



Good Things I Wish You

A. Manette Ansay

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The acclaimed author of *Vinegar Hill* returns with a story of two unlikely romances—one historical, the other modern-day—separated by thousands of miles and well over a century.

Battling feelings of loss and apathy in the wake of a painful divorce, novelist Jeanette struggles to complete a book about the long-term relationship between Clara Schumann, a celebrated pianist and the wife of the composer Robert Schumann, and her husband's protégé, the handsome young composer Johannes Brahms. Although this legendary love triangle has been studied exhaustively, Jeanette—herself a gifted pianist—wonders about the enduring nature of Clara and Johannes's lifelong attachment. Were they just "best friends," as both steadfastly claimed? Or was the relationship complicated by desires that may or may not have been consummated?

Through a chance encounter, Jeanette meets Hart, a mysterious, worldly entrepreneur who is a native of Clara's birthplace, Leipzig, Germany. Hart's casual help with translations quickly blossoms into something more. *There are things about men and women, he insists, that do not change.* The two embark on a whirlwind emotional journey that leads Jeanette across Germany and Switzerland to a crossroads similar to that faced by Clara Schumann—also a mother, also an artist—more than a century earlier.

Accompanied by photographs, sketches, and notes from past and present, A. Manette Ansay's original blend of fiction and history captures the timeless nature of love and friendship between women and men.

Good Things I Wish You Details

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From Reader Review Good Things I Wish You for online ebook

Kristen Nichols says

This plot was right up my alley, but I don't know, I thought it was badly done. The heroine = unlikable. The new boyfriend = really, really unlikable. I even hated his little kid. And the book is chock-full of pictures that don't appear to go with the ensuing chapters, like a photo marked "2006" as an intro to a chapter about how Clara Schumann visits her husband's grave more than 100 years before. Hated it.

Katharine says

I picked up this book because I am reading through my public library's fiction shelf alphabetically. This was a great find. I started it at 3:45 p.m on a Thursday and finished it before 8 p.m. -- and that was around me making dinner for my family and settling them all down for the night. It was a FAST read but it was not frothy, like a lot of fast reads are.

This book addresses the age old question "can women and men be friends" using the relationship of Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms as the context around the romance that develops between the POV character, Jeannette, and her new romantic interest, Hart. The prose was absolutely beautiful and I loved the way that the author expressed her own observations of pain and longing, of dissatisfaction and desire and her own realities of facing life as a divorced mother. I wasn't too sure about Hart. I didn't like him. I thought he was too smug and aloof and I thought that this book might go into a controlling plot. It didn't.

Where it did go, was into discussion, and I always like dialogue between men and women, about what they want. The truth is, this couple, not unlike Clara and Johannes, want their first loves to stay, perhaps like it was in the beginning. The word "significance" was tossed around and I think, through the author's not-so-subtle attack on organized religion, that the author may believe that at times too much of our significance is fully wrapped up in our romantic relationships. This book does ask if we can be satisfied with ourselves in our work outside of people using Clara Schumann as an example, but I think that the main theme, while beautifully written, was that we owe it to ourselves to be selfish. Hart struck me as selfish, and I wanted him to redeem himself more. He was not a romantic hero, just a lost, rich, attractive man who didn't really love Jeannette, he was just tired of sleeping alone. Jeannette was like him, I thought, just more devoted to her child. She also struck me as hungry for reassurance by something outside of herself that she was valued, that she was significant. Hart could not give that to her.

I give this book 4 stars for the artistic ways it asks these hard questions, for the inventive dialogue, for the historical context and research, for the fact that the author took such a heavy subject and wrote so economically that I could read it in one day and for the craftsmanship of the prose. Had the endings and philosophical conclusions aligned more clearly to my own beliefs -- that there is beauty and hope in self-sacrifice-- then maybe I would have given it five. Maybe.

Anne Van says

I think I feel so irritated, so set up.....because the premise of this novel (novella?) is so good. The story is

interwoven between an account of the much written about life long passion or soulmate-ness of Clara Schulman and Johannes Brahmes, with a contemporary writer who is researching this and her companion. Sound familiar? Just reading the jacket blurb had me racing to the check out desk, with visions of "Possession" dancing in my head. No way. The alternating sections about Schulman/Brahmes reads like a wikiapedia entry, petering out to just passages from their letters to each other, no imaginative re-creation, bringing to life, etc. I thought that's what historical fiction is supposed to be about. The main character, the contemporary writer, is banal and superficial. The new love interest so contrived, it's difficult to imagine how this got published.

