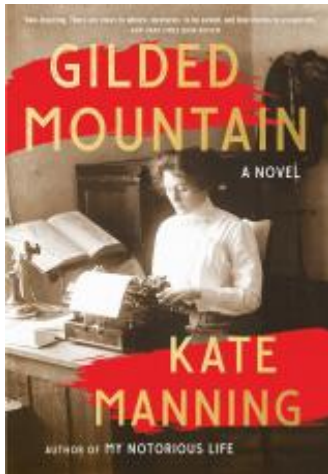


Gilded Mountain

by Kate Manning



About the Book

Set in early 1900s Colorado, GILDED MOUNTAIN is the unforgettable tale of a young woman who bravely faces the consequences of speaking out against injustice.

In a voice spiked with sly humor, Sylvie Pelletier recounts leaving her family's snowbound mountain cabin to work in a manor house for the Padgetts, owners of the marble-mining company that employs her father and dominates the town. Sharp-eyed Sylvie is awed by the luxury around her; fascinated by her employer, the charming "Countess" Inge; and confused by the erratic affections of Jasper, the bookish heir to the family fortune. Her fairy-tale ideas of romance take a dark turn when she realizes the Padgetts' lofty philosophical talk is at odds with the unfair labor practices that have enriched them. Their servants, the Gradys, formerly enslaved people, have long known this to be true and are making plans to form a utopian community on the Colorado prairie.

Outside the manor walls, the town of Moonstone is roiling with discontent. A handsome union organizer, along with labor leader Mary Harris "Mother" Jones, is stirring up the quarry workers. The editor of the local newspaper --- a bold woman who takes Sylvie on as an apprentice --- is publishing unflattering accounts of the Padgett Company. Sylvie navigates vastly different worlds and struggles to find her way amid conflicting loyalties. When the harsh winter brings tragedy, Sylvie must choose between silence and revenge.

Drawn from true stories of Colorado history, GILDED MOUNTAIN is a tale of a bygone American West seized by robber barons and settled by immigrants, and is a story infused with longing --- for self-expression and equality, freedom and adventure.

Discussion Guide

1. Sylvie frequently mentions that she feels restrained, tongue-tied, squelched and silenced, but seldom expresses

- resentment or anger aloud. What are the causes of her silence? Who else in the book is silent? About what and why? How is silence useful? Destructive? When characters do speak out, what are the repercussions?
2. GILDED MOUNTAIN might also have been called "The Education of Sylvie Pelletier." What does Sylvie learn --- about herself and the ways of the world --- over the course of the novel? Where does she get her education?
 3. Five women act as role models for Sylvie: her mother, Cherie Pelletier; newspaper editor K. T. Redmond; the "Countess" Ingeborg; the chef Easter Grady; and Mary Harris "Mother" Jones. What choices are available to these women at the time in which the novel is set? What lessons does Sylvie take from each of them? How do they ultimately change or shape her?
 4. Discuss the many ways in which characters "reinvent" themselves in GILDED MOUNTAIN. Who succeeds and who fails? What, in your opinion, does it mean to reinvent yourself in the context of this story? Does every character in this novel have the power/opportunity to self-invent? Which characters do, and which characters don't? Is it a privilege or a right?
 5. Moonstone is a "company town," while the Grady family aims to create a utopian community for the descendants of enslaved people in Weld County. What are the founders of each place hoping to achieve? How do they aim to control what happens in these places, and why? Quarrytown and a certain neighborhood of Moonstone --- given a name that uses a slur for Italian immigrants --- are also called "towns," but are they?
 6. Trace the effects of great wealth on the lives of the characters. What does Sylvie learn about wealth and charity by the end of the book?
 7. Sylvie is a child of Québécois immigrants. On page 18 she asks, "How was anyone to be American?" How do various characters answer the question of what it means to be American? How does she navigate the tension between her parents' culture and her own? And how does her immigrant perspective inform how she sees herself and others?
 8. GILDED MOUNTAIN predominantly takes place in 1907-08, during a financial panic, an enormous influx of immigrant labor, violence against African Americans, and workers' struggles over fair wages, workplace safety and the right to unionize. How do these "external" forces and events shape the individual lives of the "ordinary" people in the story?
 9. The town of Moonstone has two newspapers, each with a particular editorial point of view. How do their different approaches to news reporting affect what happens in the town?
 10. GILDED MOUNTAIN features a number of sympathetic characters --- including some who also perform or are complicit in harmful acts. While reading, did you find yourself drawn to any one character (besides Sylvie)? Discuss your favorites and how they are portrayed.

11. Early on, Sylvie mentions that marble stone is used for building ?statues and bank pillars, monuments. Gravestones? (page 2). What is the role of memory and memorializing in the book? Who and what is honored, and why? What do the different characters believe about what is owed to the dead? What purpose do monuments and memorials serve in the story?

Author Bio

Kate Manning is the author of *GILDED MOUNTAIN*, *MY NOTORIOUS LIFE* and *WHITEGIRL*. A former documentary television producer and winner of two Emmy Awards, she has written for *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, *Time*, *Glamour* and *The Guardian*, among other publications. She has taught creative writing at Bard High School Early College in Manhattan, and lives with her family in New York City.

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