and greatly unnerves her.

Ch.104 Kristín Eva lands in trouble with the warden who she came into conflict with over the bed linen. Kristín Eva gets the notion to praise her to the skies instead of checking her at the top of her voice. The warden is thrown out of kilter by this and stops giving Kristín Eva a hard time. Vanity knows no bounds.

Ch.105 Kristín Eva misses Iceland which “wafts like a bizarre bank of cloud” between Europe and America.

Ch.106 Rósa’s lover refuses to change his plans to emigrate to the States when she tells him she is pregnant. But he does suggest that when the baby is born it should be fostered with his sister. Rósa is
defeated; she thinks about her son who she was tricked into leaving behind in Britain, about the children who she can’t have with her and finally she agrees to his suggestion. She gives birth to a little girl early in February, 1922 and gives her up when she is only a few months old. She looks for work, her breasts still full of milk and no one to feed.

Ch.107 The prisoners get to watch a film which has been set up in the chapel. It’s an old science fiction film which fascinates Kristín Eva and she combines her speculations about the future with the hope of being set free. Vera is unimpressed with her fascination and talks down to her. Kristín Eva feels hurt and at a loss.

Ch.108 Kristín Eva has a dream in which a prison is set up and run by Martians. She runs across to Vera to tell her about the dream and make it up with her. Vera responds by mocking her and laughing uncontrollably in her face which frightens Kristín Eva.

Ch.109 Kristín Eva wonders whether there are any mysterious reasons behind the womens’ incarceration in Holloway. They are “potential” criminals – and possibly enemies. Is this to be the way of the penal system in the future, she wonders – to arrest those who seem likely to break the law? She reckons it is small-minded and cowardly men who imprison harmless women but then decides that they are being used to frighten others, in the same way as sensationalist headlines of spies do, or posters which encourage citizens to be suspicious of everything and everyone.

Ch.110 Kristín Eva has a dream in which a prison is set up and run by Martians. She runs across to Vera to tell her about the dream and make it up with her. Vera responds by mocking her and laughing uncontrollably in her face which frightens Kristín Eva.

Ch.111 Much to her amazement and shock Kristín Eva finds her mother, Hildegaard, crying. This strong woman was crushed when the Icelandic ambassador told her the news that he was having little joy with the British government over negotiating their release. It would set a bad precedent and they should count themselves fortunate that the conditions are not worse. Kristín Eva begins to fear that they will remain locked up for years. “We are just pawns,” says her mother. “And no one cares about pawns.”

Ch.112 Kristín Eva coins a new word to express her rage at the men who dared to reduce her mother to tears.

Ch.113 Rósa gets work in a guesthouse in Ísafjörður. One regular guest there is a young ship’s captain, Hákon, a shy and mysterious fellow. Rósa falls in love with him yet tries everything in her power to avoid getting burned as she has been from her previous experience. But she also has a strong longing for human warmth and happiness. Slowly but surely their love affair takes off, which Hákon’s father reacts very badly to. He reckons Rósa is a tart, since she has lived abroad and has four children who don’t live with her. Hákon disregards his father’s wishes and continues to meet Rósa. She becomes pregnant. He tells her that he doesn’t intend to bring up the child and she reacts calmly; she doesn’t expect anything from life any more.

Ch.114 Kristín Eva dreams that she is standing in an air-balloon, all dressed in white and on her way to heaven and at the same time she sees herself standing on the earth below, dressed in black and she is filled with terror.
Ch.115 Rósa enthusiastically writes to her son in Britain, in the hope that her sisters-in-law will read the letters to him. She never gets a reply, never gets the reassurance that her son is well. It is not until the New Year of 1923 that she gets a letter which contains a blurred photo of the lad and also an envelope. In the envelope is a letter from James; he is alive, having returned to England roughly four years after he was declared dead.

Ch.116 In his letter James describes the horrendous time he had in Russia during the years following WWI, how he deserted and joined a White Russian regiment in the hope of getting hold of some of the Russian tsar’s gold supplies with which the White Army was fleeing with from the Reds. He describes his adventures and his wanderings and why he was eventually driven back to England. He ends his letter to Rósa with these words: “I wish you were dead.”

