



# Hospital Hill

*Katherine Anderson*

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## **Hospital Hill** Katherine Anderson

In 1959 Valerie Martin takes a job on the wards of Northampton State Hospital for the Insane where she spends the next twenty years climbing the ranks. When the hospital closes she leaves for good, or so she thinks. Weeks away from retirement, she is called back to complete one last task and finds a disturbing trend amongst some of the female patients and she has a hunch: these women were murdered.

2017 Reader Views Literary Award Winner

## **Hospital Hill Details**

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Author : Katherine Anderson

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# From Reader Review Hospital Hill for online ebook

## Reader Views says

Reviewed by Sheri Hoyte for Reader Views (09/16)

“Hospital Hill” by Katherine Anderson is an uncanny mystery/thriller that will keep readers guessing as dark secrets from an old insane asylum surface just before the hospital closes its doors forever.

Weeks before her retirement, Valerie Martin is called back to the hospital where she began her career, Northampton Hospital, to complete a final task for the department: an assessment of the hospital records/data. It’s been years since the hospital has housed any patients, and the gloomy condition of the hospital is disheartening to Valerie. As she settles in with some old patient files, however, she begins to recollect and reminisce about former patients and co-workers. Valerie finds more than she bargains for when she stumbles upon some coincidences that reveal sinister and disturbing activities with several of the young female patients. She must dig deep to connect the dots that will shed light on tragic events from the past. There are other parties interested in what Valerie’s research will reveal and she must trudge carefully to expose the truth without being harmed, or worse, in the process.

I thoroughly enjoyed the historical aspects of the story, and it was apparent much time and research went into telling the history of the hospital with precise detail. The eerie monochrome of the book cover stayed in the front of my mind as I read, clearly depicting exactly how I would imagine an old asylum to look. I found the characters to be genuine and consistent to their roles for the period of time covered in the story. It was a bit of an eye opener that Valerie’s supervisor actually scorned the fact that Valerie had a college degree, clearly of the mindset that women held a very specific place in society, college graduate or not. I also found it disheartening to read about the therapies patients received during the dawn of mental health treatment, treatments now considered inhumane at best.

The story is full of unexpected twists and turns, and the plot line builds with steady intensity, setting readers up for an action-packed, dramatic climax. At just over 200 pages, “Hospital Hill” by Katherine Anderson is a short read, and I found myself wanting more! I highly recommend this story as an entertaining read, full of history, suspense, and intrigue.

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## joyce g says

Katherine Anderson is an excellent story teller. I picked this up at BookClub Bookstore in Westfield, MA and once i started reading just could not put it down. Now I need to know what is going to happen next.

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## Michelle says

There is much intrigue in this historical novel 'Hospital Hill' that is set in a gothic mental health asylum. Following her Smith college graduation in 1959 Miss Valerie Martin began working at Northampton State Hospital for the Insane (1858-1993) and spent her career working in the field, returning to Northampton to complete a data/records assessment and full department report before her retirement from state service.

Martin was sad over the dismal eerie surroundings of abandoned Northampton Hospital: yet she fondly recalled her care of several patients and working with the nursing staff who ran and supervised the wards. Martin wasn't the only young lady who was sexually harassed and traumatized by the handsome married Dr. Willard, a womanizer that used his position of trust for his own gratification. Oddly, Mrs. Willard visited the wards unannounced and made every effort to befriend Martin.

As she examined the dusty old files and records, a pattern clearly emerged involving patient deaths that indicated foul play. Martin contacted the local historian/librarian who had worked at Northampton before it closed, and both women were convinced that patients deaths ruled as suicide may have been homicide, and possibly connected to the notorious Dr. Willard!

Katherine Anderson writes exceptional detailed accounts of the asylum settings and surroundings. The main character of Valerie Martin was skillfully crafted. Martin was a lonely spinster, there was nothing wrong with that, of course: however, Martin was isolated without family or friends, she also seemed very stuck-up, snobbish and unlikeable. The first half of the story was realistic, with unpredictable elements. In the darker side of the asylum setting, the tale eventually turned to a form of gothic horror, similar to something seen in a late night spooky Alfred Hitchcock movie. 3\* GOOD.

