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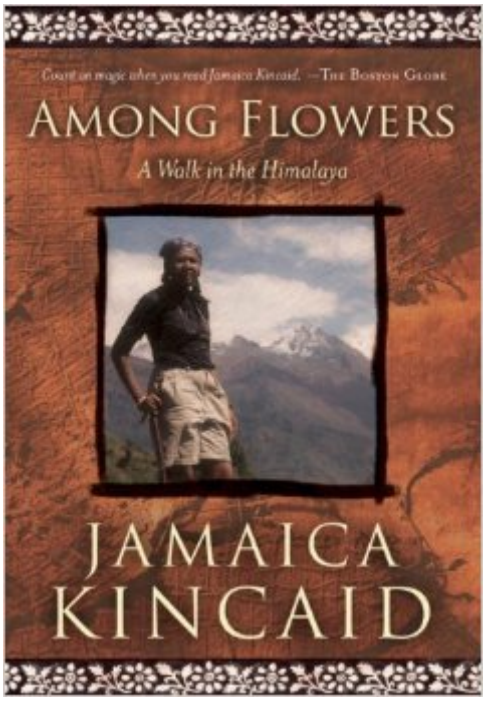
Among Flowers: A Walk In The Himalaya (National Geographic Directions)



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Synopsis

In this delightful hybrid of a book—part memoir and part travel journal—the bestselling author takes us deep into the mountains of Nepal with a trio of botanist friends in search of native Himalayan plants that will grow in her Vermont garden. Alighting from a plane in the dramatic Annapurna Valley, the ominous signs of Nepal's Maoist guerrillas are all around—an alarming presence that accompanies the travelers throughout their trek. Undaunted, the group sets off into the mountains with Sherpas and bearers, entering an exotic world of spectacular landscapes, vertiginous slopes, isolated villages, herds of yaks, and giant rhododendron, thirty feet tall. The landscape and flora and so much else of what Kincaid finds in the Himalaya—including fruit bats, colorful Buddhist prayer flags, and the hated leeches that plague much of the trip—are new to her, and she approaches it all with an acute sense of wonder and a deft eye for detail. In beautiful, introspective prose, Kincaid intertwines the harrowing Maoist encounters with exciting botanical discoveries, fascinating daily details, and lyrical musings on gardens, nature, home, and family.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As an avid reader, enthusiastic traveler, lover of Nepal, and a wannabe gardener, I eagerly picked up "Among Flowers: A Walk in the Himalaya". Jamaica Kincaid has written of her trek through the mountains of Nepal gathering seeds to plant in her Vermont garden. What promises to be a literary trek through some of the world's highest peaks ends up feeling more like a slow walk down an

endless sidewalk. While there are a few remarkable descriptions of the mountains and rivers she crossed, most of the book is filled with the author's introspective whining. The pages of a travel memoir should transport the reader into another land and introduce us to it's places, people and unique culture. Unfortunately, "Among Flowers" fails to do any of those things. The main thing that struck me about this book is how self-absorbed the author seems to be. By her own admission, she took almost no interest in what was around her unless it was of some use to her, for example, if some particular seeds would grow in her region. While she seems to have a good grasp of Latin plant names, she couldn't learn the actual names of her Nepali porters. Instead she refers to them merely by what role they played in relation to her- the man who prepared her meals was "Cook" and the one who carried her table was "Table". She admits that she didn't bother noting the characteristics of the Nepali people since they couldn't do the same for her. She makes a gross generalization of the people as either looking like they were from the South (India) or the North (Tibet), apparently not having taken the time to learn about the many indigenous Nepalese tribes.

Among Flowers is an account of Kincaid's trek in the Himalaya with her botanist companions.Kincaid, living in Vermont but originally from Antigua, is an enthusiastic gardener herself though not a seed collector to the extent of her botanist companions. On occasion, particularly at the beginning, I couldn't help wondering what Kincaid was doing on the expedition other than gathering material for this quirky introspective book. She makes much of missing her thirteen-year old son Harold and keeps calling him on her satellite phone until Sunam, the Sherpa leader, takes it away from her due to the Maoist activity in the area. Also she is acutely aware that most of the seeds collected are not suitable for growing in Vermont and therefore shows little or no enthusiasm for them.As regards her companions, she mentions them by name but dispenses with detailed description. It's as if they were pale ghosts beavering away in a mystical landscape in their quest for seeds.To say I didn't care for the book would be wrong, rather, I did enjoy it, but found several sentences repetitive, stumbling, and bordering on the nonsensical. The writing does not flow easily ..... "Dan said we were too low for finding this; Bleddyn said, yes, but soon we would be." ..... "It resembled something my children would play with in the bathtub, rounded and dullishly smoothed, like an old-fashioned view of the way things will look in the old-fashioned future, not pointed and harshly shiny like the future I am used to living in now." ..... "When I told Sunam how touched I was by his presence, this little boy, the same age as my son, carrying sixty-pound loads strapped up on his back, he said of course I would be touched because Jhaba was a Sherpa." ...

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