Ch.117 Vera admits to Kristín Eva that she is pregnant, in fact she was newly pregnant when she was sent to Holloway and is now nearly four months pregnant. She believes that the child’s father may have given the authorities an anonymous tip-off about a suspicious foreigner which led to her arrest. She doesn’t intend to have the baby – the problem though is that abortion is illegal in Britain. Outside prison she might have got help illegally, but here inside she has no option. She makes Kristín Eva promise to keep this secret.

Ch.118 Kristín Eva wonders whether and how and why Vera wants an abortion. It occurs to her that Vera is lying to her, that she is making this pregnancy up.

Ch.119 Rósa is heavily pregnant with her fourth child, who is Kristín Eva, when the letters she wrote to James in England are returned to her unopened and marked not known at this address. She doesn’t know where her son is and she will never see him again. Kristín Eva imagines James, her half-brother, as a Spitfire pilot shooting down German planes at this very moment.

Ch.120 Kristín Eva’s natural father, Hákon, drowns on a fishing trip at the age of 31. A sudden squall hits the ship which capsizes and disappears into the sea along with the 12-man crew. The search doesn’t reveal anything. From then on he is blamed for taking the ship out in uncertain weather.

Ch.121 Hákon’s ship sinks without trace. Lifeless bodies float in the depths, their eyes staring into the darkness.

Ch.122 The prison librarian tosses Kristín Eva a book about genetics written in memory of a British doctor. She is fascinated to read about genes and how a person’s appearance and nature is determined before he is born and some should be banned to have children due to internal and external factors. She wonders whether Rósa would have been allowed to have children if such constraints had been in place.

Ch.123 There is a woman in the prison who takes it upon herself to write letters for people who are illiterate or can’t write English. Kristín Eva discovers that the woman writes what she sees fit, including events and stories that she makes up.

Ch.124 Vera wasn’t lying – her belly begins to protrude more each day whilst her psychological state worsens. She has mood swings and often becomes snappish and says harsh things. Kristín Eva points out that she really should be moved to a slightly better place than Holloway to have the child but Vera hisses that she would rather rot in prison than have the child. She reels off numerous plans of how she might best abort the baby.
Ch.125 Kristín Eva has just turned three when her mother, Hildegaard, gets pregnant, contrary to what the doctors had previously said. She has a daughter and then a son two years later. With the arrival of her siblings Kristín Eva feels she has slipped down a rung or two in the baker’s family and is now in third place. But what bothers her more is that she feels lonelier and is more aware that she is adopted, the odd man out.

Ch.126 Kristín Eva is six when she returns home to Iceland with her parents and sister and brother having lived in Germany for a time. She is standing by the ship’s railings, the journey ingrained in her memory, but the memory of their arrival at Ísafjörður has been erased.

Ch.127 Kristín Eva breaks her promise to Vera and tells her mother that Vera is pregnant. She feels her mother has virtually become a new woman in prison; she has become an unofficial counsellor, advisor, mentor and leader – and Kristín Eva is not at all reconciled to this change which has come over her. Hildegaard talks to Vera to try and persuade her to have the child. Vera reacts negatively and when Hildegaard gives Vera a piece of her mind it creates a sharp divide between them.

Ch.128 After Kristín Eva discovers she is adopted she feels like an understudy in a play, an extra in her own life and family.

Ch.129 Kristín Eva stares at the sky criss-crossed with searchlight beams through her cell window, and imagines it is a projector light projecting a film onto a screen. The film is about a doctor who delivers stillborn twins in a poor hovel, surrounded by birds.

Ch.130 Kristín Eva tries to make peace with Vera after the major fall out with her mother. Initially Vera responds well to her visit but then she becomes agitated again when Kristín Eva tries to persuade her that it would be dangerous for her to try to abort the baby and virtually impossible in prison. Cursing and shouting Vera kicks Kristín Eva out.

Ch.131 One cold winter’s morning when Kristín Eva is seven years old there is a knock on the baker’s door. Kristín Eva runs to open it and outside stands a dark-haired woman who she has never seen before. It is Rósa. She pretends to be asking the way and gives Kristín Eva a coin to thank her for her trouble. Kristín Eva shows Hildegaard the coin who then asks her to describe the woman. Kristín Eva cannot understand why her mother becomes so upset.

