



## Half the World Away

*Cath Staincliffe*

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Newly graduated photography student Lori Maddox spends the year after university travelling and visits China where she finds work as a private English tutor. Back in Manchester, her parents Jo and Tom, who separated when Lori was a toddler, follow her adventures on her blog, 'Lori In The Orient'.

Suddenly communication stops and when the silence persists a frantic Jo and Tom report her missing. It is impossible to find out anything from 5,000 miles away so they travel out to Chengdu, a city in the south-western province of Sichuan, to search for their daughter.

Landing in a totally unfamiliar country, with no knowledge of the customs or language, and receiving scant help from the local authorities, Jo and Tom are forced to turn detective, following in their daughter's footsteps, tracing the people she mentioned in her posts, interviewing her friends, colleagues and students. It's an unbearably difficult challenge and, as the days pass, the fear that Lori is lost for good grows ever larger.

## Half the World Away Details

Date : Published June 4th 2015 by Constable

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Author : Cath Staincliffe

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Genre : Mystery, Suspense

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## From Reader Review Half the World Away for online ebook

### Karen says

Wouldn't this be a parent's worst nightmare. Your daughter goes travelling and is seemingly having the time of her life and enjoying new experiences when suddenly all contact is lost – no-one has heard from her, she has just disappeared. What on earth would you do and what lengths would you go to find answers?

This is the horrifying and desperate situation that parents Jo and Tom find themselves in. They are not together; they parted when Lori was very young and Jo is now married to Nick but they find themselves trying to put their past hurt and differences aside in the hunt for their daughter.

I've always enjoyed Cath Staincliffe's books and this certainly didn't disappoint. One of the aspects of her writing that I love is that her characters and storylines are just so believable with people facing dilemmas and family difficulties that could happen to anyone. Her characters are not perfect – they have insecurities and flaws just as any of us but she effortlessly weaves these in-depth characterisations into a story filled with tension and emotion. We share the frustration of Jo and Tom having to deal with the cultural differences, the language issues, the apparent inertia of the Chinese authorities and of procedures that seem so alien to our own. One or two of the friends that Lori has made seem to be behaving suspiciously and are trying to avoid Jo and Tom - do they know something?

This is not a fast paced thriller but very much a character driven story of two parents desperate to find their daughter, battling against foreign bureaucracy and sometimes unwittingly falling foul of local laws. Having said that, the suspense of wondering what has happened to Lori will keep you turning the pages! The vivid descriptions of the sights and sounds of the Chinese landscape bought the story to life and I particularly enjoyed the little insights telling of Chinese customs and culture.

The story is not just about Jo and Tom however. Jo's marriage to Nick is in a very fragile state when Lori disappears and her feelings of guilt at being so far away only intensify when problems occur at home and their two young sons, Finn and Isaac need their mother.

The first part of the story, recreates some of Lori's blog posts – this is a very creative way of bringing Lori to the reader's mind and giving a feel as to the vibrancy of her character. During her search, Jo goes over these words again and again, trying to find some clue as to her whereabouts.

This story cements Cath Staincliffe's position as one of my favourite authors, it's a gripping and thought provoking read – and I can thoroughly recommend it.

My review copy was received from the publisher via Netgalley.

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### Claire says

Review: Half the World Away by Cath Staincliffe Published by: Constable (4th June 2015), hardcover edition: ISBN-13: 9781472117977

Source: Copy provided by publisher, via NetGalley, in return for my unbiased review

## Synopsis:

Newly graduated photography student Lori Maddox spends the year after university travelling and visits China where she finds work as a private English tutor. Back in Manchester, her parents Jo and Tom, who separated when Lori was a toddler, follow her adventures on her blog, 'Lori In The Orient'.

Suddenly communication stops and when the silence persists a frantic Jo and Tom report her missing. It is impossible to find out anything from 5,000 miles away so they travel out to Chengdu, a city in the south-western province of Sichuan, to search for their daughter.

