



The Good at Heart

Ursula Werner

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Based on the author's discoveries about her great-grandfather, this stunning debut novel takes place over three days when World War II comes to the doorstep of an ordinary German family living in an idyllic, rural village near the Swiss border.

When World War II breaks out, Edith and Oskar Eberhardt move their family—their daughter, Marina; son-in-law, Franz; and their granddaughters—out of Berlin and into a small house in the quiet town of Blumental, near Switzerland. A member of Hitler's cabinet, Oskar is gone most of the time, and Franz begins fighting in the war, so the women of the house are left to their quiet lives in the picturesque village.

But life in Blumental isn't as idyllic as it appears. An egotistical Nazi captain terrorizes the citizens he's assigned to protect. Neighbors spy on each other. Some mysteriously disappear. Marina has a lover who also has close ties to her family and the government. Thinking none of them share her hatred of the Reich, she joins a Protestant priest smuggling Jewish refugees over the nearby Swiss border. The latest "package" is two Polish girls who've lost the rest of their family, and against her better judgment, Marina finds she must hide them in the Eberhardt's cellar. Everything is set to go smoothly until Oskar comes home with the news that the Führer will be visiting the area for a concert, and he will be making a house call on the Eberhardts.

Based on the author's discoveries about her great-grandfather, this extraordinary debut, full of love, tragedy, and suspense, is a sensitive portrait of a family torn between doing their duty for their country and doing what's right for their country, and especially for those they love.

The Good at Heart Details

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From Reader Review The Good at Heart for online ebook

Touchstone Books says

Growing up, Ursula Werner did not know much about her great-grandfather, except that he was a member of Hitler's Cabinet. This gorgeous debut novel is inspired by her own family history, and we are so proud to publish it.

Linda Quinn says

To read this book you'd never know it was a debut novel.. Beautifully written with nuanced characters, it explores the lives of one German family and the rest of their town over three days toward the end of WWII. I saw so many parallels, sadly, to what is happening in the United States right now. I can only hope many, many people will read it and look within themselves to determine which of the townspeople they'd like to be. If only there were more people today who were truly good at heart. I'd like to believe there are.

JO ANN says

Historical fiction has been my favorite genre since a teen. This book did not disappoint. It is right up there with The Book Thief and Sarah's Key.

The characters were beautifully developed. It was easy to visualize the three young sisters as they made their way around Blumental during the three days of July, 1944. It is the end of WWII and the family of women: Oma (Edith), Mutti (Marina) and her three young daughters are getting ready for a visit from The Führer. Opa, Oskar, works in Berlin and no one in the family is exactly sure what he does or why Hitler would be visiting their home but, maybe they do know.

Ursula Werner has set up an opportunity for these women to show their caring and kindness towards strangers and neighbors as she weaves the story line around tales she heard from her mother growing up in Germany and then the United States. She draws you into the story with her beautifully written Prologue, which I reread three times as it touched my heart "as Oskar and Edith lay under the feathers of their down comforter and built their house."

Unlike The Book Thief, Werner did an excellent job infusing German words into the story. It was almost as if she took a lesson from the errors of that novel.

This would be a five star but unfortunately, after reading the first three chapters, I had the opportunity to listen to the audio version and it was read by a man. Big mistake for Simon and Schuster!

Karen Macedo says

I received this book in a goodreads giveaway. This story revolves around three days in 1944, A during World War II in a small town in Germany near Switzerland. The father of the family is a member of the Fuhrer's cabinet which causes tension in the family. A great read. If you like Historical Fiction about World War II I would recommend this...

The Blonde Bookworm says

I am a lover of all things history, so when I was asked to review The Good at Heart, I immediately jumped at the opportunity. The story follows a family as they fight to do what is best for their family while attempting to obey the rules of their country as well. "Attempting" is the key word here folks. Some of the family members become involved in smuggling refugees across the border and the entire family is put at risk.