Ch.132 Vera refuses to speak to Kristín Eva who goes to her mother for help and Hildegaard huffs and puffs about the loose ways of women, not least Icelandic women.

Ch.133 Vera’s emotional state deteriorates fast and when Kristín Eva sees her in the corridors she looks like a shadow of her former self, the joyful, effervescent woman who she was when their paths first crossed. Kristín Eva becomes increasingly worried.

Ch.134 Kristín Eva has a horrible nightmare about wandering round an abandoned prison, thick in dust and cobwebs. Spiders are everywhere and she is just waiting for them to attack her.

Ch.135 Kristín Eva is nearly ten when she spots Rósa walking in town (Ísafjörður). She follows her home, full of mixed emotions; this is the woman who gave birth to her but also the woman who gave her away. Rósa offers her a mug of cocoa and asks her how school is going and about her friends, and suddenly the floodgates open and Kristín Eva begins to talk eagerly. When they say goodbye Rósa whispers in her ear “Always remember that I didn’t give you away because I didn’t love you. I gave you because I did love you.”
Ch.136 Kristín Eva wakes in her cell to the sound of ghastly screams which echo around the prison. A deathly silence then falls.

Ch.137 Vera comes across some crochet hooks in the prison craft room. She keeps them secreted up her sleeve all day and when she is alone in her cell that evening she ties them together. During the night she jabs the sharp hooks deep into her vagina.

Ch.138 The wardens who open up in the morning find Vera lying in her cell in a pool of blood on the floor. She is very close to death. They haul her body out of the cell to get her to the doctor, drag her along the floor drawing a long red trail down the corridor. The news comes as a blow to Kristín Eva.

Ch.139 Kristín Eva peeks into Vera’s cell. It is full of flies buzzing round the pool of blood.

Ch.140 Vera and her aborted pregnancy is all the prisoners can talk about. They ask Kristín Eva innumerable questions and she replies with lies. She doesn’t believe in the other women’s empathy with Vera, she thinks it is put on in order to feel part of the tragedy, to enjoy the impression of grieving.

Ch.141 Kristín Eva fears for Vera’s life and she herself is crumbling under the pressure of their incarceration.

Ch.142 Kristín Eva bumps into the prison doctor and plucks up the courage to ask him how Vera is. The doctor refuses to talk about his patient, instead he goes on about the seriousness of the crime Vera has committed. Kristín Eva asks whether it is worse to abort a baby or kill people in battle and the doctor is indignant.

Ch.143 Kristín Eva is eleven when she is sent with her classmates to learn to swim at a pool a good distance from Ísafjörður. The children board there for a month far from their parents. A few days later Kristín Eva falls ill and it turns out that her eardrum has become seriously infected and she needs emergency treatment. They don’t think it wise to move her so the local doctor performs the operation there and then, without anaesthesia or the full equipment. Kristín Eva endures unbearable pain.

Ch.144 Vera is moved back into the prison ten days after she aborted her pregnancy. Kristín Eva is shocked by the sight of her; she looks like an old woman, haggard and poorly. Kristín Eva barely recognises her and can’t relate to her. Hildegard thinks this is because she is mourning her baby. Kristín Eva doesn’t believe so.

Ch.145 Vera alternates between fits of crying and spontaneous outbursts of rage. She doesn’t remember being pregnant and accuses the other women of plotting against her and she talks to herself. Kristín Eva tries to get her to see sense but isn’t successful.

Ch.146 Vera’s mental health continues to deteriorate. She tells Kristín Eva that she is pregnant and will get rid of the baby. Kristín Eva asks her mother whether they can’t help her, take her to the hospital doctor, or do something to help her see reason. But her mother has no advice to offer this time; it seems that no one can save Vera from herself and her fantasies.

Ch.147 Vera spends her days talking to herself and grimacing, at night time she keeps the prisoners awake with her animal-like screams.