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### **Amy Liz says**

'Hospital Hill' is a novel that takes so many of my favorite things and combines them into a gripping mystery story that I was reluctant to put down: a headstrong female protagonist, an abandoned asylum, my favorite place in the world (Western Massachusetts), a killer plot twist, and accurate depictions of mental health care at the middle of the twentieth century that don't smack of stigma or stereotyping, which is rare to find in any fictional work that involves mental health treatment. I'm someone who cares very much about facts and historical accuracy; historical fiction is often a gamble for me as a reader, because if an author can't get his or her facts straight, it completely ruins both the integrity of their work and my ability to enjoy it. However, through her writing, it is apparent that Ms. Anderson thoroughly conducted her research before putting pen to paper.

Perhaps my favorite thing about this book is that, while the story is engrossing and the characters are accessible, Ms. Anderson has truly brought to life the legacy and memory of Northampton State Hospital. Although I never had the chance to go inside Old Main before it was torn down, I did have the opportunity to thoroughly explore the Memorial Complex portion of the hospital, and I have spent countless hours on Hospital Hill (including a brief stint of sleeping in my car, parked behind the Haskell Building, because I was temporarily out a place to live -- proving that, even after its closure, NSH acted as a refuge of sorts to those in need). Though I've walked the hallways of many abandoned asylums, Northampton State Hospital and its grounds have always conveyed a particular air of security and safety to me. Even though the institutional buildings are gone, and prefab houses now stand in their place, that feeling still hangs in the air surrounding the old hospital property on Prince Street. Valerie Martin felt it, and it's part of what called her back to the hospital. And through this story, and Ms. Anderson's writing, I think all readers -- even those who've never stepped foot on the actual Hospital Hill -- will be able to feel it too.

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### **Renee Bowlay says**

I read this book start to finish the day I picked it up, which is a rarity for me anymore. I was enthralled by the

main character in the book, Valerie, and became more so as the story flashed back to her past experiences at Northampton State Hospital. Katherine Anderson's continued work documenting hospitals and asylums in her home state has an obvious influence on the evocative descriptions she's able to portray of NSH from its heyday and eventual squalor. NSH was more than a work place for Valerie and appeared to represent her true home. I can relate to this feeling of connection to a place and time and how this heightens one's memories, even with the passing of many years.

I pride myself on being able to figure out the ending to thriller style novels but this one had me stumped! Though I was surprised by the turn of events, I found them believable and along with the whole of the story, true to the human experience. I believe one of the most captivating aspects of the story was Valerie's connections with other people and how those connections were sustained even in death. I am eager to read more from this author and am would be happy to hear from this captivating body of characters again.

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### **Nannette says**

I enjoyed Hospital Hill. Ms. Anderson did a great job of helping visualize the setting and especially the atmosphere. For example, the hospital was "perched on top like a beautiful gargoyle" and "it was a strange sort of beautiful with its brick towers and fenced-in porches." I could see the location as well as feel the atmosphere. The main character was interesting and had a good back story that explained her actions. I did not solve the mystery until the author did the reveal because I was focused on a red herring so great job on not revealing too soon. There are some typos in the text which I believe are a problem for Kindle in how they format books. I am sure they will be fixed in the next edition. Lastly the history of mental illness and its treatment is something that should most definitely be discussed more. The beginning of this book takes place in the late 1950's. Over 50 years later, our society is not more enlightened or more compassionate towards mental illness. Hospital Hill can help create interest in the treatment of mental illness and hopefully start a conversation on how our society can move forward to help end stigma and truly treat mental illness instead of ignoring it.

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### **Melissa Volker says**

A haunting, fictional tale that uncovers a dark, haunting history inside Northampton Asylum while getting ready for the building's demolition.

While the location is real, the tale is fictional -- follow Valerie as she relives her past working at the asylum as a young girl during a very different time, and find out about an uncomfortable and unexpected truth...before it's too late!

Hospital Hill is a beautiful love letter to an old, historic building, and an imaginative exploration of what might have occurred within its cavernous, dreary walls.

An engaging read by Katherine Anderson!

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### **Tammy Chimi says**

This book had a major formatting error in using block formatting instead of a traditional format, but once I got over that I really enjoyed the read. It was a quick read with a solid character at the center. Katherine

Anderson is a good writer. I also loved that it was based on a location that I was familiar with in the town I grew up in. She did the area justice in her book.