Jill says

To be fair,

I love A. Manette. I have read everything she's ever written, and I own most of it. I have her books ranked in my head, and one is in my top ten books ever.

This one falls in the experiment category. I really like it when authors break their usual molds. I want them too. There is nothing I hate like reading the same book over and over with different characters (hello, Mary Higgins Clark, I am talking to you).

The experiment mostly works. The central idea, that desire is much more powerful than achievement or gain is unique. I haven't seen this explored much. I am also not an expert in the Brahms/Schumann connection. I liked how she chose to narrate this, and I like what's left up in the air because to resolve it neatly would ruin the book. I also liked the photo collages, and how this line of text added to the story.

The modern character works for me, but I was less sure of her guy, Hart.

I'd recommend the book generally, though ;)

Elizabeth says

An engaging look at two relationships, one historical, the other contemporary. It asks and examines the question "Can men and women be friends?" through the lens of the the relationship between Clara Schumann and Brahms. This book was interesting - it certainly took chances, as we read about an author in an modern day relationship writing the book we are reading. Ansay also formatted dialogue in a way I hadn't seen done before. It kind of annoyed me, but it was new and daring, and I can admire that.

The plot moved along nicely, and I couldn't seem to put it down. However, for me, something was missing. I know that's not helpful, but I couldn't help wishing for more "meat". Even though the question seemed to be about friendships, we don't actually SEE the main character pursuing or attempting to maintain any true friendships with men. It seems to be a one-sided examination of the issue, to me, that maybe, in the end just shrugs its shoulders and says that maybe the question doesn't really matter all that much.

Melanie says

As it turns out, USF has two claims to fame in the former student arena: the guy who invented the game whack-a-mole and A. Manette Ansay, the latter of whom I recently met and who gave an absolutely lovely reading from this book.

Enjoyable, but I wish that the two narratives (Clara/Robert Schumann Jeanette-the-present-day-narrator/Hart-the-love-interest) had been explicitly intertwined from the beginning rather than tacked together at the very end.

Jennifer says

From My Blog...

Is it possible for men and women to be just friends and in the same vein how does one define art? Two seemingly arbitrary questions are proven to be inter-related in *Good Things I Wish You* by A. Manette Ansay through her use of relationships both historical and contemporary. These questions and many more are covered in this novel, rich in lyrical prose, charming characters with similar lives centuries apart. Jeanette is recently divorced and misses her husband Carl. When not at the University, spending her time with her daughter or playing piano, Jeanette is working on her book about the 40-year relationship between Clara Schumann and her husband's protégé Johannes Brahms. As Jeanette begins her story, she is waiting for her date to appear. Reinhardt Hempel, a scientist from Leipzig, the birthplace of Clara, intrigues her and is the first man she has dated in nineteen years. Ansay writes in a beautiful and lyrical manner, alternating from her childhood as a piano student, to present, and back to the 1850s with Clara and Robert Schumann and his protégé, Johannes Brahms. As the stories unfold one becomes involved in two affairs, the present with Jeanette and Reinhardt and the past between Clara, Robert and ultimately Johannes. There are similarities in the two parallel relationships and even though this is a work of fiction one gets a glimpse at the complex relationship between the Schumanns and Brahms through letters and photos Ansey weaves into the story. *Good Things I Wish You* is a beautiful, tender, and wonderful read and I would recommend it to anyone looking for a delightful book to read in an afternoon.

Rachel McCready-Flora says

I picked this up in the new books display in the library and gave it a fair go. I've never read anything by Ansay before, hadn't heard of her either, but it looked interesting.

Overall, I was really disappointed. Most of the book read okay, although it certainly was not insightful or all that interesting. The parts about Schumann and Brahms felt like a bad freshman Intro English biography assignment.

Marty says

I've read a couple of books - *SISTER, MIDNIGHT CHAMPAGNE* - by A. Manette Ansay, and always enjoyed them. When her new book came up on my HarperCollins list, I was pretty excited and knew that I wanted to read and review it.