I loved the characters and truly enjoyed each of their personalities. The younger daughters were so entertaining and I loved Rosie's spunk and joyful spirit. All of the characters held my attention, but Marina's story was especially intriguing. I found myself constantly wanting to know more about her, and I secretly wished I had her fearless attitude. She fought for what she believed in and loved without boundaries. I found that to be incredibly refreshing.

All in all, The Good at Heart is a beautifully written and touching novel about family bonds, love, and heartbreak. I thoroughly enjoyed reading Werner's debut novel and would recommend it to readers who love historical novels.

v says

At the start of World War II, the Eberhardt family moved from tense Berlin to a quiet village near the Swiss border. The patriarch, Oskar, is a busy member of Hitler's cabinet and his son-in-law, Franz, is away fighting for the Third Reich, leaving Oskar's wife Edith, his daughter Marina, and three granddaughters to carry on life at home. The Eberhardts seem to be a loyal family doing their duty for country and Fuhrer, but they are all keeping secrets, even from each other. Marina has a lover, Erich, a man her parents have always viewed as a second son and he happens to a member of Hitler's personal security force of 12 called the Erleuchtete or "enlightened ones". But Marina is even keeping a secret from Erich. Thinking that none of her family share her hatred of the Reich, she joins a Protestant minister and his small group of accomplices in the village, smuggling Jewish refugees over the Swiss border. Marina is tasked to hide two orphaned Polish girls in the basement of the family home for a night. It seems like an easy plan, until her father Oskar, comes home announcing that the Fuhrer will be visiting the area for a concert and wishes to take tea with the family in their home. This will be on the same day Marina must hide her latest "package". Unbeknownst to Marina, her activities will coincide with an assassination plot against Hitler that she knows nothing about. As events fall into place, the Eberhardt's individual secrets come to light, questioning where their loyalties really lie.

I was blown away by this book! The author wrote this novel based on information she discovered about her great-grandfather. The fictional plot takes place over the course of just 3 days and interestingly, the dates coincide with the real dates of Operation Valkyrie. There are some echoes of those events in the plot. The author builds her novel slowly at first, but as the plot develops from various points of view of key players, secrets are revealed and you start to realize the collision course that's developing. The characters are not always the person you've initially been led to believe. By the time I reached Day Three, I could barely sit

still to finish this, as the plot became so tense and suspenseful. If you like historical fiction like The Nightingale, you'll enjoy this book. This is not a novel I'll be lending out; it's going to stay firmly on my shelf of all time favorites. There has not been nearly enough coverage of this book here on bookstagram and it deserves some recognition.

Thanks to Simon and Shuster, Touchstone and @books_with_taylor for a copy of this excellent novel to read and review. #partner

Wendy says

Beautifully written and stirring, "The Good at Heart" opens after World War II has broken out and Oskar Eberhardt a member of Hitler's cabinet moves his family away from the destructive air raids in Berlin to the small village of Blumental near the Swiss border. Yet even in this quiet rural setting political chaos still brews with snoopy neighbours, the intolerance of Jews, and an overzealous, arrogant Nazi captain who doesn't tolerate any defiance.

In an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear Marina, who deplores her father Oskar's support of Hitler has joined the local resistance helping Protestant pastor Johann Weissmeyer smuggle Jewish refugees over the border. But their latest mission to save two young girls becomes complicated when the Führer decides to visit his friend and composer Klaus Webber and have tea with Oskar and his family, as an assassination attempt is being planned for the outdoor musicale he plans to attend.

Historically based, the story revolves around the intrigue brewing around the Eberhardt family during a three- day period. Intensity and suspense heat up when not only General Erich Wolf the Eberhardt's estranged foster son arrives in Blumental, but Oskar returns home to discover that Hitler plans to visit the village. Tension escalates as Marina not only must confront a love thought buried and decide the course of her future, but also must continue with the plan to hide two Jewish children in her family's basement while Hitler has tea with her father.

Faced with extraordinary circumstances that could destroy the family's serenity, the plot is powerful and poignant, keeping you on the edge of your seat until the end. Progressing swiftly to an explosive turn of events and a surprising ending, the story is filled with subtle twists as children eavesdrop and nosy neighbours conspire.

