

Why I'm Here

Jill Frayne

NeWest Press (May 1, 2022)

Softcover \$17.95 (240pp)

978-1-77439-049-8

In Jill Frayne's heartbreaking novel *Why I'm Here*, a teenager's struggle to find her place in the world requires making difficult choices.

Helen is a social worker who is asked to help Gale, a ticking time bomb of a teenager who was sent to live with her father after an ostensible suicide attempt. What brought Gale to her breaking point is tragic, and during her therapy sessions with Helen, the truth comes to light. Gale begins narrating from her first steps through to a confrontation with her father; she wonders how she can help her sister. Helen's office becomes a battlefield, where her judgment is clouded by self-deception, while Gale simply wants to escape.

Gale's mother, Mindy, is revealed in short bursts—a villain denied the spotlight, but whose cruelty and violence are still showcased. Her destructive behaviors are mirrored in the book's setting—a mercurial landscape with hidden sinkholes and abandoned homes, and populated by lost souls.

Helen knows the pains of Gale's Yukon community all too well: her town was left to decay when the mines had closed, and its people have few options. Scenes from the duo's therapy sessions are interspersed with those from Gale's life in the Yukon and her interior world. Compelling contrasts arise, used to explore the complicated nature of her relationship with Helen. The hidden motivations of the women are explored in deft, gut-wrenching terms. It becomes clear that the dreams Helen held for Gale were never really what her client hoped for at all. Still, both strive for peace in this story that conveys empathy for those who live with harsh realities.

Why I'm Here is a brave novel about how families define people's lives and destinies.

JEREMIAH ROOD (May / June 2022)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.