Ch.148 Rósa tries to drown her sorrows in her work at the guesthouse in Ísafjörður. She barely notices a man who follows her around and she doesn’t believe her colleagues when they tell her that
he has eyes for no one else. He earns money by going to sea and playing at dance halls and is quite a
drinker. When he asks Rósa to marry him she hesitates but finally accepts his offer, poverty-stricken
as she is and still dreaming of getting her children back from foster-care. She soon falls pregnant and
quickly discovers that her new husband has a drink problem, is unreliable and has affairs. They have
little money and getting her older children back is out of the question. But despite her unhappiness
and lack of means Rósa won’t give up. She has three children by him over the next few years and
tries to live a decent life. She is 36, has had eight children by four different men in twelve years and
can only have the youngest three living with her.

Ch.149 Kristín Eva thinks to herself: “What is a person to do when their life is in ruins? Tell stories.
The oldest escape for those who cannot escape is to tell their story.” She decides to tell the story of
herself and her mothers.

Ch.150 The Germans commit another raid on London. Kristín Eva decides not to leave her cell but to
stand at the window and watch the searchlights sweep across the sky, and the bombs exploding in the
distance and the glow of the fires. A new time is dawning, she thinks to herself, and its beginnings
don’t bode well for the future.

Ch.151 Kristín Eva is looking out for Vera the day after the air raids and quickly realises that
something serious has happened. She goes over to Vera’s cell and finds her there, dead, her face
swollen and distorted, her eyes staring stiffly.

Ch.152 Kristín Eva rushes to get the wardens and Vera’s body is quickly removed. Rumours quickly
start going round the prison that Vera was murdered, suffocated with her own pillow. Kristín Eva
doesn’t know what to believe but every sleepless night feeds the belief that the rumour is true.

Ch.153 Bombs fell the night Vera died. Someone stole into her cell, pulled the pillow from under her
and thrust it over her face. She fought back but the murderer didn’t budge, not until Vera lay there
lifeless on her bed.

Ch.154 Kristín Eva’s half sister looks her up in Ísafjörður when she is thirteen and has started to work
in the bakery. Hildegaard becomes aware that she is hanging around and sets the dogs on her. The
girl only just manages to run away.

Ch.155 The prison authorities make a statement that Vera died of natural causes as a result of
complications following her abortion. Kristín Eva doesn’t believe them, reckoning that the authorities
don’t want to be associated with a murder in the prison. That could cause a scandal and raise
questions about the standard of care in the prison. Their standpoint is simple: If the murderer is a
prisoner then she is already imprisoned, and if the murderer is a warden it could cause a scandal that
would diminish the standing of the whole system.

Ch.156 Hildegaard comes with news from her meeting with the Icelandic ambassador; the Americans
are going to take over the military protection of Iceland from the British. The Icelandic government
are in agreement, but under certain conditions – one of which is that all Icelandic prisoners in British
prisons are released. The women are delighted; only their joy is dimmed by the fact that no date has
been set for their release. They become ever more anxious as the days go by and nothing happens.
Kristín Eva suspects that the promises will be broken and they will never be released.

Ch.157 Kristín Eva’s half sister doesn’t let the fact that Hildegaard set the dogs on her deter her and
she tries to see Kristín Eva again. She tells Kristín Eva that Rósa is now living on the other side of the
mountain, some twenty kilometres away as the crow flies. She says that Rósa is battling some illness, she has lost her strength and become quite unsteady, but she desperately wants to meet her daughter. Hildegard is not happy to learn that the sisters have met and she tries all she can to prevent them from meeting again.

Ch. 158 The wardens tell the Icelandic women to get ready for a journey; they are going to leave the prison. Kristín Eva is overjoyed and thinks that they are going to be released, until the warden tells them that they are not going home but to an internment camp on the Isle of Man. Their protests fall on deaf ears and when Hildegard asks permission to ring the Icelandic ambassador, her request is refused. The instructions are clear; they are to be sent to internment camps.

Ch. 159 The Icelandic women are put on a train to Liverpool. Kristín Eva says she wishes Vera were alive and with them. Her words meet an embarrassed silence, then her mother says some comforting words to her, words which Kristín Eva thinks have an odd ring to them but she can’t quite put her finger on why.