Landing in a totally unfamiliar country, with no knowledge of the customs or language, and receiving scant help from the local authorities, Jo and Tom are forced to turn detective, following in their daughter's footsteps, tracing the people she mentioned in her posts, interviewing her friends, colleagues and students. It's an unbearably difficult challenge and, as the days pass, the fear that Lori is lost for good grows ever larger.

## My Review:

Having previously read several books by the same author, I was delighted when this title became available on NetGalley.

I've just finished reading and I'm in awe - this book is breathtakingly crafted. From the very beginning, as we are introduced to Lori and her family, to the bittersweet conclusion, I was utterly enthralled. The plot is like a guitar string being wound ever tighter, the tension increasing with every turn. I simply couldn't stop reading.

It is shocking and suspenseful, with developed characters you take to your heart from the outset. Intelligently written and simply unputdownable.

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## Amanda - Mrs B's Book Reviews says

\*3.5 stars

Cath Staincliffe brings her readership a scenario which is possibly every parent's worst nightmare. The parents of Lori Maddox, find their bright young daughter, currently undertaking a gap year travelling in China has gone missing. With distance and cultural differences coming into play, Cath Staincliffe highlights the complexities of locating the whereabouts of a missing young woman, thousands of miles from home.

Half the World Away is the story of freshly graduated photography student Lori Maddox. After the completion of her university studies, Lori has decided to undertake a common right of passage. Lori has chosen to embark on a working holiday based in Chengdu, a city in the province of Sichuan, China. Lori has managed to secure a lucrative post in China, working as a private English tutor. Lori keeps in touch with her family based back in Manchester, England, via a blog she has created called 'Lori In The Orient'. Lori has always taken care to ensure that she keeps in regular contact with her family, updating her blog frequently to ease their mind. When all communication ceases, Lori's parents, Tom and Jo, go out of their minds with worry. With distance playing a huge part in the early days of the investigation into Lori's disappearance, Tom and Jo make the trek to China to help find their daughter. Soon after landing in a country that is far removed from their own, Tom and Jo encounter many roadblocks in the search for Lori. Communication and language are an overwhelming barrier to begin with. They also find the local authorities show disinterest in

solving Lori's case. These factors result in Jo and Tom taking matters into their own hands, as they find themselves playing an active role in investigating Lori's disappearance. Questioning anyone who came into contact with Lori during her time in Chengdu, Tom and Jo begin to build a complex picture of Lori's movements just prior to her disappearance. As each day passes and no sign of finding Lori, Jo and Tom fear the worst for their beloved daughter.

Half the World Away is a taut, suspenseful and cutting tale that delves in the dangers faced by travellers entering a foreign country. Staincliffe's story is an emotional one, also highlighting the lengths parents will go to in order to save their child from harm. It demonstrates how strong the protective bond is for a mother and a father, despite the fact that their child has flown the nest - so to speak.

What I enjoyed most about Half the World Away was the strong sense of place that comes from Staincliffe's book. The action and crime based sections of the novel, centered on Lori's disappearance, are focussed on a part of the world I have scant prior knowledge of. Staincliffe worked to build my knowledge of a part of the world that is far removed to my own, tying in a contrasting culture, language barriers, bureaucratic red tape and questionable police work in relation to Lori's case. These factors of the story exacerbate the difference between the British and Chinese cultures.

The search for Lori in China is alternated with Lori's parent's issues on the domestic front, back home in Britain. These segments demonstrate how issues from these divorced parents suddenly come back to the surface when an unexpected tragedy strikes. Through Jo's story in particular, we see how a mother is faced with an agonising decision of choosing between her children when a second tragedy strikes her family. What emerges from Staincliffe's novel is an emotionally fraught and though provoking tale. The situation faced by these parents begs the reader to slip in their rather uncomfortable shoes and assess what they would do in such a scenario. The choices are confronting and ignited a level of anguish in this reader.

A heart wrenching crime that has occurred in a deeply unfamiliar culture forms the crux of Cath Staincliffe's gripping novel, Half the World Away. It sure made me approach any future travel plans to this area of China or another part of the world with a sense of trepidation. A recommended read.

