



Lazaretto: A Novel

By Diane McKinney-Whetstone

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This stunning new novel from Diane McKinney-Whetstone, nationally bestselling author of *Tumbling*, begins in the chaotic backstreets of post-Civil War Philadelphia as a young black woman gives birth to a child fathered by her wealthy white employer.

In a city riven by racial tension, the father's transgression is unforgivable. He has already arranged to take the baby, so it falls to Sylvia, the midwife's teenage apprentice, to tell Meda that her child is dead—a lie that will define the course of both women's lives. A devastated Meda dedicates herself to working in an orphanage and becomes a surrogate mother to two white boys; while Sylvia, fueled by her guilt, throws herself into her nursing studies and finds a post at the Lazaretto, the country's first quarantine hospital, situated near the Delaware River, just south of Philadelphia.

The Lazaretto is a crucible of life and death; sick passengers and corpses are quarantined here, but this is also the place where immigrants take their first steps toward the American dream. The live-in staff are mostly black Philadelphians, and when two of them arrange to marry, the city's black community prepares for a party on its grounds. But the celebration is plunged into chaos when gunshots ring out across the river.

As Sylvia races to save the victim, the fates of Meda's beloved orphans also converge on the Lazaretto. Long ago, one "brother" committed an unthinkable act to protect the other, sparking a chain of events that now puts the Lazaretto on lockdown. Here conflicts escalate, lies collapse, and secrets begin to surface; like dead men rising, past sins cannot be contained.

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Lazaretto: A Novel By Diane McKinney-Whetstone Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Setting her book once again in her native city of Philadelphia, Pa., McKinney-Whetstone opens her sixth novel on the eve of Abraham Lincoln's assassination. Meda, a beautiful young black woman, delivers the secret child of her employer, lawyer Tom Benin (who is white), at a medical office for clandestine services. After the baby is taken from her at birth, Sylvie, an apprentice to the midwife, lies and tells Meda her infant girl has died. Bereft and ungrounded, Meda seeks consolation by serving as a wet nurse to a pair of white newborn boys at a nearby orphanage, naming them Bram and Linc after the slain president she admired. Through a deal with Benin, Bram and Linc are able to stay with Meda on weekends and holidays. After cruelty and abuse from their employer forces the boys from Philadelphia, Meda and her family continue to treat them as their own. In the meantime, Sylvia has become a formidable and capable nurse at the city's island quarantine hospital, Lazaretto. When the boys return to the city in desperate circumstances, old paths eventually converge at the hospital. McKinney-Whetstone explores racial passing, class prejudice, the nature of family, and the longings of forbidden love, but the disjointed narratives often feel like two separate novels uncomfortably forced together. The emotional content is never allowed to rise above predictable contrivances of plot and unremarkable characterizations. (Apr.)

Review

"A perfect book for the end of the Obama era.... Incredibly daring.... McKinney-Whetstone's trademark poetic prose is still as sharp as it has always been...without sacrificing plot and pacing.... I couldn't be happier that McKinney-Whetstone has returned to show us all how it's done." (*Washington Post*)

"As in any Diane McKinney-Whetstone novel, there is love in all of its many facets and dimensions. The author shows that good writing is like a fine bottle of wine—it just gets better with time." (*Essence*)

"When it comes to creating living and breathing characters, no one can touch Diane McKinney-Whetstone. Her new novel *Lazaretto* is no exception.... I suggest reading *Lazaretto* at the dinner table, because it will leave you full as your favorite meal." (BuzzFeed Books)

"Vibrant.... Completely engaging.... A unique blend of poetic language and graphic depictions of the injustices suffered by African Americans in the post-Civil War period." (*Booklist* (starred review))

"Language sings throughout the whole of McKinney-Whetstone's writing—from the lilt of her characters' colloquial speech to her poetic, visceral descriptions.... A sophisticated and compelling novel that comes alive through a rich cavalcade of vibrant characters and a suspenseful plot." (*Kirkus Reviews*)

"Whetstone's novel explores a fictional crisis that begins in the neighborhood surrounding Philly's Lazaretto Hospital after the Civil War." (*New York Post*, "This Week's Must-Read Books")

