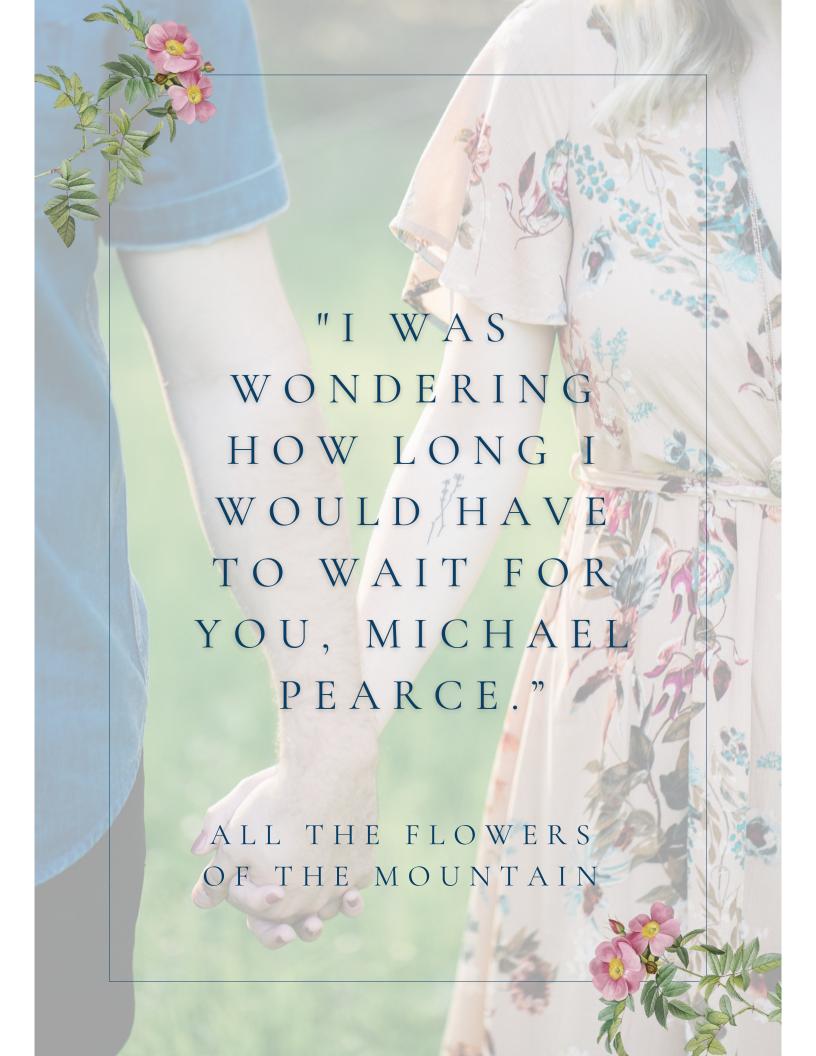


ALL THE
FLOWERS

OF THE
MOUNTAIN

BY Christina Holbrook





What is your debut novel All the Flowers of the Mountain about?

First and foremost it is a story about falling in love: About how one person can open your eyes, change your life, break your heart, and remain – despite time and distance – your North Star. The person you are always trying to get home to.

It is also a coming-of-age story, about the struggle to define who we are within the context of our family of origin; the hard choices we sometimes have to make, the mistakes and the loss, and how we find meaning in our lives.

Finally, for me, it is also a love song to a particular time and place. The White Mountains of New Hampshire, where I spent so much of my childhood, were (and still are) an absolutely magical part of the world. And the 1970s and early 80s were a time of unusual freedom—there were no cell phones, and there was still a great deal of emotional distance and lack of supervision in the relationships young people had with their parents. This freedom opened the door to both danger and exciting possibilities.



Christina Holbrook's stories have appeared in numerous literary journals including *The Forge Literary Magazine*, *Blue Lake Review*, and *Best Stories of 2021 Potato Soup Literary Journal Anthology*. A native of New York and the White Mountains of New Hampshire, Christina now lives in Colorado with her husband Alan. She is a member of both the Lighthouse Writers Workshop in Denver, and the New Hampshire Writers Project. *All the Flowers of the Mountain* is her first novel.

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Rural New Hampshire plays an important role in the story. Why did you choose it as the setting for your novel?

I grew up spending summers in the White Mountains. My family had a beautiful, rambling country home in Sugar Hill, New Hampshire, and my mother's parents also had several farm properties in different locations.