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### **Bill Kupersmith says**

This was my first Cath Staincliffe read & I had very mixed responses. As a suspense thriller its basic plot is excellent & the principal characters were well developed. Jo, the mum of the missing Lori, is a very sympathetic narrator. Altho' Lori is absent from much of the book, we really like her & her 'Lori in the Orient' blog. The author also dealt well with Lori's sexual orientation. It's excellent how Lori's being a lesbian & her relationship with her Australian lover Dawn were casually treated as routine aspects of Lori's life, simply accepted by her parents with neither misgivings nor Pflag enthusiasm. I wanted to hear more about Lori's relationship with Dawn, whom I also quite liked in the little we see of her - Lori followed her to China but they broke up on the eve of Lori's disappearance. I wondered why it didn't work out for them. Instead we learn a lot more than I wanted to know about Jo's relationships with Tom, Lori's father, & with her current, both of whom I found repulsive. I wish Jo had left the ex in England. That Jo & Tom should have a so-to-speak rematch bothered me, not morally but aesthetically (view spoiler), tho' I quite understood Jo's need for intimacy when in such a fragile emotional state. But that attractive man from the British consulate would have been a much better choice for a fling. Had Jo been a single mum, this book would have been a lot shorter & more enjoyable, & sacrificed nothing essential to the real plot. This book's BMI exceeds 30 & long after the real story finishes, we have wrap things up with a boring account of what happened with

Jo's ex, her current, & her other children 'with' (as we now say) her current. The other problem with the book were the endless descriptions of the Chinese economy, architecture, cuisine, landscape, transportation system (should you find yourself needing to take the bus in Chengdu, you'll know how to pay your fare), all of which read like an article from one of those in-flight magazines you find in the seat-back pouch. Altho' carefully selected details add a lot to atmosphere, here it almost felt the author was being paid by the word.

The Chinese persons, especially the police & the authorities, are very 'foreign'. It fascinates me that those who most vociferously support 'cultural diversity' are appalled when people in other parts of the world actually think & act differently than us. The local authorities seeming obsession with saving the face of their city of Chengdu as a safe place for visitors is an obstacle to Lori's mum & dad's efforts to publicise their daughter's disappearance but (view spoiler) . . . they go all out for maximum publicity, just like politicians everywhere. The depiction of Lori's friends in the Chengdu young ex-pat community was believable too. Jo should not have been surprised @ the diffident way they treated Lori's absence; nomadic young people travelling & doing casual work in exotic places - language teachers, barmen & barmaids, ski patrol, & yacht crew - move on all the time, esp. as they drift in & out of relationships.

Listening whilst travelling, I quite enjoyed Jo's Manchester dialect but one character's American accent sounded unconvincing to me. Pronounced 'garage' to rhyme with 'carriage', not 'mirage' (which I believe was once the high-class English pronunciation too). American idiom wasn't quite right either, a real American would have called an untidy apartment a 'dump' not a 'tip' ( a 'tipper lorry' is a 'dump truck' in America). Wonder if the voice of Dawn, Lori's Australian lover, would sound as slightly off to an Aussie as Bradley's supposedly Midwest dialect to me.

Cath Staincliffe is clearly a highly successful professional with avid followers. That she should sacrifice aesthetic quality for volume is a perfectly fair choice. But as a reader who expects & desires the same aesthetic satisfaction in crime novels that others claim to derive from 'literary fiction', I shall give this one three stars & regret the time lost I could have been listening to Sandy Denny downloads on the iPhone instead.

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### **sue says**

Cath Staincliffe is a well developed author that can get your attention from the very start.

If you had an adult child who wanted to travel, would you stop them? No. Her step dad was very encouraging of her getting 'life' experiences. Her Mother too, but of course us Mums would be saying "Stay in touch"

"Be careful, but enjoy yourself" "Let me know how you are"  
And such things like this.

Lori, their daughter has just graduated and wants to take her photography expertise and make use of it travelling to China. Just think of all the beautiful experiences she can have there and all those photo's she can take.

Waving her off was very hard for her Mom, but us Moms have to let our children flee the nest and after all, Lori has been away at University, but she did come home now and again, much more than she will be from

half the world away!