This book weaves in the love story of Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms with that of the narrator, Jeannette, and a German man, Hart, that she meets through a dating service. Jeannette is writing a book on the two, and over dinner learns that Hart also has an interest in the two composers. They become friends and he helps her translate letters and diary entries.

I found both love stories compelling, though I didn't necessarily understand them. I felt like I was trying to understand Jeannette and Hart's relationship, just as Jeannette was trying to understand Clara and Brahms'. In both relationships, the couple starts out intending only for a friendship over a shared passion - in Brahms and Clara's case, the piano; Jeannette and Hart both have an interest in Brahms and Clara's story and in their music. As time goes on, they become closer and deal the age-old question of whether or not men and women can ever be friends.

Ansay includes pictures of Schumann and Brahms and excerpts from those letters and diaries in her novel, which I liked. Aside from giving the reader a little of the history, it made Jeannette's research feel more real and more authentic.

There are a couple of sections where the conversation between Hart and Jeannette is put on the left and right side of the page, respectively, so that the reader can see where interruptions occur (and frequently are ignored). At first, I thought there was something wrong with my book and found it a little distracting. However, it was kind of interesting to read a conversation like that; it felt a bit more real.

One thing that I really liked is the title of the book. It's taken from a letter that Brahms wrote to Schumann, and it's so bittersweet - this longing and wishing for intimacy and closeness, while knowing that it's futile. Also, being an English nerd, I get a kick out of metafictional things; I enjoyed the fact that the narrator is writing the novel that the reader is reading.

Overall, I would recommend this. It's a quick, interesting and thought-provoking read.

Patricia says

There were moments when I was sure this book would merit a four star rating. Sometimes the luminous words from the correspondence between Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms, best friends, musical prodigies and collaborators, combined with the scenes the author sets between Clara, her husband (the great composer Robert Schumann) and their close friend Brahms form such a lush sensory impression. The subplot, the story of a writer researching the relationship between Clara and Johannes and trying to determine if it was romantic or just an incredible closeness between two soul mates/best friends, is less mesmerizing, and her new love interest is not so likable. She travels to Germany to research the three Romantic era composers, and on her trip becomes involved with a mysterious doctor who offers to translate

the Schumann/Brahms letters and other sources for her book. It is hard to say why the two pianists/composers did not marry or form some sort of union after the death of Robert Schumann, Clara's gifted but tormented composer husband. They were certainly expressive of a great love for each other, and supported each other's musical careers while both of them cared for Robert during his years of composing, mental illness, a suicide attempt, and voluntary commitment to a mental institution. Brahms stayed with the Schumann children when Clara would tour as an acclaimed concert pianist. Yet after her husband's death, Brahms seemed to have grown cool and detached to Clara, and moved on with his life instead of what seemed like an inevitable marriage and happy ending together. The world may never know what really happened between them. This book, above all, is an intriguing exploration of three fine and complicated souls immortalized by their music.

Maria Elmvang says

Recently divorced Jeanette is trying to figure out how to juggle her book, her child, and suddenly being part of the "dating game" again. Especially the latter isn't going too well, until she meets German-born Hart. Although they both agree that the chemistry isn't there, they still feel some strange attraction, brought on - in part - by their mutual fascination by music.

As luck would have it, Jeanette's book is a fictionalized account of the lives of a German composer-trio, and she happily enlists Hart's assistance in translating letters and journal entries for her. Describing the friendship that grew between Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms during and after Robert Schumann's sickness and death, Jeanette is convinced the friendship was completely appropriate, and that any love between the two was purely platonic or even that of a mother and a son. Hart scoffs at this. "A man and a woman can never just be friends," he claims, and as if following his command, circumstances set out to attempt to prove him right.

Good Things I Wish You is a pleasant book and a quick read, but it is as if it can't really decide whether it wants to be a novel or a biography, so it twists and turns, and ends up becoming a bit of both. If I had any prior knowledge, or any personal interest in the lives of Clara and Johannes I think I would have absolutely adored this fictionalized account of their lives. As I don't have either, I couldn't help but feel that I was missing out on something, although it shows the quality of A. Manette Ansay's writing that I still enjoyed the book, and wasn't bored by the historical details. Instead I was charmed by the characters, and especially by the discovery of a book within the book.

