

All the Light We Cannot See book Review by Sarina

"All the Light We Cannot See" by Anthony Doerr is a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel set during World War II, weaving together the lives of two main characters: Marie-Laure LeBlanc, a blind French girl, and Werner Pfennig, a German orphan. The story discusses the unseen connections that bind people together even in the darkest times.

Marie-Laure LeBlanc lives in Paris with her father, Daniel LeBlanc, who works as a locksmith at the Museum of Natural History. When Marie-Laure goes blind at the age of six, her father builds her a miniature model of their neighborhood to help her navigate the streets independently. He also teaches her Braille, fostering her love for books and knowledge. Daniel is entrusted with a valuable and possibly cursed gem known as the Sea of Flames. The gem is said to grant immortality to its keeper but bring misfortune to their loved ones.

This story has many point-of-view shifts between the main characters. Werner Pfennig grows up in the mining town of Zollverein, Germany, with his sister Jutta in an orphanage run by Frau Elena. Werner is a bright and curious boy with a talent for fixing radios. He is eventually sent to a brutal military academy, where he is trained to use his skills for the war effort.

As the war progresses, Marie-Laure and her father flee Paris to the coastal town of Saint-Malo, where they seek refuge with her great-uncle Etienne, a reclusive World War I veteran. Etienne and his housekeeper, Madame Manec, are part of the French Resistance, using Etienne's radio transmitter to broadcast information to the Allies. Marie-Laure becomes involved in their efforts, despite the constant danger.

Meanwhile, Werner's expertise in radio technology leads him to be part of a special unit tasked with locating and destroying anti-German broadcasts. His path eventually brings him to Saint-Malo, where he is ordered to track down the source of the Resistance transmissions.

The Sea of Flames diamond serves as a central symbol in the novel. I learned that it represents the idea that unseen forces shape our lives. Marie-Laure carries the gem with her, unaware of its supposed curse, while others, including an officer named Sergeant Major Reinhold von Rumpel, seek to possess it. Von Rumpel is obsessed with finding the gem, believing it will cure his terminal illness.

The climax of the novel occurs during the Allied bombing of Saint-Malo in August 1944. The town is heavily bombarded, and both Marie-Laure and Werner find themselves trapped in the chaos. Marie-Laure takes refuge in Etienne's hidden attic, where she continues to broadcast messages over the radio, hoping for rescue. Werner, who has begun to question his role in the war, hears her broadcasts and sets out to find her. The ending is heart-wrenching and heart-warming at the same time.

Both Marie-Laure and Werner embark on personal journeys in search of hope and a better future. Marie-Laure's determination to survive and Werner's eventual redemption highlight the capacity for goodness and courage even during war.

I enjoyed how the novel frequently uses the metaphor of light and darkness to explore its themes. Despite her blindness, Marie-Laure "sees" the world through her other senses and her imagination, finding light in the darkness. Werner, on the other hand, is initially blinded by propaganda but gradually comes to see the truth. (The title holds much more meaning than I originally thought.)

"All the Light We Cannot See" tells the stories of the central characters so well. I rate this book an 8/10!