



# Hothouse Flower and the Nine Plants of Desire

*Margot Berwin*

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## **Hothouse Flower and the Nine Plants of Desire** Margot Berwin

In the heart of New York City, hidden in the back room of an old Laundromat, are nine rare and valuable plants. *Hothouse Flower and the Nine Plants of Desire* tells the story of this legendary garden, and the distance one woman must travel—from the cold, harsh streets of Manhattan to the lush jungles of the Yucatan Peninsula—to claim what is hers.

Lila Nova lives alone in a plain, white box of an apartment. Recovering from a heartbreaking divorce, Lila's life is like her home: simple, new, and empty. But when she meets a handsome plant-seller named David Exley, an entire world opens up before her eyes. Late one night Lila stumbles across a strange Laundromat and sees ferns so highly-prized that a tiny cutting can fetch thousands of dollars. She learns about flowers with medicinal properties to rival anything found in drugstores. And she hears the legend of nine mystical plants that bring fame, fortune, immortality, and passion.

The owner of the Laundromat, Armand, presents Lila with a test: if she can make the cutting from a fire fern grow roots, he will show her the secret of his locked room. But Lila is too trusting, and with one terrible mistake she ruins her chance to see Armand's plants. The only way to win it back is to travel, on her own, to the Yucatan.

Deep in the rain forests of Mexico, Lila enters a world of shamans and spirit animals, snake charmers, and sexy, heart-stopping Huichols. Alone in the jungle, Lila is forced to learn more than she ever wanted to know about nature—and about herself. An exhilarating journey of love and self-discovery, *Hothouse Flower and the Nine Plants of Desire* brings together mystery, adventure, and heat, in every sense of the word.

## **Hothouse Flower and the Nine Plants of Desire Details**

Date : Published June 16th 2009 by Pantheon (first published January 1st 2009)

ISBN : 9780307377845

Author : Margot Berwin

Format : Hardcover 288 pages

Genre : Fiction, Romance, Magical Realism, Womens Fiction, Chick Lit, Contemporary, Audiobook

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## From Reader Review Hothouse Flower and the Nine Plants of Desire for online ebook

### jacqs says

There were a few good insightful paragraphs toward the end about the main character being desperate for any man who comes along. I also enjoyed some of the ethnobotanical information about the nature of the 9 plants, particularly how cannabis is tortured to make it produce resin. However... most of the first section, in NY, is filled with bad dialogue and nothing happening. Much of the second section, in Mexico, is as randomly surreal as Kafka. It was an attempt at magical realism, trying to blend the mundane with the fantastical, that did not work well; I could not suspend my disbelief. It felt like she was stumbling around the whole time, looking for her dramatic tension, and that she felt bored and awkward while doing so.

In fantasy, there are supposed to be rules in the other world, but here the rules kept changing, even including whether the 9 plants of desire were rare or common. It was like following another person's dream/nightmare where things don't hold together. Kafka, Borges, Garcia Lorca, and Calvino can pull it off, but they do it as well-focused art-form, where the point is the confusion, and they do it with humor. This felt like too much mundane combined with too much impossible, and then some personal growth being the main point.

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### Cheryl says

My friend Staci asked if I wanted to read this book and I said I would. She has to sent it to someone, so I had to get reading it. I thought I would like it from her review, but I wasn't sure.

From the cover it looks kind of like a Better Homes and Gardens kind of book or something. I knew it was about plants, and I was unsure about how plants could be sensual.

Lila finds Exley in a plant stand in town. She ends up buying a bird of paradise plant from him. After that, she sees a plant that really catches her eye outside a laundromat. She walks in and it has a moss floor and plants all around. She finds out there are nine plants of desire in the back room from the owner Armand, and she wants to make it a point to see those plants. She got a cutting of a fire fern from the laundromat, and Exley wanted to know where she got it. She was told not to tell anyone about the nine plants of desire. Lila ends up going on an adventure, and along the way meets Diego.

Each chapter tells of a certain plant and what it's properties are. There is a lot more to plants that I could have imagined. Who knew they could be so sexual too.

I wasn't sure what was going to happen at the end and who Lila was going to side with. I wasn't sure who was telling the truth, but she did what was right and I was happy with how the story ended.

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### Janet says

Thought it was brilliant. I have absolutely no interest in plants and gardening and yet this books so effectively integrated them into a story about life and love and the quest for self. If you have any interest in life, love, mysticism, or gardening you must read this book.