Lee Razer says

Ansay seems to have initially intended to write a fictionalized treatment of the much studied and wondered about set of relationships between three important figures in 19th century classical music, Clara and Robert Schumann and Johannes Brahms. Particularly, the very close relationship between Clara and Brahms (were they lovers or not?) seems rich in possibility for a historical novel, raising issues of desire, madness, ambition, and genius.

The story of the Schumanns and Brahms is told close to the established historical record at first, complete with references to Ansay's research sources. This is done just fine, and when Ansay later extends the story with her imaginings of scenes that occurred between them, the story really works quite well.

Unfortunately Ansay chose to combine that story with the story of a modern day novelist and professor of literature who is researching a historical novel about the Schumanns and Brahms while having her own relationship of uncertain intentions with a German man. This apparent indulging of authorial ego weakens the book, inserting a pale shadow of the Clara/Johannes relationship that does not have the space to be fleshed out satisfactorily.

Doreen says

So I've long been fascinated by the relationship between Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms (due to Personal Issues,) but my greatest takeaway from this novel is, in the end, who can explain these things? I'm not sure if that was A. Manette Ansay's point (and if it was, I completely missed it) but I felt afterwards that it's really none of our business if their obvious affection for one another ever turned into a physical affair. Because how does it affect us? How is their privacy less important than our prurient (as let's face it, there's no way one can label it as high-minded) interest? Every love story, like every family, happy or otherwise, is unique and dynamic and understandable really only to the people involved, though if we're lucky, one of them is gifted enough to translate it for us. But again, what is the point of speculation, particularly in this case? They were best friends for decades, passionately attached to one another. Need we know more? This is a serious question: please chime in if you have an opinion.

As to the book itself, I found the fictionalization of Clara and Johannes far more convincing, and engrossing, than the modern half. Which I found odd, given the first-person narrative of the latter. It's hard to be sympathetic to Jeanette's self-sabotage, or to fathom Hart's unreliably clinical attitude to their relationship, harder still to understand the necessity of using them to frame the narrative at all. Their story felt like filler in an already slight book. But I'm glad I read it, if only to lay to rest my own curiosity regarding Clara and Johannes with a firm "yep, none of my business." Perhaps there's a dash of transference there, but this exhaustive study of their relationship quite cured me of my need to know more.

Jennifer says

From My blog...[return][return]Is it possible for men and women to be just friends and in the same vein how does one define art? Two seemingly arbitrary questions are proven to be inter-related in *Good Things I Wish You* by A. Manette Ansay through her use of relationships both historical and contemporary. These questions and many more are covered in this novel, rich in lyrical prose, charming characters with similar lives centuries apart. Jeanette is recently divorced and misses her husband Carl. When not at the University, spending her time with her daughter or playing piano, Jeanette is working on her book about the 40-year relationship between Clara Schumann and her husband's protégé Johannes Brahms. As Jeanette begins her story, she is waiting for her date to appear. Reinhardt Hempel, a scientist from Leipzig, the birthplace of Clara, intrigues her and is the first man she has dated in nineteen years. Ansay writes in a beautiful and lyrical manner, alternating from her childhood as a piano student, to present, and back to the 1850s with Clara and Robert Schumann and his protégé, Johannes Brahms. As the stories unfold one becomes involved in two affairs, the present with Jeanette and Reinhardt and the past between Clara, Robert and ultimately Johannes. There are similarities in the two parallel relationships and even though this is a work of fiction one

gets a glimpse at the complex relationship between the Schumanns and Brahms through letters and photos Ansey weaves into the story. *Good Things I Wish You* is a beautiful, tender, and wonderful read and I would recommend it to anyone looking for a delightful book to read in an afternoon.

Serena Grey says

"I wish I could write you as tenderly as I love you and tell you all the good things that I wish you"

I loved this beautifully written book about love, music, and relationships.

A recently divorced writer, Jeanette is trying to write a book about the relationship between the famous musical couple, the Schumann's and their friend genius pianist Johannes Brahms. While writing, she is set up with Hart, a mysterious German millionaire who may have things in his past that he wishes to hide, and who doesn't believe that men and women can ever be just friends.

I love how Brahms relationship with Clara Schumann was juxtaposed against the modern relationship of Jeannette and Hart. This book was touching and sweet..... and very beautifully written.
