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Tiger Heart: My Unexpected Adventures to Make a Difference in Darjeeling, and What I Learned about Fate, Fortitude, and Finding Family Half a World Away

Katrell Christie

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Katrell Christie was a 30-something artist turned roller-derby rebel who opened a tea shop in Atlanta. Barely two years later, her life would make a drastic change - and so would the lives of a group of girls half a world away.

I chose the name of my tea shop - Dr. Bombay's Underwater Tea Party - because it sounded whimsical. India wasn't part of the equation. Not even remotely. I didn't do yoga. I had no deep yearning to see the Taj Mahal or tour Hindu temples. Indian food? I could take it or leave it.

Yet on a whim, Katrell did go. She witnessed the throngs at the Ganges River, toured the tea fields of Darjeeling, and helped string pearls in conservative Hyderabad. But it was in a crowded Buddhist orphanage where she crossed paths with some girls who would change the course of her life.

One night we had a conversation about their futures. What did they hope to be when they grew up? They didn't have any answers. The fear that consumed them was leaving the orphanage. What would happen on the day they were asked to gather their things and leave - to walk out the door and be all alone on the street with no one to turn to and nowhere to go?

With her mind racing about their grim futures, Katrell reached the simple conclusion that she couldn't walk away. So instead she walked forward - on a mission to help them in any small way. Once back at her shop, an idea for The Learning Tea was born. By selling tea, cupcakes, scones, and other treats, Katrell raised enough funds to provide life necessities for the girls - safe housing, uniforms, medical care, tutoring, and ultimately, a college education for each of them. To date, The Learning Tea has helped 11 young girls who once faced the bleakest of futures.

Tiger Heart recounts Katrell's riveting adventures back to India, through the chaotic streets of Mumbai, to tiny villages with roadside tea huts and hot samosas, to elephant crossings and snowcapped mountain switchbacks of the Himalayas - an unexpected backdrop where she fell in love with a country that was gorgeous and heartbreaking all at once, where tragedy, humor, resilience, and kindness were inextricably bound. From dodging feral monkeys, to slamming shots of whiskey to win acceptance at a local Rotary Club, to forging lasting friendships with the people who stepped up to help her cause, *Tiger Heart* offers a shotgun seat on an inspiring trek across the globe, capturing the essence of India: its quirks, its traditions, and its people.

Fate may have led Katrell to a tiny spot on a map, but it was a kinship that brought her back home a half a world away. *Tiger Heart* is a life-affirming look at the ties that bind and the power of each of us to make a difference.

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