How would you feel if your daughter or son was half the world away from you and where they usually kept in contact, suddenly, you cannot reach them?

What if you were following their blog about their trip and suddenly days go by without any posts?  
Text messages not being read let alone being replied to.

You would tell yourself, just wait a little time. See if I am not over reacting.

But then.....

Your instincts tell you...

This is not normal. I "feel" something is wrong.

Your worse fear has come true.....

### **SHE IS MISSING**

The very tense moments of this is so spell binding. I found it literally hard to break myself away from these pages when the intensity warmed up.

The author writes with such feeling, such emotion, you feel you are experiencing what these parents are experiencing.

Yes it has TWIST and yes it has TURNS and unexpectedly, you do not know which way it is going to go.

Will she be found?

Will she be found alive?

What I loved about this also, was the telling of how others reacted when they knew Lori was missing.

Also, that Lori is not missing in the UK she is missing in another country altogether and of course, they have their own ways of doing things which just doesn't seem feasible or acceptable at times.

Can you tell I liked this book :)

Its a no brainer, I would definitely say ONE CLICK this, you would miss out on a brilliant read if not.

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*Thank you to Little, Brown Book Group UK via Net Galley for early copy*

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### **LucyLui's Reviews says**

Half The World Away by Cath Staincliffe

Title - Half The World Away

Author - Cath Staincliffe

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Genre - #Mystery #Suspense

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ISBN - 1472117980

After graduating, photography enthusiast Lori Maddox sets off to do some travelling, she ends up in China where she decides to become a private English teacher. Her parents Tom and Jo follow her adventures through a blog Lori is keeping online. When a few days go by and Lori doesn't update her blog or reply to any e-mails or phone calls from her parents Jo and Tom decide to report her missing to the Manchester police, who involve the Chinese police. After a week of not hearing anything, Jo and Tom decide its time to fly to China to join the search for their daughter. Can they find her in time?

This is the second book I have read by Cath Staincliffe now and I must say I am now hooked on her books, I have become one of her biggest fans. This story really tugs at your heartstrings. You really feel for Tom and Jo and you find yourself getting really frustrated with the Chinese police for not doing a very good job and then even more so when Jo and Tom are arrested.

I found I didn't like Nick as a character and would have preferred to see Jo and Tom reconcile. I felt Nick was a rather selfish man, only thinking of himself when Jo's daughter is missing in a foreign country. I didn't think he was very supportive at all. Although I did feel sorry for him when Jo and Tom slept together behind his back.

I thought Lori was a wonderful character, strong and quirky and in many ways, she reminded me of myself, I found I could relate to her a lot which made for a good read.

I really did enjoy this book. I listened to the audiobook and found I was taking every opportunity to listen to it, at bedtime, while doing the housework, in the shower. Whenever I could listen I would.

Praise yet again for Cath Staincliffe.

Rating - 5 \*

Would I Read Again? - Yes

Would I Recommend? - Yes

Would I read other books by the same author? - Definitely

Reviews for this book can be found on:

Amazon (UK) under Lu's Reviews

Goodreads,

Net Galley (If a NetGalley Book)

My Blogs at <http://www.readingbeyondobsession.co.uk/>  
[www.lusreviewsblog.wordpress.com](http://www.lusreviewsblog.wordpress.com)

Links to this review can be found at:

Twitter: @lusreviews

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Instagram: lusreviews

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## **Elaine says**

When Jo's daughter Lori goes on a gap year trip to China she is like any other mother. She wants her daughter to live life to the full but at the same time she is a mother, and she worries. She keeps an eye on the online blog that Lori sets up for her trip and is always relieved to see an entry or to receive an email or text from her. But, there comes a time when communications cease and the blog is not updated and she cannot contact Lori by phone or email.

The story isn't about Lori per se, although obviously she plays a huge part in the book, it is the story of Jo and her family – ex husband and Lori's father Tom, her second husband Nick and their two young sons Finn and Isaac. It is about the effect that Lori's disappearance has on them and the author has done a fantastic job of particularly showing things from a mother's point of view. If I could have put myself in Jo's shoes I would have been asking exactly the same questions: Is there something wrong? Is it too soon to alert the authorities? Just like Jo, I would have been on a plane to China to get answers from the authorities and to find my daughter myself.

