

The Bad Mother

Marguerite Andersen

Donald Winkler, Translator

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In this award-winning fictionalized autobiography, eighty-nine-year-old writer and educator Marguerite Andersen shares her struggles with the choices she made when love for her children came into conflict with her longing for freedom, adventure, and meaning.

Born in Germany, Andersen saw the whole world “exploding with joy” at the end of World War II. But for the women returning to Berlin with their malnourished children, nothing would ever be the same. Pregnant and eager to escape the memory of wartime horrors, she married the father of her child, one of the liberators returning to his home in Tunis. The abusive, loveless marriage and life in her “blood-drinking Corsican” mother-in-law’s home ignited dreams of escape.

Aided by her mother, she fled to Berlin, leaving her two sons behind for a time. Custody battles and feelings of guilt that she had not defended her children from their father’s violence—“The Nazis had taught me to beware of those whose role it was to enforce the law”—burdened her spirit.

Though she maintained her relationship with her sons, and found happiness with her second husband and their daughter, Andersen never stopped questioning her choices. Her story, told with power and grace, is that of all women who wonder whether, by longing for lives of their own, they have earned the label of “bad mother.”

KRISTINE MORRIS (Summer 2016)

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