

All the Walls of Belfast

Sarah Carlson

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At first, Sarah Carlson's *All the Walls of Belfast* comes across as a solid variation of a meet-cute young adult romance, but Carlson's story has even more going for it. The book and its two main characters grapple with the history of violence in Northern Ireland. Their story takes place in the present day, but in a city where the Troubles are never far away.

Fiona, a teenager raised in Wisconsin, recently learned that she was born in Northern Ireland and that her mother brought her to America when she was two. She is making her first trip to Belfast to reconnect with the father and brothers she never really knew. That includes learning about her father's infamy as a prominent Irish Republican Army member and the domino effects it had on her family. Danny, who has never left Belfast, has his own challenges. His drunk and abusive father wants him to give up his dream of becoming an army nurse, drop out of school, and join a Protestant paramilitary group.

Once they meet and fall for each other, Danny and Fiona's backstories are obviously going to crash into one another, but Carlson throws in several earned surprises along the way. The treatment of the Troubles is appropriately complicated, as are the characters' views of them. And while the romance is an important story line for both teens, their family situations and plans for the future are treated with equal gravity.

Carlson alternates her chapters, with Fiona and Danny taking turns telling their story, allowing both to convey the struggles of their family situations and their feelings for one another. This is a young adult romance with real meaning behind it, and it is a welcome addition to the genre.

JEFF FLEISCHER (March/April 2019)

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