



This Must Be the Place

Anna Winger

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A charming and undeniably powerful debut novel set in Berlin about the friendship between a fading actor and a young married American woman who are both learning to live with the past.

Walter Baum has one of the most famous voices in Germany, if no longer a famous face. A former television star, he's been dubbing Tom Cruise's lines into German for fifteen years, since he returned from a failed attempt to make it as an actor in Hollywood. Now he finds himself nearing forty, alone and adrift.

In the apartment just below him, a young American woman named Hope is slipping further and further into herself. Having fled New York a month earlier to join her workaholic husband in Berlin, she finds herself more isolated than ever and unable to cope with the sense of foreboding created by the haunted city around her and the painful memories from the one she just left.

These two broken people form an unlikely friendship, at first out of loneliness, but then deepening out of genuine affinity. They are finally forced to reveal their secrets and examine their pasts, and, as a pair, they explore how to reconcile their hopes for the future with the ache of history that lingers, permanently, beneath the surface.

Funny, insightful, and moving, *This Must Be the Place* is an expertly crafted debut novel about the events that bind us together and the friendships that make and remake us whole.

This Must Be the Place Details

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From Reader Review This Must Be the Place for online ebook

Sherree Funk says

This is a very interesting book, set in the fall of 2001 in Berlin, highlighting the ongoing recovery of Berlin from years of disfunction following World WarII and the fall of the Berlin wall. Displacement and living as an outsider is a major theme of the work, and Anna Winger has sensitively approached issues that are rarely discussed. Very well-written. Excellent look into the heart of Germans of Jewish descent.

Shauna says

I liked this book. It had a nice melancholy mood running throughout. It's set in Berlin in 2001, where an American woman who's kind of unhappy forms a friendship with a German man who's kind of unhappy. I read other reviews saying that the book was boring or that nothing happened in it, but it didn't feel that way to me. The plot is low-stakes, but I thought there was still plenty going on, even if it was more internal character stuff than external plot stuff.

Cheryl says

I've lived in Germany both while the Berlin wall was up in the early 80's and later in the 90's once the wall came down. I think this book was interesting to me because of my experiences in Germany in the 80's. In the 80's REO Speedwagon was often on the radio and I laugh to hear it mentioned in the book. I could relate to Walter and his German angst - Hope's experience on the subway.... many aspects of German life.

Sonia says

I read this book because I was about to visit Berlin so I thought it a good idea. The story was okay, the relationship felt flat and I wasn't pulled into the story at all. The only thing I got out of this was a better understanding of voice over actors. I admit I did get a little excited when I turned on the TV in my Berlin hotel room to find Tom Cruise in "A Few Good Men" dubbed in German.

Olga says

This was okay. I read it after going to Berlin.

I think this was a different book than the author meant to write. I think she wanted to write a book about Hope, she really did. But Hope isn't interesting, not really. She's sad, and she's a little strong and a little falling apart, but she isn't interesting. Walter is. Walter took over the book, made it about himself.

That's why it doesn't work as well as it could have. Lovely writing, evocative setting, but the story doesn't

gel.

I did love the anecdote about getting caught not paying the fare in Berlin. I managed to avoid that while not paying for the train at all. Bad!

Wheeler says

This Must Be the Place is a well-written exercise in nothing-happens fiction.

Some may argue for the virtues of nothing-happens fiction (Ulysses) or point to other great novels by literary greats where nothing actually happens.

Kudos to those people because they are ignoring the flip-side of do-nothing fiction: the multitude of books published that are, at their core and outer edges and everywhere in between, boring. Boring, boring, boring.

Winger's entry into the genre takes place in a reunified Berlin, where she is living, partially alone, partially with her husband. He's an American, but I, and likely you, wouldn't have figured that out until halfway through. (I thought he was a German, with the italicized dialogue, and all.)

As other negative reviewers have noted, there's this thing going on between Winger and her neighbor and it never consummates.

Boring, boring, boring.

About halfway through, I jumped on Goodreads and went for the negative reviews. (I always look at negative reviews; positive reviews rarely have anything of any value. Rah rah! has no value.)