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## **Bill says**

### **3.0 Stars**

Hospital Hill, Katherine Anderson's debut novel released in 2016, is an intriguing murder mystery set on the grounds of the State Hospital at Northampton, constructed atop a scenic hill which later became known as Hospital Hill just outside of downtown Northampton, MA in 1856. Originally named the State Lunatic Asylum at Northampton and later renamed the Northampton State Hospital, the facility was notorious for overcrowding and patient neglect and ultimately abandoned by the state of Massachusetts in mid-1980s.

Valerie Martin, a 1959 graduate of Smith College, joined the Northampton State Hospital staff shortly after graduation and spent the next twenty years working on Ward B, the all-female wing of the sprawling psychiatric facility. Nearing retirement after a fifteen year stint at the Westborough State Hospital, Valerie finds herself heading back to Northampton for one last assignment. The Department of Mental Health needs patient records for the period 1960-1979 assembled at the Haskell Building and Valerie is specifically requested for the task given her intimate familiarity with the patients on the ward during that time period.

Twenty years of memories swirled in her head as Valerie combs through the patient records. Flash backs of fond relationships with co-workers and patients, intermingled with some of the violent episodes she experienced on the ward, float Dr. Robert Willard to top of mind. A psychiatrist who joined the hospital's medical team shortly before Valerie started on Ward B, Willard was ambitious to further his career and a philanderer with a streak of viciousness.

Martin's record compilation uncovers the untimely and violent deaths of six young women all under the care of Dr. Robert Willard. Despite the determination at the time that suicide was the cause of death while knowing the history of the good Dr. Willard and his penchant for late night visits with the young female patients, Valerie digs deeper and deeper to reach some starkly different and perilous conclusions. As she peels back layers of the circumstances surrounding these suicides, Valerie encounters an unexpected turn of events that threatens her own life!

I enjoyed the story but came away somewhat unsatiated and very hungry for more! The book is very short, just 220 pages in a trade paperback format, which did not allow for much in the way of comprehensive character development or deeper exploration of the notoriety of the Northampton State Hospital. I live in a small city just south of Northampton and if not for my personal knowledge of this psychiatric hospital from extensive media accounts, I don't think I would fully understand or appreciate the notoriety and dark history of the facility solely from the descriptions in the book. The book cover image projects a foreboding, eerie creepiness surrounding the hospital that I didn't feel that at all during this story.

I met Kate Anderson at a cultural event in April 2017 in Westfield, MA that featured a combination of gallery artists and authors. I purchased my copy of Hospital Hill at that event and had the opportunity to chat with Kate. Her enthusiasm is contagious, her smile warm and inviting. I can't wait see what she comes up with next!

For additional information about the Northampton State Hospital, check out these sites

## **Claire Gem says**

Old asylums are one of my obsessions, and this book addresses some that existed close to my home in Massachusetts. Ms. Anderson has done an outstanding job of combining bits and pieces of poignant history into an exciting tale of intrigue and suspense.

Valerie Martin spent most of her life working in Northampton Hospital, so is not hesitant when asked to go back and organize its old records before its pending demolition. But going back to a place holding so many memories for her, good and bad, stirs new emotions in Val, who had emotionally cloistered herself years ago. When she begins to uncover evidence of foul play involving the supposed suicides of several patients, Valerie dives in to uncover the truth.

The author has a wonderful, descriptive cadence to her prose, and has obviously done a great deal of research on the subject. I highly recommend this book to anyone who enjoys history, mysteries, and literary fiction.

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## **Bonnye Reed says**

XXX This was an excellent story packed with information about the birth and death of the treatment of the insane in the U.S. from the 1850's through the 1980's. Katherine Anderson based this novel on an actual institution located in Northampton, Massachusetts that operated as a mental hospital from 1858 - 1986. I was not aware that anti-psychotics were not even around until 1956 when Thorazine hit the market. Basically that treatment marked the end of the 'insane asylum'.

Katherine Anderson made this tale easily envisioned, and the search for more info on this important part of American History a necessity. I feel richer for having read this book, researching the questions Katherine Anderson posed in her novel and searching out some of the architectural designs built by Dr. Thomas Kirkbride, who was responsible for many the asylums in the US in the 1880's.

But if all you are looking for is a good mystery with a little romance and warm, believable characters, you will want to read Hospital Hill.

