Any Place I Hang My Hat : A Novel by
Susan Isaacs

It's hard to believe that over 25 years have passed....

No matter which side of the nature/nurture debate you're on, Amy Lincoln's prospects do not look good. Her mother abandoned her when she was ten months old (just a couple of months after Amy's father went off to serve his first prison term), leaving her in the care of Grandma Lil, who shoplifts dinner on the way home from her job as a leg waxer to the rich and refined. When Amy is fourteen, she gets a scholarship to a New England boarding school -- her exposure to the moneyed class. After Harvard and the Columbia School of Journalism, Amy becomes a political reporter for the prestigious weekly In Depth. While covering a political fund-raiser, Amy meets a college student who claims to be the son of one of the presidential candidates. Its precisely the sort of story that In Depth wouldn't deign to cover, but the idea of tracking down a lost parent and demanding recognition intrigues Amy. As she begins a search of her own past as well as the candidates, she discovers a new and unimpeachable grandmother and a mother who is much more than she bargained for. Most important, she finally comes to understand the stuff she made of and finds the perfect place to hang her hat in the world. Bold, insightful, witty, and exhilarating, Any Place I Hang My Hat is a novel about one extraordinary young woman looking for a place to belong -- by one of the most compelling and beloved voices in contemporary fiction.

My Personal Review:
......since author Susan Isaacs penned her Compromising Positions yarn about a middle-aged suburban housewife. In THAT book, which may seem ordinary today, Isaacs broke a lot of rules. She wrote about the suburban mom vs. working woman in a manner that poked fun at both. She let her heroine have an adulterous fling, and, somehow, it seemed all right in a day and age when the sexual revolution was just something hippies were involved in. Over the years, in nine novels (ten, now!) Isaacs
has given me much pleasure and literally has me stop and say more than once throughout each book—that's happened to me.... My personal favorite of Isaacs novels is After All These Years, but, then, I never met an Isaacs novel I didn't love.

I credit Susan Isaacs with starting the chick lit era, and she is a master. Her novels don't just make light of women facing issues, they generally are themed for a woman who is just discovering a whole lot about herself that she never knew. Any Place I Hang My Hat is no exception, although the heroine, Amy Lincoln (a 30-something Jewish-Italian New Yorker from the slums, with a missing mother who walked off and left her and a father (Chicky) who has lived a life incarcerated, on and off) doesn't realize right away that she's destined to try to find her true self.

Naturally, Amys used her wits and her knack for hard work and fitting in to go first to an exclusive boarding school, all expenses paid, then on to Harvard and Columbia to study journalism. She's a political writer for In Depth—a quality magazine with an educated following, and she's been involved for more than two years with a documentary filmmaker, John Orenstein. She got a longer relationship, for a decade and a half, with rich, exotic Tatty, her best friend. The two met in boarding school when Tatty insulted her and Amy retaliated by punching her in the mouth. Tatty naturally does not have to work for a living, but chose a career in gourmet occasion cake making, after her two marriages failed. Isaacs normally draws me in with a more middle-aged heroine, but in the brilliant little journey that Amy makes to find herself in the novel, we quickly learn that she has an old soul.

Involved in the early part of the Democratic run for a presidential candidate, with a clever mix of real and imagined candidates, Amys struck by the parallel between a young Hispanic man who crashes a fund-raiser, claiming the blueblooded Senator who is running for office is his father. Amys own life has been lived trying not to speculate on why and how her mother, Phyllis, left her in the care of crazy Grandma Lil and jailbird Chicky. Phyllis never once looked back, and Amy has to decide—does she want to find Phyllis and find the answers to all those questions or is it just safer to leave the genie in the bottle?

Interspersed with the quest for her identity are the often humorous anecdotes of Amys struggle with editorial control at the magazine, and her on and off again romance with John. Warning: there is a broken heart that really leaves you feeling bereft in this novel.

In the concluding chapters, I will admit to tears, because Isaacs truly engaged me in her character, and never went over-the-top for her laughs.
Indeed, Isaacs practices wit more than humor, romance more than sexual heat, and contemporary writing more than groundbreaking plotting. Reviewing the above, you may yawn and think its just another plot thats been done before, but you havent counted on Isaacs style and way with a phrase or a concept. Here she has Amy assess her life:

I could fit in anywhere: With all the kids on the bus going upstate to visit their fathers in prison. With all the Ivey girls and the guys they hung with. In a government seminar at Harvard. Drinking with the Democratic powers-that-be in Chicago. Except when you could theoretically live a thousand different lives, how do you pick the one where you belong?

Join Isaacs and Amy for a journey of discovery, and enjoy the wit, charm, warmth, and ultimately and unfortunately, the end of a smart new novel. Isaacs only averages one novel every 2.5 years. Thats way too few with too much space between them, for my taste. Thus, I pay full price whenever I see shes got a new one on the shelves....believe me, Any Place I Hang My Hat, was worth every penny!

Enjoy it!

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