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Clarion Review ★★★★½ **ROMANCE**

Somewhere Above It All

Holli Fawcett Clayton
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A healing adventure becomes a chance for new romance in the healing novel Somewhere Above It All*.*

In Holli Fawcett Clayton's evocative romance novel *Somewhere Above It All* a grieving woman seeks to scale a treacherous mountain, hoping to come to terms with her loss in the process.

Marren's husband was her high school sweetheart, but opioid addiction turned him into an emotional abuser. When he commits suicide, Marren determines to put herself first, for the first time in a long time. For years, she was lost in despair; now, she's ready to tackle the unimaginable—a grueling ascent of Mount Kilimanjaro. But leaving her past behind isn't easy. Thoughts of her husband intrude on her successes and failures on the mountain, inhibiting her new friendships and dimming her joy.

The book's landscapes are both emotional and physical. Careful and perceptive, the prose reveals the mixed emotions that accompany Marren's husband's suicide: though she's now free from her husband's choke hold on her life, she has survivor's remorse. Sometimes, gasping for breath on the mountain is all that she can focus on; it staves off her soul-crushing desperation. She moves slowly up its side, simultaneously wrangling her grief.

Chris, the lead counsel for a pharmaceutical company, is part of Marren's Kilimanjaro team. The rugged outdoorsman is grieving a suicide himself—that of his older brother and best friend. Like Marren, Chris resolves to survive the arduous trek; if he can do that, he thinks, anything is possible. Chris and Marren's sorrow and determination draw them together, even when it seems as if they can never be a couple.

The novel is convincing in handling losses—not just related to death, but related to betrayals. A grief counselor becomes its mouthpiece, assuring Marren, and her audience, of her strength and resilience. The story moves toward the triumphant sense that she is invincible and unconquerable, just like the mountain that she scaled; the metaphor is stellar.

But the central relationship's progression is dependent on Marren's healing, and the book's movements become dependent on how she pursues wholeness and seeks to move beyond her past. Its storytelling highs are mirrored by exquisite details in the scene setting, which render the African landscape in vibrant terms; the book also takes care in covering the emotional resources that are required for high-altitude climbing. And the Tanzanian expedition guides and porters who make it possible for neophytes and expert mountaineers to summit the mountain are also given ample room in the text; the story pays tribute to their efforts.

A healing adventure becomes a chance for new romance in the novel *Somewhere Above It All*, whose leads are tender and strong.

KEIRA SOLEORE (December 15, 2021)

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