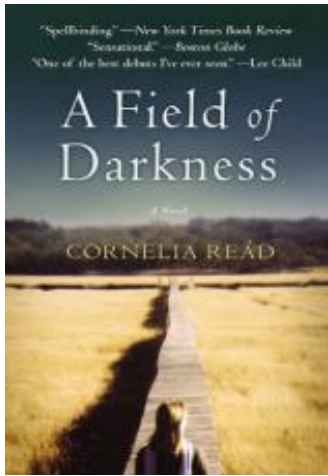


# A Field of Darkness

by Cornelia Read

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## About the Book

Madeline Dare would be the first to tell you her money is so old there's none left. A former socialite from an aristocratic family in decline, Maddie is a tough-talking, would-be journalist exiled to the rust belt of upstate New York. Her prospects for changing her dreary lifestyle seem dim--until a set of dog tags found at a decades-old murder site is linked to her family.

Shocked into action, Maddie embarks on a search that takes her from the derelict smokestacks of Syracuse to the posh mansions of Long Island's Gold Coast. But instead of the warm refuge of home, this prodigal daughter soon uncovers dark, sinister secrets that will violently challenge everything she believes in and holds dear.

## Discussion Guide

1. Cornelia Read shares a lot of similarities with her protagonist, Madeline Dare. She comments, "In some senses, Maddie's who I'd like to be. She's tougher and braver than I am, not to mention way more handy with shotguns and snappy comebacks." If you were to base a novel on your life, how would you shape your own character?
2. Despite near-death experiences, Maddie relentlessly investigates the secrets surrounding the dog tags. Why do you think she is so compelled to uncover the truth?
3. Maddie is confronted by shocking and harrowing events throughout the novel. How do these experiences impact her? How does her character change or remain the same by the end of the novel?

4. Cornelia notes, "To me, the most important thing Madeline learns in *A Field of Darkness* is that her heritage can't dictate her destiny without her consent." What elements of Maddie's past haunt her the most? How is she able to overcome them?

5. *A Field of Darkness* begins with Maddie pondering her sense of place: "There are people who can be happy anywhere. I am not one of them." The setting in this novel switches between rural Syracuse and posh Oyster Bay. How is Maddie situated in each place? Where does she belong?

6. Maddie would be the first to tell you that her family's money is so old there's none left. Still, many of her Long Island relatives have married into wealthy families and enjoy lifestyles as extravagant as their predecessors. Consequently, Maddie feels like a foreigner when she visits her relatives. Discuss her position as an outsider looking into her own family.

7. Fleishmann tells Maddie how to discover someone's secrets in their face: "You have to look and look, until the secrets come out. They cannot stay hidden if you are quiet for long enough, because the secrets are foolish and they have no patience." As Maddie strives to discover the truth about the past, she discovers that people are not always as they seem. Discuss the secrets that characters strive to protect in this novel and why they are being hidden.

8. *A Field of Darkness* is filled with intriguing characters. Which characters would you have liked to know more about? Why?

9. Maddie and Dean will return in Cornelia Read's next novel. Can you predict how their lives might change after the events of *A Field of Darkness*? What would you like to see happen?

## Author Bio

Although she was raised by divorced hippie-renegade parents on the outskirts of Big Sur (with occasional stints in Honolulu), Cornelia Read knows old-school WASP culture firsthand, having been born into the tenth (and last) generation of her mother's family to live on Oyster Bay's Centre Island. Her childhood mentors included Sufis, surfers, single moms, Black Panthers, Ansel Adams, draft dodgers, striking farmworkers, and Henry Miller's toughest ping-pong rival.

At fifteen, Read returned east, attending boarding school and college on full scholarship. While in New York, she did time as a debutante at the Junior Assemblies, worming her way back into the *Social Register* following her expulsion when a regrettable tantrum on the part of her mother's boyfriend's wife landed the lot of them on "Page Six" of the *New York Post*.

Much of the material in her Madeline Dare novels is autobiographical. Cornelia indeed lived in Syracuse, worked at a thankfully-defunct "therapeutic" boarding school in the Berkshires of Western Massachusetts, and has a cousin named Cate Ludlam who's intimately involved with the renovation of Prospect Cemetery, the oldest burial ground in Queens, New York.

Today, her Bostonian Great-Grandmother Fabyan's Society of Mayflower Descendants membership parchment (once

proudly displayed at the back of Read's tiny linen closet in Berkeley, California) is boxed up in a mini-storage unit on the West Coast, awaiting a cross-country U-Haul rental so Cornelia can road-trip it to her new digs in New Hampshire.

Cornelia has twin daughters, the younger of whom has severe autism.

## Critical Praise

"Read's sensational debut features spot-on descriptions of upstate-downstate conflicts, strong characterizations and a fascinating plot."

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### **A Field of Darkness**

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