



Air (Elemental Journey, #2)

Caroline Allen

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The second book in the Elemental Journey Series, AIR follows Pearl Swinton as she uproots and moves to Tokyo, where she hopes to live floating above the culture. Her encounter with Usui, a missionary who voluntarily makes himself homeless, brings her face to face with her own homelessness. AIR tackles core issues facing individuals coming of age in today's world. How can anyone feel safe and at home, let alone find themselves, on an increasingly unstable planet? Where, truly, is home?

Air (Elemental Journey, #2) Details

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Author : Caroline Allen

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From Reader Review Air (Elemental Journey, #2) for online ebook

Peggy Gilmer says

I loved EARTH and waited expectantly for AIR. I was not disappointed. It is fabulous. The writing is spare and evocative. It's shorter than EARTH and still tells a powerfully poignant story with our heroine, Pearl, in rapid evolution. I love Pearl. She makes me remember, she makes me cry, and she causes me to grow....all in 162 magic pages.

Gaytracy says

Air Took My Breath Away

By gay tracy on October 14, 2015

Format: Paperback

Air took my breath away. It is one of those books that is a joy to read and a loss to finish. I didn't want to let the characters go. I will read it again. I liked it that much. Allen writes beautifully which adds to the pleasure. Even in parts where the subject matter is sad or uncomfortable there is always something beautiful in the scene to make it hopeful.

I read Earth. Her first book and also loved it, but this second book is better. She has searched deeper into the characters. It is great to read Earth first and it does add a bit to Air, but it isn't necessary. You can start with Air. Allen has provided enough of the back story from Earth, so you won't be confused.

I now look forward to the "rest of the story". But first I will reread Air just for the pleasure.

Nancy Jones says

Gifted copy for honest review.

I have to say this was different from anything I have ever read. The story, the characters everything is different. This is a story about Pearl. She leaves her home in the States and travels to Japan to continue her journey. She meets different people along the way as she tries to fit in.

Julie M. says

I just love this Elemental Journey series! Caroline Allen has a style of writing that is at once both lyrical and visceral, poetic and grounded, and her characters are as complex and interesting as the language of the story. The protagonist, Pearl, is constantly taken out of her element, either through physical movement or through visions, and in this book, Pearl travels from rural Missouri to Japan, facing challenges that raise bigger questions for the reader, such as the meaning of "home" - is it established through relationship or location? How do the outside forces of our world impact feelings of safety, love, home? I found myself in awe of Pearl as she navigated the events of this novel, including coming to terms with her own metaphysical experiences

in a culture that feels so foreign and in some ways, intolerant. It is not necessary to read Earth before Air, although the experience of reading both feels rich and satisfying, and I can't wait until the next one!

Ruty B says

Rating: 3.5 stars

'Air' is the story of Pearl and her journey to Japan. She decides to leave her hometown and take the risk of living in a strange land. With no friends, no job and minimum money to survive, she jumps into a plane despite some fears.

Her adventure in Japan is full of surprises, turns, and diverse people. She first meets Usui (a Jesuit missioner) who gives her a place to live. After a while, she lives and works with a Japanese-American girl and then finally she finds a job at a newspaper. There are many events in between but I'll leave you to read about them.

Pearl is a strange character. I wanted to like her but it was hard. She is trying to figure out her place in the world and her struggle is relatable. She is an outsider in a new land, where the culture is totally different to hers and she needs to figure out how to make it there. She has some qualities like her strength in hard moments and her empathy is a good trait. However, she is voluble to say the least. For moments, she isn't afraid of taking her life by the horns, but there are moments where she seems conformist and people do what they wish with her. Also, she has these visions and she doesn't know the reason behind them. I liked the narration of them, they had a poetic aura and are colorful.

The story, in general, is good and the plot is clear. The writing is flawless, the dialogues sound real and the rhythm is steady. I liked that the story is set in the eighties, I don't think this story would work in today's world with all the technology and massive communication.

For me, the book was difficult to read because the atmosphere is a bit dense for moments, I mean: there is a sensation of sadness and despair in the story that leaves the pages and submerges you in a dark mood. It's a good thing if you think about how powerful the author's words are but it's a bad thing if you ended up feeling a bit blue after reading it.

This is book two in a series. I didn't read the first book and I think that was one of the reasons I couldn't fully enjoy the story. I'm sure Pearl's growth was notorious from book to book but I missed that evolution. Also, despite there are some references to events from the past, I would have liked to witness them to know her better.

*** I received a complimentary copy in exchange for an honest review. **

Sally says

I actually liked the first book, Earth, better, but Caroline is quite a story teller. Wondering what comes next...

