**Clarion Review**

Body, Mind & Spirit

**Where Am I?**
Benvinda Marques
Xlibris Corporation
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Two Stars (out of Five)

The arduous journey of a businessman with cancer acts as a spiritual guide in this thought-provoking book.

Benvinda Marques's *Where Am I?*, the dramatic story of a powerful, philandering businessman afflicted with penile cancer at the height of his career, is a serious tale of spiritual failure and redemption that consists primarily of dialogue. There is no description of time or place, and there are no portraits of the characters painted in the narrative. Much is left to the reader's imagination. What is presented is essentially a running discourse on the meaning of life and spiritual development.

The book opens with a discussion between the main character and either God or the devil. At times it is unclear which is which. After two chapters, the reader discovers that all of this is a dream, and the story begins. The businessman undergoes surgery meant to remove his cancer, but it results in the removal of part of his penis and loss of a good deal of his feeling of self-worth. How he reconstructs and improves his life and his relationship with his long-suffering and ultra-understanding wife is the meat of this allegory.

There is an inconsistent use of quotation marks throughout the book, so often it is not easy to determine who is speaking. Fortunately, most of the scenes take place as conversations involving only two characters. A reader who gets lost in the flow of the dialogue can usually pick up the thread again within a paragraph or two.

Some passages will perplex. The businessman meets a waitress who turns out to be a spiritual guide. At one point, she asks if he needs something to eat and drink. Declining, he says, "I just wanted to have some air, and a nice coffee served by a pretty waitress can only but do you good." A few lines later, she replies, "If you like to have a chat, it has to be after work

otherwise I will soon be sucked because of you." The reader is left wondering whether this use of the word "sucked" is a typographical error or a strange play on words.

Marques leaves the reader wondering how far the businessman has gone in his spiritual development. By his own admission, he is greedy and self-absorbed at the beginning of the story, thinking little of others and devoting his efforts to making money and pursuing women. By the end of the book, after recovering from surgery, he allegedly becomes a new man and re-establishes his relationship with his wife. When his wife tells him she is pregnant with his baby, his immediate reaction indicates his development may not be as advanced as first presented: "The baby you are carrying cannot be mine, and you have not consulted me before on the matter of whether I would be happy to father someone else's child."

Although getting there can be rough sledding, there is no denying that *Where Am I?* contains a thought-provoking message, that loving relationships and forgiveness can bring healing and redemption.

*John Senger*