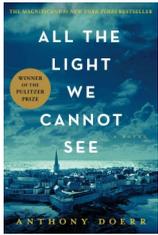


All the Light We Cannot See



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A blind French girl. A brilliant German boy. A locksmith who works at a world-class museum. A French resistance worker who doubles as a housewife. An agoraphobic great uncle who has not left home since the close of the last war, WWI. A Nazi army gem expert who prowls after a world-class jewel that he believes will cure his advanced cancer.

These are the main characters that people this fascinating WWII novel. Tying them all together are radio signals and a blue diamond worth millions.

The novel alternates (mostly) between the points of view of Marie-Laure, a blind girl and Werner, an orphan who teaches himself advanced radio skills. Marie-Laure has been blind since the age of six. Just after the German occupation, she and her locksmith father flee Paris, but soon after the Germans take and imprison her father.

A myth surrounds the blue diamond itself. Marie-Laure learned about the diamond early in her life. The myth says that anyone who carries it will have bad luck befall them. Unfortunately, the museum director entrusts the locksmith with this diamond as the Germans enter Paris. He also ordered two other duplicates created to confuse anyone trying to track the diamond. None of the three employees trusted with the diamond know who has the real one.

Marie-Laure and the locksmith travel to the seaside city of St. Malo where the locksmith's uncle lives in a great house. It's here they decamp for the rest of the war. Before he is captured the locksmith builds Marie-Laure a model replica of the city's streets and buildings so that Marie-Laure can learn her way around with her cane. He did the same for her in Paris.

High in the St. Malo house is a huge radio where the locksmith's father and uncle used to broadcast science programs out to the ether where the young German, Werner, heard them in his orphanage along with his sister, Jutta. This turned Werner's interest to science.

The Germans soon descend on St. Malo, but a family friend has taught Marie-Laure the location of a private beach accessible with a key where barnacles, snails, and molluscs grow. The girl finds these creatures oddly comforting, how they resist the pull of the tide yet prosper in this inaccessible place.

This novel offers a wonderful mix of the brutality of war alongside the courage and hope of people. The descriptions of the natural world, food, and the sea are very sensual and painted well from a blind person's perspective. Neither side of the conflict is painted in black or white. Eventually, Werner and Marie-Laure will meet up. And the blue diamond's history will unfold, but long before you will be captured by these strong, interesting characters each so alive on the page.

Another novel that focuses on the German occupation of France during World War II with people fleeing Paris and then needing to cooperate with the enemy or perish is *Suite française*.

Posted by Dory L. on July 21, 2014

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