Bringing the story to life are compelling, realistic and complex characters like Marina (Eberhardt) Thiessen who can be defiant, headstrong, very confident and honest; tough, spirited and curious five-year-old Rosie; meek, traumatized Sofia; polite, generous but self-indulgent Lara; quiet, gentle but duty-oriented Oskar; and his loving wife the pragmatic and sensitive Edith.

I thoroughly enjoyed "The Good Heart" as members of the Eberhardt family face guilt, denial and tragedy in the face of their duty to family, God and country during WWII.

nikkia neil says

Thanks Touchstone and netgalley for this ARC.

We can all say what we would have maybe done in a horrible situation but I think this novel comes close to the real life feelings of a family. A microcosm of a village and family in the Nazi era makes us think hard about the past and present. I don't want to say what I would do because its too hard to put myself there. this novel is the perfect springboard for this kind of discussion.

Alison says

The Good at Heart: A Novel by Ursula Werner

This piece of historical-fiction is based on the author's discoveries about her great-grandfather and his family during WW II, which takes place over a three day period, in the small town of Blumental, near the Swiss border.

When WW II breaks out, Oskar Eberhardt, a member of Hitler's cabinet, moves his family from Berlin to Blumental, wife Edith, daughter Marina, son in law Franz, and his three granddaughters. He is hardly ever there and his son in law is also sent to fight in the war, so the women of the house create a life on their own. Marina the daughter, has a hatred of the Reich, and starts to help a local pastor in his effort to smuggle Jewish refugees over the nearby Swiss border. Also at this time the town is about to have a visit from the Führer, who is coming to hear a concert to be put on in his honor, by a local friend and composer.

There is a lot that happens, with curious and nosy neighbors, old friends of the family etc. This book gives us not only a look at this town and its people, but also about the far reaching hand of the Nazi regime.

A lot goes on in these three days, a story of a families love for each other, tragedy, people getting into each others business and a lot of suspense.

It is about a family trying to figure out what is important to them between doing their duty for their country or doing what's right for their country and family.

Very well written, it is definitely a story worth reading.

Thank you NetGalley and Touchstone

Book of Secrets says

I love historical fiction set during World War II, and this one was a bit different since it focused on a German family whose patriarch is a member of Hitler's cabinet. Oskar Eberhardt has moved his family – wife, daughter, and granddaughters – to a small village close to the Swiss border called Blumental. Here they'll be protected from most of the horrors of the war, or so it seems. Within the town, there are people who support the Führer or seem apathetic, and those who oppose the Nazis and will fight back however they're able, which of course puts their lives in danger. Oskar's daughter Marina is part of the secret resistance.

While I liked the story involving the rescue of two Jewish girls, overall I just wasn't riveted. The plot moved along slowly, and I was expecting more suspense or drama considering the subject matter. I was pleased and surprised at the bittersweet ending though. "Good at Heart" was a fitting title, taken from an entry in Anne Frank's diary.

Audiobook • 9 hrs, 44 mins • Gibson Frazier, Narrator

I like Gibson Frazier's voice. He performed the narration for GOOD AT HEART in a straightforward way

without a lot of emotion, which I suppose fit with the book. A little more inflection might have made the story more exciting.

Disclosure: I received a copy of this audiobook from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

Laura says

"In spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart. I simply can't build up my hopes on a foundation consisting of confusion, misery, and death. I see the world gradually being turned into a wilderness, I hear the ever approaching thunder, which will destroy us too, I can feel the sufferings of millions and yet, if I look up into the heavens, I think that it will all come right, that this cruelty too will end, and that peace and tranquility will return again."

~~Anne Frank

Now the Führer was coming here. To this house, her *home* . The home that she and Oskar had created and populated with children and grandchildren. The home whose threshold had been crossed only by friends. The home that she had enclosed in beauty, deliberately planting layer upon layer of blooming plants and scented flowers around it, so that everyone inside, looking out, would be reminded how wondrous the world was. Or how wondrous it *could be* if carefully tended. And Oskar proposed to allow the Führer into this sanctuary. The Führer, a man whose philosophy was based on destruction and conquest, who proclaimed to love beauty, but knew nothing about it. Because beauty was--wasn't it?--based on truth, and he lived in lies.