The book is extremely descriptive and China is really brought to life – the colours, the smells, the people, the sights and sounds. It all felt very realistic as we watched Jo and Tom manoeuvre their way through the Consulate and dealing with the Police Superintendent and their total bewilderment at the seemingly lack of action by the authorities. Is it just their way of doing things or are they trying to hide something? I could really feel their frustration, not just in a foreign country with a language barrier, but in one with a culture that must have seemed totally alien at times.

It is a really good read that really drew me in as I identified with Jo. I thoroughly enjoyed it and find it hard to put down. As I said it is a very descriptive book and there were just a couple of times that I thought it became a bit too descriptive and I did skim a couple of pages here and there, but that was only a couple of times. On the whole I really enjoyed the book. However, I do have one complaint to make and that is to Jo herself – Jo, darling, don't plant out your bedding plants in April. It is far too early and the frost will kill them.

Many thanks to the publisher for the review copy.

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## **Dale Harcombe says**

Lori Maddox takes a trip overseas and ends up in China. She starts to blog about her experience. Then suddenly the blog posts stop and her mother Jo cannot get in touch with her by phone. What has happened? What would you do if your daughter was overseas and all communication ceased? Jo and her ex-husband Tom decide they need to go over to China as the local police don't appear to be taking the matter as seriously as they would like. So they travel to Chengdu to look for Lori and find out for themselves what is going on. The situation is complicated by the language barrier and the need for an interpreter. Nick, Jo's second husband, who has recently been retrenched, stays home with their two young sons, Finn and Isaac. So, begins a nightmare time for this family. Given the subject, this book reeled me in from the beginning, and yet, oddly, I didn't quite connect with Jo as much as I'd expected to. I found some of her behaviour strange. Then, about three quarters of the way through the book I felt like I had been punched in the stomach. And no, I am not going to tell you why. You'll just have to read the book. But know that from that point on, I

couldn't turn the pages fast enough. It is an emotive read.

One thing I particularly liked was the way the author made China come alive so I could see and smell it and taste it. The scene with the cockroach had me squirming in my chair. China is as much a character as any of the people in this story. The author presents a good picture of another culture and the attitudes of its people. There was a bit of language in the novel it but not overly peppered with it.

This is my first experience of this author and I suspect it will not be my last.

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### **Rachel Hall says**

Cath Staincliffe can write a police procedural novel to compare with the very best of the genre, but more recently her offerings have brought something different to the world of crime fiction and tackled emotive topics through a comprehensive range of angles. I listened to the audiobook of *The Silence Between Breaths*, released in 2016, and was gripped by how Staincliffe delivered a powerful and immensely brave story of eight strangers on a train and a suicide bomber that sits amongst their midst. Delivering the contrasting life stories, opinions and subsequent crisis management quickly made for an immersive tale and the fallout was handled realistically, confronting the events and never opting for platitudes. One of the most poignant analyses of the situation came from the younger sister of the suicide bomber and I found myself looking through new eyes, and considering other outlooks on the same scenario. *Half The World Away* offers a similar treatment of travelling twenty-three-year old Lori Maddox ceasing communications and going off the radar in the south-west Sichuan province and her parent's ensuing voyage overseas to bring their daughter home.