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## **Mike Driver says**

Hospital Hill, by Katherine Anderson, charts the return of Valerie Martin, a nurse nearing retirement, to Northampton State Hospital, after a near fifteen year absence, induced by an old colleague, Bill Dunston, who needs her help for a few months to catalogue and process old patient reports . The records all date from the period 1960 to 1979, an era with which Valerie is personally familiar, and it is not long before she begins to realise there is something darker at work within the dusty reports and the bones of the old building.

There is an extra shiver of anticipation you get when you know you are reading something this well researched and built upon the foundations of a real Institute for the Insane and Katherine Anderson clearly knows her stuff. It also helps that she is a gifted writer as she effortlessly captures the characters of Valerie and

Bill, and in flashback the enigmatic Dr Willard, as well as the Hospital itself, which looms ever present over the narrative, as she cleverly builds tension in a realistic and captivating way. Gradually the stakes are ramped up as the documents and Valerie's memories begin to coalesce around those who died and the manners of their death begin to take on more significance.

Hospital Hill is a real page turner, wonderfully descriptive of time and place. Highly Recommended.

I was provided with a free copy of this book in return for an honest review

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### **Douglas Debelak says**

Hospital Hill has a creepy darkness to it, from its name and the realization that the hospital at the top of the hill was once an insane asylum, to the mystery that begins to unfold in the basement, as old records are reviewed and a string of women inmates' deaths ruled suicides begin to show a pattern that brings that into question. It held my attention as I feared for the woman, who'd once worked the wards and was brought back after the hospital's closing to review these records, as she worked alone with growing suspicions. Who could she trust with what she found? She'd known many of the women whose records she reviewed. She also knew most of those who could possibly have perpetrated these acts, some of whom were still alive, and would not appreciate her digging into crimes they felt they'd gotten away with. And, even though he was deceased, she feared destroying the reputation and good name of the man who became her prime suspect if she was wrong. I found this to be a good and intense read. I highly recommend it.

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### **Allen says**

Rich prose, a complex main character, and strong sense of atmosphere

When I came across Anderson's Hospital Hill, I could not resist. My parents were both clinical psychologists who worked with institutionalized patients. And as a child I grew up across the street from an abandoned hospital that we used to sneak into and wander on stormy nights. Seemed like perfect prerequisites for enjoying this novel.

The writing was exquisite. Anderson's ability to cast rich prose was impressive. There were many sentences that were fresh while remaining clear and simple.

A second strength was the presentation and development of her main character. This was a complex, multi-faceted figure with internal and external motivations that logically drove the story forward.

Additionally, between the thoughtful writing and the author's clear understanding of the physical aspects of the primary setting, the novel has a very strong sense of atmosphere, very much like you are there in the story.

The two strikes against the novel, and why I won't give it 5 stars, is what I consider a highly improbable sequence of events over the last fourth of the novel, and a surprising number of typos and other gaffs. In the first instance, though, I won't spoil the story, it felt like a story that had flowed very logically and coherently suddenly veered to the improbable and fantastic enabled by the most improbable coincidences and unlikely accomplishments.

On the second count, there were a distracting number of simple typos that repeatedly tripped me up and knocked me out of the story. A few hours in the hands of a rigorous copy editor could really polish the



writing into a gem.

In sum, four stars on the strength of the writing. Rich and engaging. I'm sure as Anderson continues to write, her story telling will only get stronger.

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### **Megan says**

There are books that you read, which take you places, introduce you to people and times. Occasionally, you'll look back at the story and have flashes of the imaginings that you had whilst reading. Valerie Martin, the protagonist of this story, is so clear to me. The Northampton State Hospital, the setting of the story, is so clear to me. The 1950's, the time period that half of the story is set, is so clear to me (as well as the 1980's that the other half of the story resides). Yet, I've only ever been witness to any of these places, people, or perspectives through Katherine Anderson's beautifully haunting story.

The brilliance of Hospital Hill lies within its author's beautiful ability to capture time, place, and character. At no point does the reader question any of the unfolding events or actions because they are so kept within a certain, remarkable reality that is both researched and resilient. In fact, it is this reality that ends up being the aspect which bites the reader the hardest and makes it impossible to forget the characters, the places, the times, and the truth—the horrific allure that lies with them.

5 stars because it was chillingly amazing writing, which evolves my view on mental health through beauty and legitimacy rather than fear and indoctrination.

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