

Undiscovered Country

Jennifer Gold

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After her mother's death, Cat decides to defer her admission to Stanford and flee her grief by joining (the amusingly named) Students Without Boundaries and traveling to Calantes, a South American country that has just experienced a civil war. While Cat grows close to a local boy, Rafael, who is dealing with his own grief and ambitions, she also meets others like her who have fled their lives in order to try to find some mix of redemption and achievement.

Written in the first person, *Undiscovered Country* features a voice that is strong, sharp, and smart. The book alternates between two sections, "Before" and "After," with "Before" showing glimpses of Cat's life during her mother's battle with cancer, and "After" showing Cat's new adventure in Calantes. While the switches occasionally slow down the pace of the book, they do offer a deeper look into Cat's relationships and help give life to the grief she is experiencing.

The existence of a student group in a war-torn country—a group that attracts the sort of privileged youth seen in the novel—seems dubious, but the novel builds up to an intriguing moral dilemma. Cat's own grief mixes with her sense of right and wrong, and what results is a compelling story where Cat must pick apart romantic feelings, ethical obligations, and even her own sanity in order to arrive at a crucial decision.

Undiscovered Country is first and foremost a novel about grief and new beginnings, but it is also a thoughtful coming-of-age tale about finding purpose even in the midst of despair.

STEPHANIE BUCKLIN (March/April 2017)

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