Beginning in September with mother, Jo and father, Tom dispatching their daughter, Lori, to the airport ahead of ten weeks planned travels with her two friends through Thailand and Vietnam, the floodgates are already open for pensive Jo. Returning home to her other two children and husband of eleven years, Nick, she wants to wallow in her sadness, weep and get drunk but instead she has her two much younger children, Finn and Isaac, waiting for their dinner, bath and then bed. Life never stops for working mum Jo but having brought up Lori as a single mother, with erratic help and numerous disappointments from Nick, not known for his reliability she has handled the lions share of the workload. Kept updated on Lori's exploits via her blog, *Lori on The Ori-ent*, complete with photos, thoughts and insights on the culture and atmosphere she encounters, the family are ever eager to hear her stories. As the new year turns Lori emails with a change of plans, intending to spend a year in the Chengdu province of China (known for its pandas) and travelling with Aussie and new girlfriend, Dawn. She soon has news of a year long work visa and a job as an English tutor. Initially overwhelmed, with very few non-Chinese in Chengdu, it does not take Lori long to make friends. Jo's initial disappointment gives way to her understanding that beholden to no one, this is the only time when Lori will be free of responsibility and able to expand her horizons. For Jo things aren't so simple with two boys under ten, the younger exhibiting a darker, petulant streak and at loggerheads with father, Nick tensions at home run high. Angered by Jo undermining him in front of the children, Nick is already tetchy only for a company merger to leave him redundant and withdrawn. In this midst of this drama all contact from Lori suddenly ceases and Jo and Tom realise how powerless they are to influence events in Chengdu and left frustrated by the necessary hurdles in handling such an enquiry they do what every devoted parent and determine to bring Lori home.

Jo takes the decision to report Lori missing after failing to make contact for eleven days but there is limited that the UK police can do when Lori has gone missing in a foreign jurisdiction. Restricted to checking for recent activity on Lori's bank account and mobile prior to giving Jo the go ahead to contact the Foreign and Commonwealth Offices and asking them to liaise with the Chinese Public Security Bureau on their behalf,

the UK police have their hands tied. As the wheels slowly grind, Jo and Tom are frustrated by the seeming lack of urgency and take the momentous decision to journey to Chengdu. Some excellent research has gone into this novel and it is clear that Staincliffe must be familiar with the locality of Chengdu and have taken the time to observe procedures and attitudes in China. Charity Missing Overseas discuss press handling, opening a hotline and the consulate, Peter Dunne, brings the situation even more brutally home with a request for something containing Lori's DNA. From the first tentative worries it is only a short journey to the things that break a parent's heart are glimpsed in the cold light of day. Forced to use the consulate as an envoy liaising with the man in charge of the investigation, Superintendent

Yin, it quickly becomes clear that Jo and Tom are in their hands, and any interference will most definitely not further their cause. Added to this is the reluctance of the locals to be connected to any potential sources of trouble, but Jo and Tom take matters into their own hands to discover the truth.

Staincliffe does a superb job of conveying the vibrancy and lifestyle of the natives of Chengdu where breathtaking scenery and a vibrant culture sit hand in hand, with an property boom ongoing. The ever articulate Cath Staincliffe balances the visceral pain of a parent with the procedural aspects of such an investigation right through to the aftermath and picking up the pieces. This is not a breakneck thriller, but it is in an intelligent enlightening and honest account of the horror of a mother fearing for her daughter as real life back home grinds relentlessly on. The aftermath is handled exceptionally well and this is an informative and emotive story from the excellent Cath Staincliffe. Real people and real stories are her forte.

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### **Nicola Gipson says**

Lorelei (Lori) Maddox a newly graduated photography student decides to spend the year after graduating travelling in the Far East.

She eventually ends up in China in Chengdu a city in the south western province of Sichuan working as a private English tutor.

Her parents Jo and Tom ,back in Manchester England ,who seperated when Lori was a toddler, keep in touch with their daughter by following her online blog 'Lori in the Orient'

When all communication suddenly stops Jo and Tom become increasingly frantic deciding to contact the local police. However from five thousand miles away feeling more and more helpless they decide to make the long trip to China to search for Lori themselves.

I thoroughly enjoyed ' Half the World Away ' by Cath Staincliffe. The author takes you on a gripping ride with the parents as they find themselves having to deal with an unfamiliar language, customs and police force in their quest to discover what has happened to Lori.

I can't even begin to imagine the terrible despair you would feel as a parent trying to discover what had happened to your child in such terrifying circumstances.

This is my first book by Cath Staincliffe and I really appreciated all the hard work and research she undertook writing this story. I look forward to reading more from her in the future.

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## **Virginie (chouettblog) says**

Prior to “Half The World Away”, I was not familiar with Cath Staincliffe work. However after this read, I feel the urge to visit her back catalogue, but before I do that, let’s talk about this story which is pretty much every parent’s nightmare.