~~Lake Constance in southern Germany

Ursula brings us a unique perspective of World War II Germany. She brings us into the midst of an ordinary German family, trying to cope with the confusion, fear, worries, and day-to-day struggles of living in the midst of a war. The family patriarch, Oskar Eberhardt, is a member of Hitler's cabinet, serving as the Secretary of Economy. He remains in Berlin, while the females in the family flee to their vacation home in rural, southern Germany. Oskar's wife, Edith, along with her daughter, Marina, and her three granddaughters make the small cottage as cozy as they can. Edith cultivates both flower and vegetable gardens, along with fruit trees, and turns the outdoors around the cabin into a fragrant place of escape.

Edith shoves worries about what her husband may or may not be involved in to the farthest cob-webbed corners of her mind. She has plenty to keep her occupied in the day-to-day running of the household. Not least of her worries is the middle grandchild, Sofia, who has been battling severe PTSD related to the bombings in Berlin, just prior to the family's flight to the countryside. Then there is the oldest granddaughter, Lara, who is at the brink of adolescence and infatuated with Princess Elizabeth of England. The youngest, Rosie, is a boundless fount of barely contained energy. Then there's their adopted son, Erich, who is a general in the German army, and who must reconcile his duty to his country with his troubled conscious. Edith is also concerned about Marina, and isn't exactly sure what she's up to.

What she is up to, in fact, is participating in an underground resistance movement. She feels strongly that her father is on the side of evil, and is working to counter that with her own actions. Her own husband, Franz, participated in the siege of Stalingrad. While he was one of the lucky few who survived, he returned home a shell of his former self. "The man who returned was not really alive, not as he had been. During the month

Franz was home, the tension in the house was a living, wounded, snarling animal that curled up in a corner and attacked if you came too near. Franz spent most of his days napping, but it was nightmarish sleep, and he often awoke screaming."

Resistance, worry, and fear come boiling to a head during the three days we spend with the Eberhardt's in *The Good at Heart*. Oskar returns to his family on leave, only to announce that the Fuhrer himself is attending an outdoor concert in their town, and wants to have afternoon tea with Oskar and his family. Hitler's visit coincides with plans that Marina and Erich have separately engaged in. No one knows what anyone else is thinking or planning, and no one knows who they can trust. And will the Jewish refugees make it through this confluence of events and into the relative safety of Switzerland? Read this wonderful book to find out!

Bottom line: It's easy to look back at history and armchair quarterback. It's easy to say that I/you/we would not sit idly by while Jews were rounded up and shipped East to labor camps, then to concentration camps. Examining, discussing, and learning from the past is particularly important in our current political climate, irregardless of "political party". Werner gives a rare glimpse into what German citizens could very well have thought and felt. She shows us Edith agonizing over the fate of her German friend and neighbor, but then rationalizing that she must be growing a new garden in her Eastern camp. Werner also shows that while the majority of Germans supported Hitler, whether fearful or true support, some did not. Those in the resistance did their best to make a difference, and many gave the ultimate sacrifice. It's a book well worth reading. Given 4.5 stars or a rating of "Outstanding". Highly recommended!

Another favorite quote: "What was Oskar trying to tell her? Then, as Oskar continued to clasp her hands, Edith began to feel what her husband was feeling: resolution, courage, exhaustion, sadness. No fear, not even an ounce of fear. But love--the love Oskar was communicating to her at that moment was overwhelming."