Lisa says

By the time I got to page 40 of "Air", I was shaking my head in amazement and said out loud, "She did it again! She wrote a SECOND beautiful novel!"

"Air" is an accomplishment in many ways: its structure, its nuanced exploration of a Midwestern American's experience of Japan, its absorbing characterization, and most of all the clear and lovely writing.

The author, Caroline Allen, has taken on quite a challenge with this "Elemental Journey" series, and does a remarkable job in weaving the abstract "elements" concepts into the rich folds of Pearl's life. As with the Earth (Elemental Journey Series) (Volume 1) in "Air" I admire the author's artful treatment of what could have been either unrelentingly bleak or else sappy salvation stories. Ms. Allen does neither, yet both books manage to be satisfying in a very balanced, mature way, despite the very dark events, because the characters are multidimensional, and because anger is leavened with forgiveness and hurtful actions with loving ones.

Ms. Allen's descriptions, dialogue, and most of all the feelings she describes are so clear and so engaging that I smiled just from the sheer pleasure of reading the sentences.

The comparisons between Missouri and Japan were just spot-on, poetic and yet sharp as a laser. Like this: "Shoot. Slice. Gut. Chop. Fry. Missouri survival poetry, the cadence of subsistence."

and

"In Missouri things were big and heavy and you could slam your whole body and not break them. But here, even a wayward step could ruin everything."

There are also many astute observations that are specific to the events of the book, yet universal - I especially loved this one:

"I'd noticed how the educated, the "civilized" made fun of all things rural, how they mocked the earth. If you came from the earth, they treated you like a handicapped cousin, a demented half-wit. It wasn't just corporations killing the earth, maniacs murdering children. The average intellectual had a lot to answer for, too."

It's very hard to write about traveling and living overseas without hitting the wrong tone. Many writers fail at it. But this book got it just right: a full-blown portrait of a place and time, yet with no tedious travel-book monologue. I've only ever spent one night in Japan, but after reading this I feel I know the place and I know exactly what I would like and dislike about it.

I found it remarkable how suspenseful "Air" is. I read it in just four sittings, didn't want to put it down. "Earth" was the same: compelling without resorting to any gratuitous plot twists. Mostly, this arises from how absorbing Pearl is as a character, but also from the twists her life takes as she submerges her entire being in the worlds of spirit as well as substance.

Needless to say, Pearl continues to be a character that I want to know for the rest of the series, and watch her life unfold. Ms. Allen's emotional honesty and integrity shine through, and carry the book. It is impressive indeed.

Pearl is hurt and suffers but she is never a victim. Even in her darkest times the reader witnesses and believes in Pearl's strength, and inevitably this strengthens the reader's belief in her own self, too.

It is difficult to find role models of people who live their life with authenticity and who try to honestly express their spirit - not just survive. Many thanks to Ms. Allen for providing this role model.

Kay says

All I could think as I read this was: this is different: different style, different voice, different plot twists from what I'm used to in the novel these days—and what a different and delightful discovery! Anachronisms were refreshing; the raw grit of the words, and then jigsawing words in a startlingly poetic way were energizing; laying out an alien world in poetry by spurting in, realistically, the funny ways of foreigners in English: "I am going" when a Japanese lover is about to climax rather than "I am coming" = just one of the quick captures of life abroad. Lots of smells in this book, more pungent than most novels, give it fresh life; the cliffhangers and the unexpected twists in the story keep the pages turning. Unexpected street-smart young American befriends Japanese Jesuit who falls on hard times, and as the American woman finds a job in journalism, she is able to dig for the truth of what happened. And the truth is a surprise for Pearl's mystical, visionary side that sees karmic worlds deep behind ours and tackles the central question of the book: where do I belong? A revelation of a book, disturbing and exciting and so much fun to read.

Katia says

Caroline Allen

"Air," the second volume in Caroline Allen's Elemental Journey Series, follows Pearl Swinton, the teenage protagonist of "Earth" (Allen's first novel), now a young woman, as she leaves her original home in rural Missouri to live in Tokyo, Japan. "Air" is, in many ways, an expat novel. The description of Pearl's journey is a powerful reflection on how moving across borders and cultures profoundly changes a person.

