What A Wonderful Book!

Zinder was a case, always, of unrequited love, according to the unnamed narrator of Kathleen Hill's Still Waters in Niger. Together with her husband and three small children, she once lived in this forbidding West African town, a city of winds and wheeling vultures, of rocks shimmering in the heat. Yet in the end, its strangeness only made it more precious, and the place became her consuming passion. As the novel opens, the narrator has returned to Niger to visit her eldest daughter, Zara, who works in a medical clinic not far from Zinder. With Zara she retraces the scenes of her young motherhood, searching for the same transcendence she found there 17 years ago. Once again, she longs to become a woman freed from the confines of her own history: This time, if no other, myth will overtake one's own stumbling story and all the griefs and longings spilled so messily over the sad confusion of one's days will at last assume a noble shape, both tragic and anonymous: Orpheus, unable to resist the backward glance. Demeter, crying for her daughter. Myth does suffuse this story, but not in the way the narrator envisions. As she meets the Hausa women in Zara's clinic, her story becomes a meditation on motherhood, hunger, shame, and love—both universal and specific, metaphorical and concrete. She moves from the clinic's malnourished babies to her own starving Irish ancestors, from her guilt as a mother to her grief as a daughter. In less sure hands, so much abstraction could easily become too much for one slight, plotless novel to bear. But Hill writes like a dream, and her Zinder is both lyrical and precisely observed. Still Waters in Niger is a lovely, satisfying book, as vivid and compressed as a poem. --Mary Park

My Personal Review:
STILL WATERS IN NIGER is so masterfully conceived and written that I was reluctant to finish, reading more and more slowly as I came toward the end. This is a work that grows increasingly powerful and beautiful, especially in its final section and concluding three calls to prayer. The author transported me to Niger and enlarged my understanding of what is to be a global citizen, a parent (and daughter), a mother, a woman, and
(so searchingly) a person. I intend to survey recent issues of the Hudson and Yale Reviews where, according to the jacket, there are other works by Kathleen Hill. May she give us more writing and, soon, another book as fine as this!

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Still Waters in Niger by Kathleen Hill - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!