

★ North

Brad Kessler

The Overlook Press (Oct 5, 2021)

Hardcover \$26.00 (288pp)

978-1-4197-5042-7

Brad Kessler's compelling and compassionate novel *North* follows Sahro, a young Somali woman who's forced to flee to Canada to avoid deportation from the US. Detoured by a snowstorm, she becomes the troubled secret guest of a small Vermont monastery.

In this fluid tale, Sahro's hellish odyssey begins after her parents are murdered in Somalia. Her childhood is spent in a displaced state; she travels north, through Africa, South and Central America, and into the United States. Detained for over a year in bureaucratic purgatory, she is then pursued by ICE agents. A devout Muslim, she hopes to find political asylum and live without violence and fear.

Father Christopher's quest is more internalized: the abbot of the monastery, he's given to soul-searching. He's a former art student, and is kind, intelligent, and accepting of the rules of monastic life. But the priest discovers that, in order to fulfill God's wishes, both governmental and religious restrictions must sometimes be challenged. And Teddy is the monastery's groundskeeper and an Afghanistan war veteran. He lost a portion of his leg during the conflict. Still influenced by his military training, he rejects self-pity, but he is troubled by occasional uncertainties, flashbacks, and resentments.

These three stories are developed, then brought together by the curious circumstance of a springtime blizzard. Sahro is a true refugee: she cuts off her hair and hides her gender to avoid rape during her migration. Recognizing her plight and the intensity of her will, Father Christopher and Teddy choose humanity over immigration protocol. With spy-like subterfuge, they help Sahro continue her northward trek.

Taut with suspense and eloquent insights, *North* is a novel of extraordinary scope. It travels from bitter African droughts to snowy cloisters in Vermont, reaching toward the verdant grass and "milk-blue sky" of Sahro's Canadian sanctuary.

MEG NOLA (September / October 2021)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.