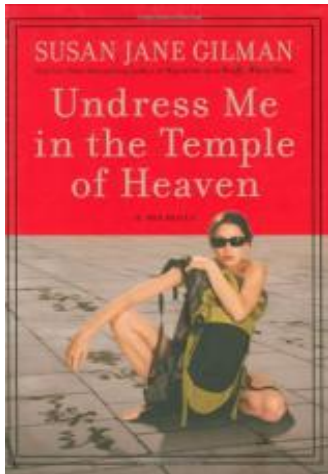


Undress Me in the Temple of Heaven

by Susan Jane Gilman



About the Book

They were young, brilliant, and bold. They set out to conquer the world. But the world had other plans for them.

Bestselling author Susan Jane Gilman's new memoir is a hilarious and harrowing journey, a modern heart of darkness filled with Communist operatives, backpackers, and pancakes.

In 1986, fresh out of college, Gilman and her friend Claire yearned to do something daring and original that did not involve getting a job. Inspired by a place mat at the International House of Pancakes, they decided to embark on an ambitious trip around the globe, starting in the People's Republic of China. At that point, China had been open to independent travelers for roughly ten minutes.

Armed only with the collected works of Nietzsche, an astrological love guide, and an arsenal of bravado, the two friends plunged into the dusty streets of Shanghai. Unsurprisingly, they quickly found themselves in over their heads. As they ventured off the map deep into Chinese territory, they were stripped of everything familiar and forced to confront their limitations amid culture shock and government surveillance. What began as a journey full of humor, eroticism, and enlightenment grew increasingly sinister-becoming a real-life international thriller that transformed them forever.

Undress Me in the Temple of Heaven is a flat-out page-turner, an astonishing true story of hubris and redemption told with Gilman's trademark compassion, lyricism, and wit.

Discussion Guide

1. Why do you think the book is titled **Undress Me in the Temple of Heaven**?

2. The author mentions several times in the book that she and Claire were Ivy Leaguers. Why do you think she does this?
3. To this end, she also mentions that she and her friend were groomed to be "the future leaders of America." Why might she have gone out of her way to point this out? Does this detail have implications beyond the immediate story?
4. How do the people in this book transform over time? Are the changes predictable?
5. What role does China itself play in the narrative? Could this misadventure just as easily taken place anywhere else?
6. Did you find the narrator herself sympathetic? Heroic? Does she seem to think that she was --- or was not?
7. This adventure took place in 1986. Do you think it's still relevant today? Why or why not?
8. Did your own feelings for the people change over the course of the story? If so, how?
9. If you could ask the author any questions directly about **Undress Me in the Temple of Heaven**, what would they be?

Author Bio

Susan Jane Gilman is the bestselling author of *HYPOCRITE IN A PUFFY WHITE DRESS*, *KISS MY TIARA*, *UNDRESS ME IN THE TEMPLE OF HEAVEN*, and the novel, *THE ICE CREAM QUEEN OF ORCHARD STREET*. She has provided commentary for NPR and written for the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times* and *Ms. Magazine*, among others.

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