I think my inner, personal and creative landscape was formed in this place: swimming in Echo Lake or in the icy pools below the waterfalls at The Basin, climbing Mount Lafayette, skiing Cannon Mountain, spending entire days exploring on my bike. And like Kit, I was a big fan of skinny-dipping!

My school year was spent in New York, so it was tremendously liberating to be set free in this wild, rural place where time was so unstructured. I could easily spend an entire day sitting very still and hoping to catch a glimpse of deer or fox in the woods, searching for hidden swimming holes, or laying back in the field grass watching clouds float through the sky—and not encounter another living soul.

As a kid, I was also always trying to make sense of a kind of spiritual reality I was aware of. I felt this very strongly in the wild places of my childhood. I remember being quite convinced, one early morning, that as I came down a path through the woods, I was about to encounter God!

Finally, those years when I was a child and then a young woman in New Hampshire were very meaningful to my family. Together we experienced an awful lot of fun, drama, and rich memorable times.



What are the challenges of writing about actual locations and businesses in your book compared to creating fictional settings?

Many of the important locations in the story are in fact made up. Having spent so many years in the White Mountains it was somehow easy for my imagination to concoct the particularly grand summer house and farm that is "Cedaredge," the Morgan family compound. And while Profile Lake is an actual lake, the Profile Lake Club is a fabrication as is the "wild side" of the lake where Kit and Michael make some important discoveries related to the story's key mystery.

That being said, no story about this area would be complete, would be authentic to the reader, without the inclusion of some of the most beloved landmarks: Polly's Pancake Parlor (where, by the way, I worked one summer!), The Sugar Hill Sampler, Thayer's Hotel which once included a pub called "Oliver's." There is an elegant Profile Club, though it is not on the lake, and the Old Man of the Mountain, an iconic rock formation, sadly tumbled from the mountain several years ago.

When I do refer to real places, I try to capture the essence of their charm or glamour. But they are fictional creations of my own, and their details are not necessarily accurate in a journalistic sense. It is my hope that those connected to these places will forgive any errors and my flights of fancy.

Both Kit and Michael want to figure out what will make life meaningful for them. What do you think it takes to create a life of meaning? What might we have to give up in order to find greater meaning?

Both Michael and Kit have to confront family and social situations in which others presume to know what is best for them, what they should want. And society has only become more insistent, more inyour-face in this regard.

For Kit, the pressure is so intense that she believes her only option is to take drastic and dramatic action. To forfeit love. Michael has to find a way to create meaning in his life, even when love seems lost forever.

It can take a long time to grow up. You have to make a lot of mistakes, confront your demons, be ready to put your ego aside so that one day you are both strong enough and vulnerable enough to humble yourself to love.

As I get older it is more and more clear to me that, in the end, love is all that matters. It's so simple, but it can take a lifetime to figure this out.





Michael and Kit share a connection to and love for the natural environment of New Hampshire. What does a connection to nature mean for you, personally?

I think a connection to nature is what grounds us and makes us feel alive. Kit regains a sense of herself as a whole person – creative, sensual, hopeful, and self-confident – during her summers exploring the forests, lakes, waterfalls, mountains of New Hampshire.

When Michael wants to share with Kit who he really is, he takes her on a hike up a hillside to experience a view of all the surrounding mountains and farmlands, rivers and forests of his New Hampshire home. And, ultimately, both return to this place of deep and intimate natural beauty.

You've been working on this book for five years now including many revisions and challenges along the way. What has your writing process been like and how has it been influenced by your own personal journey?

It's been a long process! The novel began in the first person as a story told by Michael. Then, I re-wrote the story in the third person. Finally, I spent a year on this final version, re-writing the novel so that it would include both Kit's and Michael's points of view.

What seemed curious to me from the start is that I felt completely driven to work on this manuscript, every day without fail. I didn't procrastinate, had no issues with writer's block, but was up at 4:30 or 5 am each morning and writing until I could barely see. It was like an obsession--and it only became more intense in the past year, as Kit began to tell her side of the story.

In March, just as I was about to begin submitting the manuscript to publishers, I was diagnosed with a brain tumor. It sounds crazy, but I can't help wondering now if some part of me "knew" that I was running out of time.

I had surgery in April and will begin treatment soon. I hope and pray that I still have plenty of months and years ahead of me. But the truth is I don't know. I received an amazing gift when Sunroom Studios offered to bring this novel out in what amounts to lightning speed, with a pub date in July! Because I want to hold this book in my hands.

Christina Holbrook

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