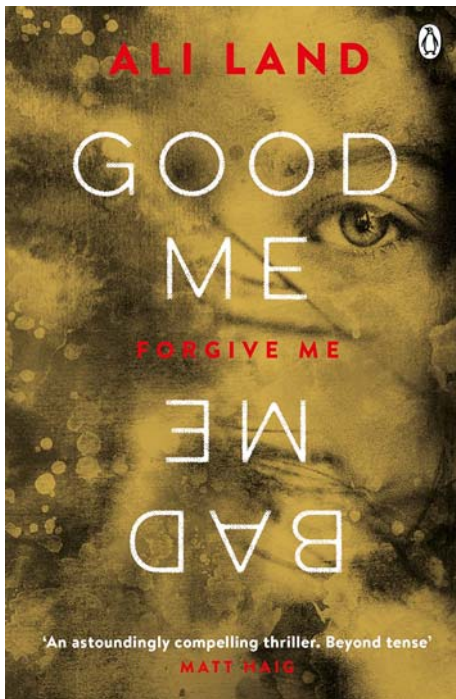


Good Me Bad Me



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Ali Land

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What makes someone a bad person in the eyes of others? Annie has become who she is largely through her mother's habit of killing children in her home in the west of England and making Annie watch.

In her mid-teens Annie finally 'escapes' and goes to the police with her blood-chilling story. She feels that this makes her a good person, though she is conflicted about standing up to her mother. Her mother is arrested and held in custody pending trial, and much of this thriller is set in the time between the arrest and the trial. Annie is to be the main prosecution witness and is sent to live, incognito, with a family in London for her own safety – only a few people know what and where she has come from.

The story is told by Annie herself, which allows the reader into her head and into her emotions. The book starts with Annie saying, "I don't know what's going to happen to me. I'm scared. Different. I wasn't given a chance. I promise this, I promise to be the best I can be. I promise to try." And try she does.

Through the telling of her horrific story, Annie manages to thoroughly scare the reader, because we don't know what is going to happen to her any more than she does. She has to navigate the precarious existences of her nightmare past, her mother's psychological hold on her, the family she has been thrown into – about as dysfunctional as a family can be – and the uncertain future that others seem to want to fashion for her. She is split between the need for survival and the external and internal forces threatening to scuttle the possibility of her survival as a sane individual.

The author, Ali Land, has masterful control of the characters and their various needs and challenges. Like Annie, many of them are struggling to survive. Like Annie, many of them are finding it near impossible to be whole, sane individuals.

Ali Land brings to this debut novel the experience and insights she obviously gained in the ten or so years she worked as a child and adolescent mental health nurse, with a degree in mental health.

Having worked as a psychotherapist myself, I hazard a guess that this novel may even have been a journey of catharsis for its author. I found this to be true in the writing of my own short story, '[Dead](#)'. In perhaps no other field, can a professional gain such rich understanding and appreciation of how others think and feel in a multitude of situations. This is as close as a writer can get to authentically portraying characters in fiction with their motivations, hang-ups, fears and inner conflicts.

Annie certainly has more things pushing and pulling her than is the case for most teenage girls. The 'good me, bad me' struggle is there throughout the novel. Does she succeed? She finishes her story with, "I promised to be the best I could. I promised to try."