



This Is Where I Am

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Heartbreaking, uplifting and unforgettable, This is Where I Am is a tender and eye-opening novel about loss and survival, and an unlikely friendship between a Glaswegian widow and a Somali asylum seeker.

This Is Where I Am Details

Date : Published March 14th 2013 by Bloomsbury Academic (first published February 14th 2013)

ISBN : 9781408832714

Author : Karen Campbell

Format : Paperback 480 pages

Genre : Fiction, Book Club, Cultural, Africa

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Reindert Van Zwaal says

I can't really grab the essence this book in one sentence. The story is quite slow starting, which kind of matches with the process of two people, a refugee and his mentor, meeting for the first time and starting to get to know each other. During this first half of the book, this is the main thing happening: a bond being formed between two people, boundaries getting vague, trust growing. Throughout the books, there are many flashbacks of the past, which I think were sometimes a bit too tedious. But the way they just revealed a little bit more every time I think is quite well done.

The book kept my attention, and mostly from the second half onward I wanted to keep reading.

The most striking things I found were the way you can feel the tension between the two main characters and the insecurity they have towards each other. And hell, me getting goosebumps because a wee child utters a single word, WOW! However, the ending touched me less, I think because the story rushed a bit to reach a proper ending, which could have been worked out better.

All in all, a very nice read, carrying a message about human values and acceptance.

Brooke Powley says

This book was a beautifully crafted story, which was careful to show empathy for refugee's coming to live in the UK. It was written with both sensitivity and balance.

Told from the viewpoint of two main characters, a single father who is a refugee from Somalia and a middle-aged recently widowed woman. The story weaves in and out from the present and the past, delving in the issues that lead to Abdi's travel to Glasgow with his young daughter, Rebecca. I must admit, that I didn't see the end coming! Keep the tissues handy!

I am looking forward to more books by Campbell.

Mandy Setterfield says

Enjoyable book, I don't know Glasgow, but would imagine for those who do this is a great read. The quality of the writing is extremely good.

This was a 5-star book until I was 7/8ths of the way through. I felt the final part of the book was somehow unrealistic, and didn't quite fit, even though it had a happy ending.

Hayley T says

Excellent book that doesn't shy away from some difficult discussion.

I won't go too much into the plot of this story but it is about a Somalian refugee - Abdi - in Scotland and the story is told from the perspective of both the refugee and his Scottish mentor, Deborah. The switching between narration is well done and I found it a particularly effective tool in terms of both of their characterisation. You only got to understand and find out more about the characters as they did themselves

which felt a bit frustrating at the start but developed really nicely.

Other good points about the book - Abdi is not a simple refugee character who only has one emotion and the book confronts this stereotype effectively as Abdi says himself at one point 'I am not a smiling black African' and as the book develops, the many layers to his character slowly and painfully emerge. No-one in the book is presented as 'good' or 'bad', the main characters are quite self-conscious narrators and question their motives and judgement which I found interesting and fulfilling.

The story doesn't shy away from harsh details but it also doesn't revel in them which I have noticed can be a trend in 'atrocities' stories.

Some minor points that I noticed - Gamu's story started off as if it were going to be quite a significant subplot but seemed to just be left as the story ended which felt a little strange. It would have been nice for Deborah's sister and her husband to be more involved in the story as I found the scene all three of them were in quite compelling. I personally was unsure about the ending, without giving anything away, it felt a bit simplistic and easy but it didn't take anything away from the story as a whole.

All in all, excellent book that was touching without being trite.

Karyn Wolstenholme says

Just finished reading the uncorrected proof of this novel and man, this woman is an amazing story teller. I'd read that the author used to be a cop in Glasgow and did a master's in creative writing. What an interesting perspective.

I loved this story the whole way through. The narration alternates from the perspective of the mentor Deborah, a widowed, frumpy but genuinely lovable 50 something year old Glaswegian, and her Somalian Fisherman refugee mentee Abdi who has just arrived in Glasgow. Each character is the perfect blend of human and hero. I loved watching each grow and unite with the other characters. If you love the underdog or better yet a bunch of underdogs this book is for you. This book isn't rose tinted and has many moments of gritty and painful truths but its honesty makes it so so so worthwhile. Looking forward to reading the published edition in a few weeks.