Ch. 160 They are put on a ferry in Liverpool heading for the Isle of Man. A worn-out bus is waiting for them in Douglas which takes them to the camps, ex-holiday parks which have been surrounded with barbed wire. It’s a women’s camp, not a man in sight. They are allocated a reasonable house and Kristín Eva feels almost a sense of well-being; the contrast with Holloway is so great. But she is very dissatisfied that she has been allocated a child’s bed by mistake which is far too short for her so she has to sleep curled up.

Ch. 161 Kristín Eva has a restless sleep, her mind is full of words and pictures tumbling over one another. Then she jolts awake out of a nightmare, disorientated. Suddenly she recalls her mother’s words on the train journey. She goes to wake her and demands an answer – did Hildegard kill Vera? Hildegard’s response is strange but she denies having killed Vera. On the other hand she says that the person who did kill her was really only murdering a corpse. Kristín Eva doesn’t know what to believe but suspects her mother of some malice.

Ch. 162 Kristín Eva’s thoughts are all at sixes and sevens, she tries hard to reach some conclusion; is her mother a murderer or not? Slowly but surely it dawns on her that she will never uncover the truth.

Ch. 163 The internment camp proves to be a much better and more humane place than Kristín Eva feared; the women run a library and an informal clothes market where they exchange and re-style garments; they run courses and engage in sports. Kristín Eva avoids her mother and does her own thing.

Ch. 164 Rósa’s second son, Theodore, had a dark complexion and attracted all the girls in the western fjords area where he grew up. Kristín Eva meets him twice by chance and he smiles engagingly to her and tells her to let him know if bullies ever tease her. Kristín Eva thinks he’s like some kind of film star. He tells her that he wants to sail to England and find his brother and maybe his father too.

Ch. 165 Theodore discusses his plans with his mother and sails to Hull. Rósa tells him that if he finds his brother James he should bring him back with him to Iceland. Theodore goes from place to place in Hull; he goes to the Probe family’s former home and then to the poorer part of town. But no one knows of the Probes and his enquiries bear no fruit. It’s as though the sisters and young James have disappeared without trace. Theodore gets hired as a crew member on a ship sailing to Spain and when it docks there on a hot summer’s day, he dives into the warm waters. He never surfaces and his body is never found.
Ch.166 Even though Kristín Eva suspects her mother of killing Vera, she can’t keep avoiding her in the camp. Her mother acts as though their conversation the night before hasn’t happened. Kristín Eva goes about in a dark mood and tries to come to terms with the events of the preceding months. She feels as if her youth has come to an end and the essence of everything is ephemeral and constantly changing.

Ch.167 Hildegaard takes Kristín Eva along with her to a woman who teaches English in the camps. To her own surprise Kristín Eva enjoys herself.

Ch.168 Kristín Eva’s half-sister tells her that she is worried about Rósa’s health, she fears Rósa is gradually becoming paralysed. If she wants to meet her mother then she needs to hurry up. Kristín Eva struggles with all kinds of doubts; will Rósa like her and will she like Rósa? Will it hurt Hildegaard deeply and split the family if she goes to visit Rósa?

Ch.169 Kristín Eva is about fourteen when she bumps into her half-sister, Elísabeta Aníta, the youngest child of James and Rósa, but she doesn’t dare to say hello. Elísabeta Aníta gets engaged to a man in Reykjavik and falls pregnant, fertile like her mother. When it comes to the birth it turns out that it’s a breech baby but with a lot of effort Elísabeta Aníta manages to deliver the child alive. Some mistakes are made and the mother is left alone in the labour room after the birth with no one to keep an eye on her and she bleeds to death there, only twenty two years old.

Ch.170 Rósa’s grief is overwhelming. Young James has disappeared somewhere in Britain, Theodore drowned and now Elísabeta Aníta has died. All her children by James Probe have been taken from her. She is consumed by guilt that through her mistakes she has brought a curse on them, that she leaves a trail of misery and death in her wake.

Ch.171 The camp director calls for the Icelandic women and informs them that they are to be released. Kristín Eva is delighted and wonders what it will be like to be freed – and will she manage to free herself from the suspicion of her mother’s crime and if not, will she be able to forgive her?

