

Where Madness Lies

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Where Madness Lies is an utterly compelling historical novel about the Nazi genocide, told from the perspective of psychiatric patients who reveal the generational impact of mental illness.

The two-part story begins in 1934 in Germany, where Inga Blumenthal and her sister Rigmor live with their demanding mother. Rigmor is beleaguered with anxiety and sleeplessness, hallucinations, and debilitating fear, but doctors are unable to diagnose and treat her. Inga decides to study psychiatry on her own. Then Rigmor is institutionalized, placed under the care of Arnold Richter at the Sonnenstein Psychiatric Hospital. The two become close. A Nazi eugenics program leads to terrifying developments for Rigmor, despite Inga's best efforts to cure her.

In 1984, Inga lives in Switzerland. She receives word that her granddaughter, Sabine, has checked herself into McLean Psychiatric Hospital in Boston. Sabine, a new mother, has found herself unable to cope. Inga travels to the United States to help her granddaughter, leading her to unravel the story of Rigmor's fate. These tragic revelations help Sabine and Inga to forge a stronger bond.

The book's chapters are brief and their details close, and its characterizations are complex. Inga's aristocratic Jewish family is subjected to cruelty in Nazi Germany; in the 1980s, Sabine is riddled by anxiety that she can't control. Clear parallels are drawn between Rigmor and Sabine, despite their separate psychiatric institutions and differing periods. Though they are considered more fragile than society at large, they are shown to be courageous.

Hereditary mental health is at the fore of the novel's search for understanding, as are the consequences of eugenics movements. *Where Madness Lies* is an illuminating story about how so much about mental health is beyond the individuals' control.

MONICA CARTER (January / February 2021)

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