



## Back to Back

*Julia Franck*

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## **Back to Back** Julia Franck

Julia Franck's German-Book-Prize-winning novel, *The Blindness of the Heart*, was an international phenomenon, selling 850,000 copies in Germany alone and being published in thirty-five countries. Her newest work, *Back to Back* echoes the themes of *The Blindness of the Heart*, telling a moving personal story set against the tragedies of twentieth-century Germany.

*Back to Back* begins in 1954, and centers around a single family living in Berlin in the socialist East. The mother, Käthe, is a sculptor of Jewish heritage, who has been leveraging her party connections in order to get more important and significant commissions. Devoted entirely to becoming a success in the socialist state, she is a cruel and completely unaffectionate mother, putting the party above her children, who she treats as if they were adults - there is no bourgeois mollycoddling in her household. Thomas and Ella's father emigrated to West Germany after World War II, and they deeply long to see him again and dream of a life where they could be allowed to have the kind of childhood that other children enjoy. But Käthe's hard-nosed brutality - a reflection of the materialistic, unsentimental state in which she lives - means Thomas and Ella are unable to live the lives they want to - instead of his dream of becoming a writer, Thomas is forced to study geology, and do hard labor at a quarry as the practical part of his education. And Ella, meanwhile, is becoming increasingly introverted and strange - not least because the Stasi lodger the government has billeted in their home is beginning to abuse her...

Heartbreaking and shocking, *Back to Back* is a dark fairytale of East Germany, the story of a single family tragedy that reflects the greater tragedies of totalitarianism.

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