## Amanda says

Um - the author was obviously smoking her favorite sensimilla bud when writing this. As far as I know, rattlesnakes don't live in wet damp jungles. They don't dance 6 feet tall in the air like cobras. They don't get as big as pythons. Scorpions don't feast on human blood or lurk in grass in numbers that make you have to "tiptoe". I could go on. I still rated this a three because she gets credit for lots of imagination and a fun plot. I have a better appreciation for orchids (I a...more Um - the author was obviously smoking her favorite sensimilla bud when writing this. As far as I know, rattlesnakes don't live in wet damp jungles. They don't dance 6 feet tall in the air like cobras. They don't get as big as pythons. Scorpions don't feast on human blood or lurk in grass in numbers that make you have to "tiptoe". I could go on. I still rated this a three because she gets credit for lots of imagination and a fun plot. I have a better appreciation for orchids (I actually petted my orchid yesterday and said "hi" to it:)(less)

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## Timothy Urges says

*Hothouse Flower and the Nine Plants of Desire* is a weird book, and the weirdness is its saving grace.

With a touch of magical realism and romance, this book is about Lila, an advertising agent and judgmental New Yorker, who meets Armand, a pseudo-shaman, in a plant-filled laundromat. She then meets a slightly sexy suntanned stranger and inadvertently causes a break-in and robbery. To repay her new friend for his loss and relieve her guilt, Lila heads to Mexico.

The book is supposed to be about personal growth, but Lila makes odd choices and acts like an idiot most of the time. Lila is one of those white people that goes to a foreign country and complains about how everything is not up to their standards. By the end of it she is sort of a new person. Lila is not necessarily likable, but her weird decisions are what I enjoyed about the book.

Though there are some factual discrepancies and inconsistencies within the text, I ended up being entertained by this and actually laughed a few times at some of the ridiculous situations.

*Hothouse Flower and the Nine Plants of Desire* is decent cheap entertainment about plants and a strange adventure in Mexico.

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## Linda says

Well, this book took me by surprise. I was expecting a chick-lit light-weight break from my heavier reading. Instead, this book seems to be an attempt at doing Carlos Castaneda's Don Juan material, or James Redmond's *Celestine Prophecies*, except with a young NY career woman protagonist and ethnobotany.

As in the *Celestine Prophecies* and similar books, the characters here are shadowy two-dimensional creatures for whom I could find not interest. They are prone to quoting what seem to be encyclopedia lectures on any given plant. The author's tale seems very forced at times. For example, she speaks of the ancient Mayan tales about chicory, a North American roadside weed that isn't cultivated in Mexico. Things happen in the book

that are completely implausible and never explained, such as using a potted chicory to unlock a bolted door. Really? And one day only, the house and environs were covered with blood-sucking scorpions (everyone has to have their own spatula at the ready for defense). The next day, no problem, walk barefoot if you want to. For the record, scorpions are not vampire bats. They do not crave human blood. And what is Lila supposed to do about the stolen rental car? After it was taken by a young child doing weird things with a rattlesnake, the car is never mentioned again.

With some more more in having her characters come alive, and with less pontification and a great deal more research, she could have done something better with this story. The way it is now, it simple falls flat, from the lack of support in the writing.

Where's the editor? This book should not have been released without some serious re-writing.

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### **Heidi says**

What an odd story. I really enjoyed how different this was. I listened to it on audio. Magical realism, botany, adventure, romance. I REALLY appreciated a male/female FRIENDSHIP with no romantic weirdness! That never seems to happen.

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### **Tejchy says**

4.5

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### **Rachel says**

I'm not sure why I'm giving this 2 stars instead of one - but it probably wasn't the story that was so bad as much as the characters. I HATED the girl in the book. So much of what she did or said was just idiotic. I didn't connect with any of the characters even a little bit, which was disappointing.

The plant thing might have been cool but it seemed like it was trying too hard to be mystical and, again, I just didn't connect. But I confess I did google a plant or two to learn about their mystic properties. And for some reason now I'm seeing the term "mandrake root" everywhere and I don't think I even heard about it prior to reading this book. So I think that because I "learned" something while reading might be why I feel the need to nudge it up a star.

Oh, and I listened to the audiobook so I'm not sure if the effected my rating. Audiobooks usually make my commute fly by but this story, with all the stupid things I KNEW were going to happen, made it agony. But still, the plants got me thinking...

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### **Jennifer Defoy says**

I picked up this book only because the title sounded interesting. I didn't read any reviews on it, nor did I read through the description. They say not to judge a book by it's cover, but I did, and I'm happy.