Tracy says

This book has touched me profoundly.

A novel with 2 voices, an asylum seeker, and a recently bereaved widow, we see both sides of their story and how they interact and understand or, often misunderstand each other.

I always have believed that given a choice those who seek asylum would rather be in their own countries with what they know and understand, with the people they love and the culture they have been raised in.

Who would walk away from family, friends and all they know unless they were desperate or in immediate danger? The choice they have made is one of survival.

This book has confirmed that but also given me an insight to the very real tensions and realities that asylum seekers face. There is much in this book which makes you think and cringe at the way some sections of society and the press deal with the issue of refugees and asylum. (I write this knowing that I have friends and family who would close our county to refugees)

The author has obviously researched the subject and has managed to show the reader that despite popular belief the life of an asylum seeker is far from easy.

There is this (fairly long) quote by Abdi which just floored me

“It Is not your money you give to us. It is the money society, in its kindness and wisdom, has decreed we may have. It is called humanity. Do you know this? When “humanity “is a concept, it is fine, but when it is one human being deciding on another’s right to be human, it is petty and unkind”

This is an amazing book and by far the best book I have read in a long time, if you only read one book this year make it this one.

Tammy says

When I picked this book up in the local library I sat down on a chair there and started reading it straight away. And yet I wasn't sure if I wanted to take it out as the description on the back seemed a bit boring. However I told myself that any author whose writing got me reading straight away must be worth a try and anyway being a library I would be bringing it back anyway! And so I won't go into telling you too much of the story. Except to say I thought that I wouldn't be able to relate to a book set in Scotland that was about an immigrant and his daughter who was not talking and how they came to be in Glasgow and also about a middle aged woman whose husband had died and was volunteering to help refugees as a way of coping. For the story was so much more deeper and had so many more layers. It was moving and touching and challenging and really needs to be read by all politicians and anyone dismissing the refugee situation as 'not our problem'.

Val Penny says

Karen Campbell was born in Paisley and brought up in Glasgow, Scotland. Both her mother and father worked in Strathclyde Police Force and following a degree at Glasgow University, Karen also joined the police, where she met her husband. Karen studied for the Creative Writing Master's Degree at Glasgow University. She is a vegetarian and lives in Galloway with her husband and two daughters. Karen Campbell has been best known, until now, as an accomplished proponent of Tartan Noir. She wrote a series of 4 well-received police crime novels featuring her main protagonist DCI Anna Cameron. I very much enjoyed those books. So, when *This Is Where I Am* was book of the month in my book group, I was thrilled.

However, this novel is a complete departure in style and subject matter for Karen Campbell. *This Is Where I Am* is a book of two voices. It tells the story of Abdi, a Somali asylum-seeker newly arrived in Glasgow with his young daughter, and of recently widowed Deborah, who has been assigned as mentor to help them settle in. I thought the situation of the recently bereaved woman mentoring the recently arrived refugee from Somalia worked well.

This book was a beautifully crafted story, which was carefully to show empathy for refugees coming to live in the UK. It was written with both sensitivity and balance. The story weaves in and out from the present and the past, delving in the issues that lead to Abdi's travel to Glasgow with his young daughter, Rebecca but sometimes the story left me feeling flat, maybe helpless, when I felt I should have been more angry. The parallels between their fights with authority and their own individual grief also worked.

The differences in the attitudes of the Scottish people ranging from aggressive and bigoted to friendly and kind was very realistic. However, I must admit, that I did not see the end coming. I found it quite

unbelievable. It was too neat for such chaotic lives. Nevertheless, I really enjoyed This Is Where I Am and am not surprised that the novel was selected as the BBC Radio Four Book at Bedtime.

