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The Unlikely Lavender Queen: A Memoir Of Unexpected Blossoming



Synopsis

â œI couldnâ™t help but question how Iâ™d gotten to this strange spot in my life, so far from what Iâ™d expected for myself. Yes, there had been a heady romance a few years back. Then a slew of subsequent decisions, fueled by love and yearnings I didnâ™t even know I had. But I never, ever would have suspected that this was where the sum total of them would bring me. That afternoon a new doubt dripped into my mind. When do you know, I wondered, whether the choices youâ™ve made were the right ones?â

• In 1990, Jeannie Ralston was a successful magazine writer and bona fide city girlâ”the type of woman who couldn’t imagine living on soil not shaded by skyscrapers. By 1994, she had called off an engagement, married Robb, a National Geographic photographer, and was living in Blanco Texas, population 1600. The Unlikely Lavender Queen is the intimate story of a woman who gives up a lot for the man she loves â “ her beloved blue state, bagels and all-night bodegasâ”only to have to wonder: Was it too much? Ralston offers a lively chronicle of her life as a wife, new mother and an urban settler in rural Texas. As she labors to convert a dilapidated barn into a livable home, deal with scorpions and unbearably hot summers, raise two young children while Robb is frequently away on assignment, she realizes her ultimate struggle is to reconcile her life plans and goals with her husbandâ™s without coming out the proverbial loser. And just when it seems like she might be losing that fight--and herself-- a little purple bloom changes her life. For centuries lavender has been a mystical herb, so valuable to ancient Romans that a bushel would cost nearly a monthâ™s wages. But when Robb returns from a trip to Provence with a plan for growing lavender on their land, Ralston is not convincedâ”in fact the last thing she needed or wanted was to take up farming on top of everything else. Then, much to her surprise, she slowly but surely falls in love with lavender, and in the course of growing and selling blooms, hosting the public at the farm, and creating lavender products, she discovers a new side of herself. A few short years later, Ralston had built Hill Country Lavender, a thriving commercial enterprise that transforms both her little corner of Texas and her life. The Unlikely Lavender Queen will resonate with all women who have faced the tough choices that come with â œhaving it allâ • and secretly (or not so secretly) hoped for great adventure to come along and surprise them. Ralstonâ™s honest, funny, and poignant memoir is a testament to the fact that such adventures await us around every bend in life.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

Have you ever noticed how the one thing that most attracts you to a person can end up being the thing that, in time, makes you absolutely crazy? Jeannie Ralston's friend Kim once told her "You're just not very adventurous." But any girl who was willing to move from Tennessee to New York, after landing an internship with McCall's magazine, must have had some longing for excitement lurking inside. From there, she carefully engineered a flourishing career as a freelance writer and, thanks to fashion editor Kim, a well-dressed one at that. When she was assigned to work with Robb Kendrick, a cute young photographer from National Geographic magazine, Jeannie got swept right off her Manolo Blahniks and into a life beyond her imagining. It began as a whirlwind of travel and excitement, where she might wake up on her thirtieth birthday and find her bikini-clad self on the cover of Travel + Leisure magazine. So how did she end up at age forty, living on a farm outside of Blanco, Texas, with work-roughened hands, aching back, and a husband who's rarely home? Ah, therein lies the story! When Robb first announced that he despised living in New York and wanted to move back to Texas, Jeannie felt sure he would come around eventually. However, she had no idea just how persistent and persuasive her new husband could be. Next thing she knew, they owned a house in Austin. Of course, that was just the beginning. Robb is an idea man, a man who needs to challenge himself with new projects. A man with itchy feet, enamored with the idea of being a pioneer. After Austin, he hit upon the notion of transforming an old stone barn near Blanco into their

home.

The beginning 2/3rds of this book is not great but the last section about the lavender farm and how that evolved is quite interesting and makes it worth it. The weakness with the first part is the way she writes about her life in NY compared to Texas. I believe what she wanted to describe was the contrast between what she saw as a happy and exciting life in NY and the let down she felt losing that in the move to Texas. The problem is that she focuses not on what made her happy in NY per se but how much more glamorous and envy evoking her life was compared to the rest of the world outside of NY. I guess it is very hard to try to describe what you think is glamorous without sounding kind of bragging, like "wasn't my life just so great, don't I live big and don't you wish you were me" and as the reader I felt like, ah, no, it doesn't sound any more interesting than many people I know. For example, this is a quote from the book after she opens her farm to the public - "It smells good," I'd tell them, trying to make sure my smile showed patience, not the condescension of a New Yorker who once met regularly with executives at beauty companies.' -- I mean this is what is going through her mind when she meets with people visiting her farm??? It's kind of comical like - you met regularly with beauty executives? wow, didn't you lead a fascinating life meeting such rarefied people. I mean does she think that people in Texas have not done things, met interesting people and led an interesting life too?? The other problem is her depiction of her husband - could he really be so unsupportive, so selfish? Why marry a guy like that and let him make all the choices, leaving such a successful and happy life?

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