This was a very good book. It has love, romance, lust, greed, passion, death, spirituality, and just about everything else. For a debut novel, I'd say that Margot Berwin did a great job. She's left me with high expectations for her next novel.

The story takes place in New York and Mexico, the Yucatan to be specific. As Lila, Armand, Diego, and Exley are all on the hunt for the illusive Nine Plants of Desire. Oh what a tangled web Ms. Berwin has weaved...

This story was exciting. It was pretty fast paced and it kept me wanting more. The stories behind the nine magical and mystical plants are great. Even with all that Lila went through I want to find these plants. I did do some research on some of the nine and they really do have stories just as great as they are given in this book. (I LOVE when an author does great research!)

I was captivated from the first line to the last. I will be looking for a second novel for sure!

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### Lori says

This book started out so strong, and was very intriguing, for the first 1/3 of the novel. Then it started to degenerate... by the end I was so glad it was over! This author has read waaaay too much Carlos Castenada, but doesn't have the skill to parlay that into a successful and interesting book.

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### Emily says

Oscillated between enjoying the book and feeling like giving up on it. The constant "question and answer" format of so much of the dialogue started to really annoy me, and I wished that Lila had been able to take a more active role in what happened to her.

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### Shellie (Layers of Thought) says

The original review for this book is posted at Layers of Thought. There is also a giveaway for it there that ends October 3rd - 2010 for the US and Canada.

*A "trip" into the realistic yet magical where an urbanite discovers herself in the rain forest of Mexico. It's city girl goes jungle Jane with consciousness altering plants.*

**About:** Lila is from NYC. She is in her thirties and cynical as well as wounded from her recent divorce. She has sworn off men and most attachments - "no pets, no plants, no people, no problems". However she breaks her rule when she decides to buy herself a bird of paradise plant from the hunky greenery vendor around the corner from her studio. This starts her adventures and discovery about the mythical 9 plants of desire.

This humorous story, with its self-deprecating main character, takes the reader to the rain forests of Mexico. Where Lila is propelled by her quirky yet mystically oriented friend Armand to search for the illusive plants in order to repay a debt. As they enter into foreign territory into a place where fantastical elements are the norm, Lila herself makes a mildly hallucinogenic ride into self discovery and more.

**Thoughts:** Funny, fluffy and a very easy read, it was a needed break from the heavier stuff I have been recently reading. It was a foray into the magical. A chick lit escapist read with some mild romance which includes a gorgeous Huichol Indian from the mountains of Mexico.

As Lila gets to know these plants with their anthropomorphic attributes, we get an interesting mix of fact and fun fiction about each, where all of the short chapters are headed with a plant (and a few critters) and their description. I think my favorite section was on the chocolate plant, native to Southern America, where the author includes a recipe on how to make chocolate from the actual pods. Fun stuff!

I think this book will be perfect for any woman recovering from a recent break up or for anyone needing a light yet magical read. My mom is going to love this book being a plant person extraordinaire – me, the black thumb of the family killing cactus in the desert, enjoyed it just as much. I even found a few new books to add to my tbr list within the text of the novel - The Sheltering Sky by Philip Bowles and one by Carlos Castaneda. I love that. I give this fun book **3.5 stars**. It was a blast.

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## Eva says

When you pick up this book, turn off your reality meter. Nothing in here is anything like real-life, except maybe the introductions to the plants at the beginning of each chapter. Ready?

Lila Grace Nova is a 30 something, newly divorced, advertising exec in New York City. Her very empty new apartment needs a little decorating, so she goes to the open air market in search of a plant. She meets the decidedly sexy and mysterious David, the Plant Man, who sells her a Bird of Paradise. He keeps her coming back to learn how to care for it.

Late one night, Lila finds an amazing laundromat filled with tropical plants. The owner, Armand, tells her, you see a laundromat for washing clothes which happens to have some plants in it. I see the perfect place to raise tropical plants that just happens to also wash clothes - humid and hot from the washers and dryers.

Armand has, hidden in the back of the laundromat, the nine plants of desire. Each plant has the ability to give a person what they most want and together they are a powerful force. As the story evolves, Lila learns more and more about her own desires and how they shape her world.

One of the desires is for wealth, but it comes with a nasty sting. Lila shares the location of the nine plants with David, imagining that it will cement their love and she'll act as broker between the plant owner, Armand and the plant acquirer, David. Instead, he steals the plants and runs away. The ensuing chase brings Lila into contact with the magic of plants and animals, teaching her and changing her, ever so slowly, into someone who understands who she is and what she wants.

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## Nina Draganova says

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