Ch.172 Kristín Eva is skiing with some friends over towards Suðureyri where Rósa has spent the last few years. She knocks on Rósa’s door, tense with fear and full of doubts about whether meeting her natural mother is the right thing to do or not. Rósa recognises her immediately and gives her a warm welcome.

Ch.173 Rósa tells Kristín Eva that she has a disease which the doctors say is terminal and she only has months to live. She shows Kristín Eva the letters she received from James Probe while he was in Russia and tells her about her time in Britain and her life after she returned to Iceland. They talk on through into the evening, totally absorbed in memories. When Kristín Eva says goodbye and skis back home, she has regained a part of herself that she had never known before.

Ch.174 The warden holds open the gate and the Icelandic women walk out to freedom, into an unknown and undetermined future.

Ch.175 The Icelandic ambassador greets the women and drives them through London, a city scarred by the German raids.

Ch.176 Kristín Eva hardly knows what to do with herself when they are settled into a magnificent hotel in Russell Square. There they meet up with the Icelandic men for the first time since they were brought to England. The men have been living in poor conditions in Brixton prison. Bertha’s husband gets angry when he sees Hildegaard, who he blames for having brought this all upon them,
and asks whether she would rather stay in a cheaper hotel with her daughter. Bertha, who has known nothing but genuine support from Hildegaard throughout their imprisonment, does not side with her. Hildegaard gives a crusty reply and orders the most expensive room in the hotel.

Ch.177 That evening the Icelandic prisoners eat in the hotel restaurant, courtesy of the Icelandic embassy. They are all ecstatic about their new found freedom. The ambassador gives a short speech and says “Today seven Icelandic citizens were released from His Majesty’s prison. This must be a record. Don’t land up there again; there are limits to how often Iceland can be pawned for a loan.”

Ch.178 The ambassador tells them that Thomas Lang, the German who they were accused of helping and who betrayed them all, will probably be shot as a spy. It occurs to Kristín Eva that although Thomas Lang let them all down badly she is actually grateful to him; without him she would never have landed in this contorted adventure or got to know the characterful women of Holloway and never met Vera. Without his betrayal she would have remained unchanged.

Ch.179 Kristín Eva and her mother are walking around London. Kristín Eva is captivated by the size of the buildings, the crowds on the streets, the balloons in the sky, the streets cordoned off because of bomb craters. And, as a newly released prisoner suspected of helping a German spy, what she finds most ironic is the giant hoarding with the warning BEWARE OF SPIES.

Ch.180 A woman who works at the Icelandic embassy invites Kristín Eva to a cafe in the evening. They go on to a pub where they meet up with some Icelandic men. Kristín Eva is elated, curious and full of longing to experience something new and forbidden. It feels like she is experiencing something new and magical.

Ch.181 Hildegaard is awake when Kristín Eva gets back to the hotel. She seems down and when Kristín Eva asks her what the matter is she admits that, odd as it may sound, she liked living in prison more than her life before prison when she considered herself free. She is anxious about returning home as she will undoubtedly enjoy less respect there than before. “People find it hard to look on those who’ve been in prison as anything other than tainted, damaged goods,” says Hildegaard. Kristín Eva realises that being free will not solve all their problems and that there will be new battles to be won in Iceland.

Ch.182 Kristín Eva dreams about Rósa, dressed in white and walking in the snowfall, her white hair hanging loose.

Ch.183 The Icelanders sail in convoy to Iceland, on a ship which is sunk on the way back to England. Kristín Eva feels she is seeing Iceland for the first time when the undulating mountains appear on the horizon, as though it was a new country.

Ch.184 There is no welcoming party to greet the Icelandic women on their return to Ísafjörður. Rumours are rife, they are said to have helped the Nazis, plotting a sabotage and Kristín Eva is said to have been a spy’s mistress. Kristín Eva’s birthday comes around, she is now 18 years old. She feels that she doesn’t want to live in this town any longer; she feels that the town of her youth has become her prison.

Ch.185 The person who travels is never the same on his return, Kristín Eva sees that clearly now. Prison has totally changed her. She recalls the prediction of the gypsy woman in prison: she will fall in love with a soldier and emigrate from Iceland. Her destiny awaits her as an exile in America.
she will outlive her wardens, she will outlive her tormentors. And most importantly, she will have the last word.