Johanna says

An interesting read to begin with, I really quite enjoyed the first half but the last half of the book took a bit of an unrealistic turn for me, seemed far fetched. Despite that the book did shine a light on what it must be like to be a refugee in Glasgow/Scotland and I really wish that had been explored even further than it was. In addition I felt it was also about 100 pages too long ?

Ann Marie says

Really enjoyed this - although some parts were acutely uncomfortable to read. Another hidden gem I'd have never picked up if not for my book group!

Marina says

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I will give rating 3,8 of 5 stars. it is interesting story about an widow woman, deborah who help Abdi, a somalian refugee to survive in scotland. they try to heal each other's wound, learn other culture, forgiveness and try to move forward..

abdi also have a daughter, rebecca who does not speak..I really hate still found many discrimination with skins

Anne says

A moving and poignant read. This is a the story of the friendship that develops between Abdi Hussain, a Somalian refugee, his daughter, Rebecca and Deborah Maxwell, Abdi's mentor, from the Scottish Refugee Council.

Abdi and Rebecca have gone through some terrible traumas before escaping from Somalia. including appalling conditions of squalor and starvation in the camps in Somalia. Not least of their heartbreak is the loss of Abdi's wife and Rebecca's mother, leading Rebecca to become withdrawn and unable to speak. They then have to contend with the difficulties in resettling in Scotland. Deborah herself has experienced tragedy in the loss of her young husband after a long illness.

They are drawn together by these circumstance and each character relates their experiences, with flashbacks from Abdi of his life in Somalia and his suffering due to the hostility he experiences when he arrives in Scotland, he feels alienated, and some of the locals are resentful. He eventually gets moved on to a safer environment, with some help from Deborah.

There are entertaining moments, there are tear inducing times, hard to believe there can be a resolution to the variety of problems they all experience, but through it all the power of the human spirit are seen. A beautifully written novel, giving an insight into the plight of the refugees, their problems, lack of financial resources and a lack of a support network and the problems faced by organisations such as the Scottish Refugee Council, attempting to support the refugees to settle and be supported in their host home.

I learned a lot from reading this amazing novel, and would recommend this book to the thoughtful reader.

Laura Anderson says

I almost gave this five stars and then I almost gave it three stars! ? for me the character development was slow but it was in pace with how a genuine relationship of this sort may develop. The characters are really interesting but it almost too long to get to the 'twist' for me. It definitely left me wanting to know what happened after- the books doesn't really end. I appreciate the subject is sensitive and maybe the book was purposefully honouring that.

But I loved visualising Glasgow through a different perspective and how these two people had some strong similarities. Other characters also encapsulate the essence of Glaswegians! At times the faux pas really made me laugh as well. Certainly worth a read.

Moira McPartlin says

I really enjoyed this book. I thought the situation of the recently bereaved woman mentoring the recently arrived refugee from Somalia worked well. The parallels between their fights with authority and their own individual grief also worked. The difference between the attitude of West of Scotland folk (aggressive/bigoted vs friendly/kind) was very realistic. So why not give it five stars?

Well,sometimes it left me feeling flat, maybe helpless, when I felt I should have been more angry. But I think the main reason I didn't give it five stars was the ending. It was too neat for such chaotic lives.

Alison Cairns says

This book is different from Karen Campbell's usual police novels, and what a wonderful read it is. I felt I became part of the world of the novel from the start - from the fact that the Glasgow story was set in the part of the city where I grew up, and I could identify landmarks, to the beautiful depiction of relationships and circumstances. You are drawn into the lives of Deborah and Abdi although never given full details - always left wanting more. While the blurb prepares the reader for some shock when Rebecca starts to talk I wasn't prepared for what it was. The relationship between Deborah and Abdi is described beautifully and then as Rebecca begins to view "Debba" increasingly as a mother figure there are some tensions introduced. I felt the relationships were very real and not over dramatised. I was left feeling I had learned a lot about the situation of asylum seekers and refugees and a lesson on acceptance of others.

A beautiful story, with enough to keep the reader gripped wondering how it will end, along with the interaction of the relationships.
