

For Malice and Mercy: A World War II Novel

Gary W. Toyn

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In the historical novel For Malice and Mercy, two siblings draw on their inner fortitude to accept changes and make difficult choices in the chaos of World War II.

In Gary W. Toyn's historical novel *For Malice and Mercy*, two German American siblings are shoved into adulthood when their family is betrayed during the early days of America's involvement in World War II.

Hank and Ella are in high school in a Mormon community in Utah. Their parents, who converted to Mormonism in Germany, emigrated to the United States as newlyweds. The family is proud of their heritage, and they speak German and keep German holiday customs. Then the children visit their grandparents in Germany, just as Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party are beginning to gain a following, and Hank returns to Utah with Nazi memorabilia.

Soon after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the FBI begins searching the homes of Japanese and German families. On a tip, they search Hank's family home, and they find his souvenirs in a suitcase under his bed, including a Nazi flag. The discovery becomes evidence against Hank's parents, who are taken to a detention camp. Without the presence or support of their parents, Hank and Ella are forced to grow up, and they are haunted by the question of who betrayed their family.

Foregoing imagery or figurative language in favor of speed, the book's sentences are concise, clear, and direct. The narrative leans on dialogue and action when it comes to communicating its background information, advancing the plot, and developing characters. The transitions between chapters, and perspective shifts, are immediate. In some sections, the only transitional cues are chapter titles that include the month, day, and year. A sense of staccato movement reigns, complementing the rapid changes of a country at war.

However, the book's secondary characters are prone to arriving and departing without being connected to Hank and Ella's story, or contributing to the book's themes of loyalty and forgiveness. In an opening chapter, for example, a bully is developed in a way that suggests they will be significant to the book, but after one scene, he disappears.

Some characters engage in reflection during conversation; this is an entry point into their internal lives. The main characters face their challenges alone, though, and the book's overall tone is one of stoic individualism. Some secondary characters seem present most to reflect the plights of detained German Americans, the role of women as WASP pilots, and the trauma suffered by prisoners of war, with footnotes present to support the details of their story—though these internal notes also disrupt the story. Nonetheless, the book works toward an emotional conclusion in which Hank fulfills a dream, Ella works to keep the farm, and a childhood friend forces hard questions.

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MICHELE SHARPE (July 6, 2021)

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