



# Charity Girl

*Michael Lowenthal*

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## **Charity Girl** Michael Lowenthal

Charity Girl examines a dark period in our history, when fear and patriotic fervor led to devastating consequences. During World War I, the U.S. government waged a moral and medical campaign, incarcerating and quarantining fifteen thousand young women who were found to have venereal disease.

Frieda Mintz is a seventeen-year-old Jewish bundle wrapper at Jordan Marsh in Boston; she struck out on her own in the wake of her mother's determination to marry her off to a wealthy man twice her age. Then she spends one impulsive night with "a mensch, a U.S. Army private, ready to brave the trenches Over There." Unfortunately, Felix Morse leaves Frieda not just with vivid memories but with an unspeakable disease. Soon after, she is tracked down and sent to a makeshift detention center, where she suffers invasive physical exams, the discipline of an overbearing matron, and a painful erosion of self-worth. She's buoyed, though, by the strong women around her -- her fellow patients and a sympathetic social worker -- who, in depending on one another, seek to forge a new independence.

In smart, unusually determined Frieda Mintz, Michael Lowenthal has deftly created a most winning heroine through which to tell this troubling tale. Charity Girl lays bare an ugly part of our past when the government exercised a questionable level of authority at the expense of some of its most vulnerable citizens; it also casts long shadows, exploring timely questions of desire, identity, and the balance between the public good and individual freedom.

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