"McKinney-Whetstone's trademark poetic prose is still as sharp as it has always been...without sacrificing plot and pacing.... I couldn't be happier that McKinney-Whetstone has returned to show us all how it's done." (*Washington Post*)

"Juggling a wide cast of characters, this book dives into family struggles, romance, Lincoln's assassination, and the racial tensions simmering in post-Civil War Philadelphia. Perfect for fans of history and complicated, rich, character-driven stories." (BookTrib.com)

“Once again, McKinney-Whetstone has managed to bring to life a wide range of characters whose triumphs and tribulations would never show up in a history book.” (*BookPage*)

“In this masterful work of historical fiction, Diane McKinney-Whetstone seamlessly transports us to Philadelphia in the aftermath of the Civil War and Lincoln’s assassination, beautifully evoking powerful stories of love, friendship and humanity amid the vibrant black community that flourished amid the troubled times.” (“Largehearted Boy”, *40 New Books in 2016 That’ll Make You Forget about Netflix*)

“TUMBLING is an accomplished novel, with sharply drawn characters, exuberant prose, plenty of period detail and a wise, forgiving outlook on family life.” (Los Angeles Times Book Review)

“McKinney-Whetstone weaves an intricate tapestry of love, pain and memory. . . . Philly is as much a character as the women. . . . Neena’s dire straits are nicely handled and provide a pretty sharp hook.” (Publishers Weekly (starred review))

“[A] poignant, multigenerational story. . . . An achingly tender portrait of familial love and pain.” (Booklist)

“A compelling story. . . . In evocative prose, she re-creates the world of 1940s and 1950s Philadelphia with passionate emotion in a moving novel of love, loss, redemption, and healing.” (Ebony)

“Offers up both wrenching and sweet truths that feel familiar to any reader, in a series of uncloying, unpredictable plotlines. The result is a book that feels honest, filled with people you want to keep reading about.” (Philadelphia Magazine)

“[McKinney-Whetstone] creates a unique, believable black middle-class world where there are no villains—just individuals trying their very best to get through life while inflicting minimum pain on each other, or themselves.... These people are flawed, human, engaging in the best sense.” (Washington Post)

“Even the air is palpable in TUMBLING. . . . The story moves forth on the power of Ms. McKinney-Whetstone’s characters. Ms. McKinney-Whetstone captures the formidable struggle to protect both a community and a family.” (The New York Times Book Review)

“[A] beautifully written tale [and] a lyrical read.” (USA Today)

“[A] remarkable first novel. . . . The story probes beneath its residents’ lives to tell a powerful tale of damage and healing.” (Publishers Weekly (starred review))

“A bouncy, moody, musical debut by an author who, like a good blues singer, is strong on style and interpretation. . . . A gifted prose writer with a tremendous sense of place.” (Kirkus Reviews)

From the Back Cover

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herself into her nursing studies and finds a post at the Lazaretto, the country's first quarantine hospital, situated near the Delaware River, just south of Philadelphia.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Lois Yale:

Have you spare time for the day? What do you do when you have considerably more or little spare time? Sure, you can choose the suitable activity to get spend your time. Any person spent their very own spare time to take a move, shopping, or went to the actual Mall. How about open as well as read a book entitled Lazaretto: A Novel? Maybe it is for being best activity for you. You already know beside you can spend your time together with your favorite's book, you can wiser than before. Do you agree with it is opinion or you have other opinion?

Tom Scott:

This Lazaretto: A Novel book is simply not ordinary book, you have it then the world is in your hands. The benefit you obtain by reading this book is information inside this e-book incredible fresh, you will get data which is getting deeper an individual read a lot of information you will get. This particular Lazaretto: A Novel without we realize teach the one who studying it become critical in considering and analyzing. Don't become worry Lazaretto: A Novel can bring whenever you are and not make your tote space or bookshelves' turn into full because you can have it in the lovely laptop even mobile phone. This Lazaretto: A Novel having excellent arrangement in word along with layout, so you will not really feel uninterested in reading.

Helen Leavitt:

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Victor Parisi:

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