Sure enough, they told me, nothing happens. I then started skimming.

Being a former ex-pat myself, I had little sympathy for the main character. She barely goes to German class, complains that all her classmates hate her because she's both an American and a woman. Yet, she never tries to get into a different class in the same school or go to a different language school. (Berlin is a big town. I cannot fathom them having only one Volkshochschule for the cheaper people and Goethe Institutes for the wealthy.)

Also, the only former East German character is really a dick, a foil to the West German counterpart. He's all America-hating and the main character never stands up to him. Having lived with former East Germans, they might be cold, and I had the same experience when it came to other people hating American foreign policy, but I never once experienced the kind of ridiculous behavior Winger has her character encounter.

I did not suspend by disbelief.

Another thing that I did not suspend my disbelief for: the neighbor, whom in a normal novel the main character would have had an affair with, is 39. I only found this out on page 107. All other readings lend to a man in his mid-50s at the earliest.

As a former ex-pat who lived in the post-reunification former East Germany, I get a lot of the references Winger makes in her book. Cilantro? Germans hate it. (She doesn't mention the non-existence of jalapenos, or any peppers.)

"'I'll make you salsa if I ever track down cilantro in Berlin,' she said. 'I make really good salsa verde.'"

Hint: Asian stores or the Asian-run fruit/vegetable carts/stores.

Over all, not worth reading, because nothing happens. There is no great line, there is no great insight, there is no great scene. Nothing happens and it's boring. This isn't even a book where I write, "It could have been condensed to a novella or a short story," because something has to happen in a novella or a short story.

Michelle says

This is a beautiful story about an American expat in Berlin in the aftermath of 9/11. Smart, strange, surprising--a meditation on guilt and grief, and an intriguing exploration of the intersection between public events and private identity.

Libby says

Definitely felt like a first novel to me, with its ambitious preoccupations and breezy, spare writing style. It was not as substantial as I'd hoped, in terms of emotional and intellectual weight - but it was engaging, and I did enjoy escaping into Berlin and considering the city from so many different angles. Effective representation of personal and historical disorientation, which has stuck with me.

Chris says

This is a simple, lovely story about expat/pat friendship in contemporary Berlin. The characters and the city are drawn with detail and warmth. While not a feel-good cop-out, the novel still makes you feel quite good about the possibility of redemptive love, platonic or otherwise.

Marcy Dermansky says

This book was leant to me. I read it and it was easy to read but the wheels of the plot turning were a bit painful. I felt it all coming on -- and the big climax that was necessary, a confrontation between the two main characters, a sex, a refusal of sex, never happened. Hope was a difficult character to like, and if anyone should emphasize with a woman unhappy with her life in Germany it should be me.

Lance says

I read the first three chapters while drinking coffee at a bookstore and promptly bought the book. Winger writes thoughtfully and fluidly, and she draws on her perspective as an American-born journalist living in Berlin to tell an authentic story about life between two cultures seldom compared. The novel isn't only political and historical, though these are two strong points. It's also a perceptive, sometimes moving portrait

of regret and a frank consideration of what it takes to move forward.

Ben Duhl says

Snoozefest. If it wasn't for all the Tom Cruise references I would've dropped it at page 90. Hoping that something would happen when protagonists finally met kept me going. Nothing happened. Awesom

Rita says

Yes, this book took me 9 months to read. It was like 9 months of boring and 20 minutes of interest when I got to the last 2 chapters. This book will be one that falls into the abyss of books I've read but completely forget.

Emily says

Winger's familiarity with Berlin and inclusion of local color and description had me reliving my travels to the city. She tackles the German capital's hot and cold war-torn history through the stories of two unlikely friends: a former television actor who is now the German-dub voice of Tom Cruise, and an American grieving the loss of her unborn child in an unfamiliar city. While at some points slightly over-sentimental and at others slightly predictable, I enjoyed the story and characters and would recommend this book to anyone fond of German culture and its links to and exchanges with American culture.

eb says

A boring guide to Berlin crossed with accidental chick lit. Ugh.