“Half The World Away” takes you into the life of an average British family, with the particularity of being recomposed, and I choose to highlight this fact as this element plays an integral part in the story.

Meet Jo and Nick, who have two children Finn and Isaac. Jo was previously married to Tom and they have a lovely daughter together Lorelei, which this piece is mainly about.

Shortly after graduating, Lorelei better known as Lori decides to travel and see the world with some friends. After a few stops on her way to China, she decides to extend her stay and settle there while teaching English to willing Chinese natives...but then, Lori disappears. Jo and Tom whose dealings only centred around Lori and became few and far between as Lori grew older are now on their way to China in the hopes to find their daughter.

After turning the last page of the book, I find the answer to the question of liking or not liking the book not a simple one, probably because it is the wrong question. Matters of children disappearances are so heart wrenching, but to have children disappearing abroad adds another layer of emotional anguish to an already very distressing situation.

While reading, I kept thinking, thank God it’s only fiction!!! But then it isn’t!!! The author told the story of so many families around the world and gave us the opportunity to walk in their shoes for one moment. We get to share in their struggle, their helplessness and their dealings with foreign authorities whose main concerns can sometimes be more about preserving their public image in the eye of the people they govern and the international community, than dealing with the task at hand.

This piece was made all the more real as its timeline is filled with very recent events in 2014 such as the disappearance of Malaysian Airlines flight MH370 and the kidnapping of the 200 Nigerian girls to name but a few.

This book is an injection of a heavy dose of fictional reality however expertly told as Cath Staincliffe just kept it real all the way. Even when reaching the final denouement whether happy or sad, life went on in a manner that remained true to the characters.

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## **RitaSkeeter says**

I rarely feel the need for half stars, but this book is more than a three so **3.5 stars** it is.

This was an absorbing and gripping novel. It's power isn't in fast paced action, but rather in the building tension in the story as the characters become increasingly desperate and frustrated. It was hard to not flip to the last page to find out what happens, such was the level of tension (I resisted though).

This wasn't a story about Lori, the young woman who goes missing. This was the story of her family as they

try to find her, grappling with the added complications of being in a country where they don't speak the language, and where the customs and mores of the country are unfamiliar to them. I found it hard not to judge the mother and father at times for their western bias and lack of respect for Chinese procedures. But really, easy for me to judge when I'm not in their shoes. I'm sure if I were in their position I'd be doing the same or worse.

For me, once a key plot point was reached at around 4/5 of the way into the book, it lost power for me. The tension left, and what was left was a deflated feeling along with the thought of 'why hasn't this ended?'. Probably similar to the way some of the characters were feeling. I get why the author did this, given knowing Lori's fate doesn't end the nightmare, however it did drag and pulled the story down.

All in all though, a very solid read.

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## **Michael says**

Lori Maddox, fresh from graduating in photography, decides to take a gap year travelling through Asia with friends. Her parents, Jo and Tom who have been separated since Lori was a young child, follow her adventures through the blog 'Lori in The Orient', email and Skype calls, with all seeming to be going well. For Jo who is now married to Nick and has two young boys, Isaac and Finn there is a sense of both worry and pride. Despite disappointments, like when Lori informs Jo she will not be coming home for Christmas and then it may be some time before she returns after taking a job in the Chinese city of Chengdu teaching English, her parents are content as long as the updates keep rolling in.

On April 4, Lori's communications stop. When nearly two weeks passes with still no updates, Jo and Tom are beside themselves with panic and report Lori missing to the local Police. The two will realize soon that if they want to find out what has happened then they will need to hop on a plane for Chengdu. Once there, with the help of the charity, Missing Overseas and a representative of the British Consulate Jo and Tom begin interviewing friends, handing out pamphlets and talking to the police. It soon becomes clear though that procedures in China are much different to the UK, much to the frustration of Jo and Tom, who feel like they are receiving scant help from authorities who do not want to damage the country's good name with foreigners.

