

## A Mosaic of Wings

**Kimberly Duffy**

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A nineteenth-century entomologist is caught between social expectations and desire in Kimberly Duffy's *A Mosaic of Wings*, a novel about wanderlust and women's empowerment.

In Ithaca, Nora is her class's valedictorian. She longs for a scholarship to Cornell's graduate program and joins a classmate, Owen, at a British research camp in India. There, a dismissive group leader has her illustrate *Lepidoptera* instead of joining the men on their outings.

Spirited Nora's plans for her future change when the camp cook's niece, Sita, discloses that she's a Christian, though she is destined to be made a prostitute in a Hindu temple. Nora is shocked. The discovery sets off a firestorm; Nora risks her career, despite British insistence that she avoid entanglement in Sita's situation. Nora follows her moral instincts and learns invaluable lessons. However, Sita's background is not explored, and Nora falls into white savior tropes as she tries to help.

When Nora is in her outdoor element, she's an exciting lead, sharing tactile details about entomology and the pleasures of scientific work. These experiences bring her closer to Owen, who becomes a supportive confidante. Their romance grows at a measured, sweet pace. When Nora returns home to Ithaca, both she and Owen sacrifice opportunities to be with each other.

India's allure is captured with appreciative details of its spices and embroidered saris. There are also a plethora of delicate specimens and nods to Cornell, including to the Comstock couple John (an entomologist) and Anna (an illustrator and later educator), who are present in the novel as Nora's benign mentors.

*A Mosaic of Wings* is a religious romance that pays tribute to trailblazers and field research as a captivating, down-to-earth bluestocking dares to let her own dreams take flight.

KAREN RIGBY (May / June 2020)

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