

Carnations in Lisbon: Book Club Guide

Author: C. A. Wilson

Genre: Literary Fiction / Historical Fiction

Setting: Portugal and the United Kingdom, 1971–2025

Character Profiles

Helen: Raised in England, she is summoned to Portugal by a legal case that uncovers her hidden origins. Thoughtful, principled, and emotionally searching.

Elena: Helen's mother, a former political activist who fled Portugal. Her past is marked by courage, grief, and concealment.

Marco: Helen's lover. His identity is shaped by secrecy and reinvention.

Joaquim: A wartime child refugee and the black sheep of his adoptive Portuguese family. His journey from privilege to disgrace forms one of the novel's most complex moral arcs.

Douglas: Elena's husband, a former diplomat who builds a culinary legacy despite personal setbacks.

Laurinda: Sharp and charming, she is both accomplice and critic – a figure of ambiguity in the novel's modern timeline.

Lourenço: A trickster and opportunist who engineers a major financial deception. Represents generational disillusionment.

Gomes: A remorseless informer for the PIDE, whose denunciations have tragic consequences. A bully and a coward.

Duarte: A commanding patriarch whose authority shapes his family, echoes across generations, and extends into the workings of Salazar's regime.

Álvaro: the idealist and dreamer who sacrifices everything in his fight for freedom