



All the Light We Cannot See, by Anthony Doerr
Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy, March 2015

All the Light We Cannot See by Anthony Doerr sat atop the *New York Times* hardcover fiction bestseller list for several months. Published to critical acclaim, the book was selected by the *Times* as one of the best five novels of 2014 and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.

Set just before and during World War II, the story revolves around Marie-Laure, a blind girl growing up in Paris, and Werner, an orphaned boy in Germany. How these two disparate characters converge makes for an intriguing, yet seemingly improbable tale.

Marie-Laure's widowed father, a locksmith at the Museum of Natural History, constructs a miniature model of their Parisian neighborhood. From it, the inquisitive sightless girl learns how to navigate her surroundings. When the occupying German army approaches Paris, Marie-Laure and her father flee to his eccentric Uncle Etienne's walled citadel in Saint-Malo, taking only the model of their Parisian house with them.

Meanwhile, in Germany, young Werner, a gentle boy who is fascinated by radios, wins a scholarship to the Academy for Hitler Youth. There, he champions Frederick, a bullied classmate, and also meets the giant-like Volkheimer who later will serve on the battlefield with him.

Into the mix is the "Sea of Flames," an ancient and rare diamond sought by Sargent Von Rumpel, a sadistic Nazi, who is wracked by an incurable disease. According to legend, whoever owns the "Sea of Flames" will have immortal life. But with the gem comes a price: all those around its owner will perish. Von Rumpel—convinced that Marie-Laure's father took the diamond from the Museum—is racing to find the jewel, no matter what the cost.

At 500-plus pages, *All the Light We Cannot See* is by no means a quick read. In my opinion, its choppy short chapters, alternating between characters and times, break up the narrative's flow. But everyone in my book group loved *All the Light We Cannot See*—and we're still discussing the meaning of its ending.