In desperation Jo and Tom will take matters into their own hands in a bid to find out the truth, no matter how awful that could be. For Jo as the days go by, her despair of what could have happened to her precious daughter Lori inevitably starts to take its toll. These are magnified when it is confirmed that Lori has not left the country and has not accessed money since April 7. The very real thought that she could have met with foul play, almost too much to bear. With Lori's friends and people she has been teaching giving little information, they will go to great lengths to find Lori, while treading a fine line with the authorities.

Narrated by Jo, *Half The World Away*, is an emotionally engaging drama mystery about a parent's worst nightmare. It is impossible not to feel sympathy for Jo as she battles her thoughts of the great unknown with Lori while missing her family back home. The mental effects of Jo's absence and the worry of not knowing what is happening so far away are also there for all to see with Nick, who does his best in his own way to not to fall apart. Written from a mother's perspective you can feel Jo's distress, wanting nothing more to hold her daughter in her arms and save her. Written in a way that keeps the reader on the edge of their seat, with plenty of twists and turns and with wonderfully vivid descriptions of China, this book is an easy recommendation for anyone after an intelligent page turner.

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## **Joanne D'Arcy says**

Imagine your daughter taking a year out and going to travel, finding she likes China and decides to stay longer.

Your contact is through the wonders of technology, Skype, email, scant phone calls and watching what she writes on her blog.

Then the contact stops. The emails stop, the phone just rings, the blog posts cease. You know the exact date and time you last heard anything.

How long before you do anything?

Lori is the daughter and Jo her mother, Tom her father, long since divorced in Cath Staincliffe's new novel which is so wrought with tension and emotion, I read it within two days. Something about the storyline, the characters and the vivid writing drew me right in. I was learning something new at every page as I tried to make sense of what was happening to Jo and Tom as they are half the world away from their daughter.

Travelling to China seems to be the only way to further the progress of making contact with Lori. Jo now has to make a choice, as she will now be half the world away from her two younger children and Nick her husband. She leaves at a crucial point in their marriage and family life.

It is now Jo who is making all the contact through the wonders of technology. How can she possibly spilt herself in two?

In China, Jo and Tom face suspicion and antipathy about their cause. The police seem to be doing nothing, the consulate the channel through which to communicate, just tells them to wait and see. The waiting is becoming unbearable, the system so different from the west, the language, the culture, the heat, the smells, the landscape, the understanding of a new world.

Despite all this Jo and Tom come to a decision and create their own destiny. Their only aim to find their daughter.

To say any more will stop you going and reading this book, of which you must read. It was a fascinating read, and had me wrung out emotionally by the end. What made it all the more fascinating, was the unknown, we shared reading Lori's blog posts and just as Jo and Tom did, they abruptly stop.

As readers we simply have no idea what has happened. There are no clues. And what made this more interesting, the book did not finish at the end. A concept difficult to explain without having actually read it, but you get to see the whole circle and whilst the actual end leaves you with more questions than answers, it gave me one clear answer. You can actually be half the world away from someone even if you are in the same continent, country, county, town, street or home.

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Simply read this book.

## **Tracey Walsh says**

This story kept my heart hostage all the time I was reading it - and I'm sure it won't let go for a while.

"Newly graduated photography student Lori Maddox spends the year after university travelling and ends up in China where she finds work as a private English tutor. Back in Manchester, her parents Jo and Tom, who separated when Lori was a toddler, follow her adventures on her blog, 'Lori In The Orient'. But then all communication stops...so they are compelled to travel out to Chengdu, a city in the south-western province of Sichuan, to search for their missing daughter...It's an unbearably difficult and heartbreaking challenge and, as the days pass, the fear that Lori is lost to them for ever becomes harder to ignore..."

The author has created a family that feels as real as your relatives or neighbours. While the main plot concerns Lori, missing in China, we also become involved in the lives and everyday problems of all the family.

The depth of research is impressive - although I know next to nothing about China and its customs I was fascinated by the insight into the customs and nature of the people Jo and Tom interacted with in Chengdu. A highly recommended read. A big change from my usual crime fiction / psychological thrillers but one that I found captivating and powerful.

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