Stuff I learned: Here's a few links to Resistance efforts during WW2:

~~Discussion of Resistance movements on Wikipedia

~~ A discussion of resistance aimed at aiding Jews

And finally, a link to Ursula Werner's webpage: <https://www.ursulawerner.com/>

Jill Furedy says

Can't decide between 3 and 4 stars on this one. I didn't get to writing this until a few days later, and it has already faded a bit in my mind. As events are unfolding for the characters, you kind of know what's coming based on actual historical events. You are just waiting to see how they play out for each person. So the characters are very important to keeping my interest. And they mostly did. But none of them jumped off the page for me. At the beginning of the book, the prologue had me all set to love Edith and Oskar. The idea of the story, a family with the men serving the Third Reich and the family struggling with love and duty, is what caught my attention. And their dreams in the beginning of the book, before the war, caught me up immediately. But then the story begins and Oskar is off at war, and Edith isn't that involved, her daughter and grandchildren are more central to the plot. There is a scene where Marina and Edith discuss her love for Oskar and what his possible role in the war means for that love. That was what I was expecting, more of the pull of good and evil on the family. But there was not much questioning of each other's roles. The effect of the war was the trauma on the kids, the separation of the family etc, not the doubting or trust issues I sort of anticipated. Marina's story has the most twists to it, and possibly the most potential interest and conflict, but to keep the story moving, we don't get to go too in depth on any of it and so I never connected to her much.

The three girls also had distinct personalities, but again we didn't spend enough time with any of them to see much of it through their eyes. Rosie had a lot of personality, so I expected her to be more significant. I think that part of what diminished my interest was that there were a lot of characters besides the main family (who already make a substantial group)...the Pastor Johann of course, Hans, Max, Fritz and his car, the refugee girls, the bakery women, Captain Rodemonn. Our time in the book is spread out among so many people, most introduced with just enough info so you know who they are, but their parts are fairly minor. Franz we never really meet, nor the former bakery owners, but both of them pop up enough as side stories that again, I expected more from them. I suppose to get more in depth on everyone's story or perspective would have added another 100 or more pages to the book. But the story was good and if the characters had hooked me, I would have gladly read that. So I think the best I can do is say I liked this book, when I wish I could have loved it.

Magdalena aka A Bookaholic Swede says

I was quite taken with the stunning cover and the blurb intrigued me. Especially the fact that the book was based on her discovery about her great-grandfather. I found the start of the book great with the introduction of the characters that live in Blumental. I especially loved the viewpoint of little Rosie, the youngest daughter of Mariana. I'm used to reading books about WW2 from the Allies side of the story, so reading a book set in Germany was a nice change. As I wrote before did I find the start of the book great, especially the egocentric Nazi captain that thinks he will single handedly stop the French from invading Blumental. If there will ever get there of course.

The whole story takes place during three intensive days where much happens. There are preparations for the arrival of the Führer which coincide with the hiding of two Polish girls. We get to know more about Edith and Oskar Eberhardt and their family, recollections from the past. Personally, did I find the start of the book and the end the best. There were some nerve-wracking moments towards the end of the book. Unfortunately, I found the middle part of the story not always that engaging, but it's still a very good book. And, I was quite taken with the epilogue.

I want to thank Touchstone for providing me with a free copy through NetGalley for an honest review!

Eyra CM says

3,5

Maureen Timerman says

I love stories that are based on fact, and this one did not let me down, from the first page forward we get an in-depth look at the lives of the Eberhardt family, and the parts they played in WWII over a two-day period. Made me think how I would feel if my father was involved with something that I detested, and then deciding to go against him by helping others. We are in a small village in Germany in 1944 and the family has just found out they are to serve the Führer or Emperor as he is also known, at a coffee, he doesn't like tea, that is English.

We see jealousy, greed, and pure hate, and yet life must go on, and at what costs, and what can be done?

Things are not always as we perceive, and that is exactly what those that are looking to help hope. I found myself right there in this picturesque setting, with so much evil surrounding and it, and yet they are not untouched by what is happening. We see those who cannot stand the atrocities, and others who love that they are benefiting, yes sad.

We should not forget what happened here, and this puts faces on a place far away from where we live. Should be a mandated read.

I received this book through Net Galley and the Publisher Touchstone, and was not required to give a positive review.