When Pearl leaves Missouri for Japan, her concept of home is transformed. Faced with a radically different culture and worldview than the one she grew up with, she struggles to belong and find a sense of home. Although eventually Pearl adjusts to her new life, she never fits in completely in the Japanese culture. When, at some point, she goes back to Missouri for a visit, she discovers that she does not belong there either: "I didn't belong in Missouri any more, and I'd never belong in Tokyo. I lived in the space in-between." She has been homesick for a home she can never go back to. Allen poignantly and insightfully describes Pearl's struggle with a shifting and elusive concept of home – a familiar struggle for global nomads.

The question "Where is home?" keeps recurring in the novel. Home is many things. For Pearl, as for many global nomads, home is everywhere and nowhere. Home is Pearl's in-between status, her homelessness: "Home had become a series of flimsy replacements. Home was homelessness." Isn't this the story of every modern expat?

Elizabeth Mehlin says

"Floating above my body, I looked down at myself driving the orange truck, the sharp profile, the crazy black hair like a nest, the cigarette burning. Still the beauty of Missouri, even with the land raped by the winds, could catch me in the throat, juxtaposition of red barn, broken-down farmhouse, field of thick farm

beasts – like a poet’s dream. But I didn’t belong in Missouri anymore, and I’d never belong in Tokyo. I lived in the space in between. Every step I took forward was a step with no ground, a movement into air. Living in Tokyo was like spending my life floating. I’d chosen it, this floating life. Did it make it easier to know I’d chosen it? It had its consequences – no traditions, not even language to comfort you. But it had its benefits, too. I was beginning to see so much.”

In *Air*, Caroline Allen’s second book and book two of the *Elemental Journey* series, we revisit Pearl Swinton, our protagonist from the first book, *Earth*. Pearl moves away from Missouri, from all she knows, and flies to Tokyo with a tiny amount of money in her pocket, no knowledge of Japanese, and only one small connection, a letter from her hometown priest introducing her to a Jesuit mission. She does all of this in a headlong rush to escape Missouri, a need to experience the something outside of her rural, small town American life, and to try to come to an understanding about the visions she has had since a child.

Tokyo is everything Missouri is not: Pearl finds herself in another world altogether, a world of the Jesuit mission, a contemplative oasis in the craziness of Tokyo, the local temple with incense burning and shrines to the Shinto Gods, a shop full of beautiful teapots. Pearl finds herself experiencing a time for reflection, almost a feeling of peace, and yet also a nagging worry about money, needing a job and a home.

Then there is the other Tokyo: A sophisticated, urbane society, all the “salarimen” (working men) in black pushing onto the subway trains. Pearl leaves the mission and starts working long hours as a journalist, trying to claw her way up a ladder at the newspaper where women do not have a voice, living in a tiny apartment, partying into the night with her wild roommate. Her only grounding is through the mission where she first arrived, and its priest, Usui. When she goes back to the mission to find him again, needing some kind of balance in her life, she discovers he’s left without a trace.

Later, Pearl discovers that Usui has become homeless, has given up everything and now spends his days folding cranes under a railroad bridge in a nearby park. The cranes, he says, are for a wish – a thousand cranes for one wish. Pearl has to reconcile this seeming unraveling of the one person who she loves and admires with the hard-driving, deadline-driven, hard partying world in which she is embroiled. Pearl has to try to navigate Japan’s cultural ambiguities amidst a profound exhaustion of never belonging.

This book, like its predecessor, *Earth*, explores the ways in which the mind creates a sense of home, of belonging. However, in *Air* the protagonist is propelled out of a world she knows into the heady and untethered world of floating. She finds, in this floating world, some comfort in the life in between, not having to be a part of one culture or another, not even needing a common language. But yet she also finds that the cultural parameters of Japan, much like Missouri, are actually quite rigid and unforgiving. Those that do not fit into the paradigm can be driven mad. But then, she also realizes, the contemplative gentleness underlying this hectic world might actually be the sane part, and maybe the driven, professional, overworked world might be the mad one.

Air is a powerful and gripping story of a small town girl launched into a foreign world, and the far-reaching consequences for this person in trying to grasp hold of an identity while living between worlds and cultures. The book is an examination of what actually makes us who we are, what really “matters” in a world of such different extremes of value and priority, culture and norm. The book takes our protagonist, Pearl, out into the world and makes us see ourselves through her experiences, through her apocalyptic visions, through her sense of loss and love, and her dogged determination to find some meaning in her life.

This book is gripping and bold. *Air* brings the reader to confront their own preconceptions, to try to make sense of the world by floating above it and looking down. It is a must-read for anyone who has lived outside of their country, or who has wondered what it would be like to, to transport out of their comfort zone and feel that freedom, that terror. Caroline Allen brings us into stark understanding what it feels like to be there, and what we can learn from it about ourselves and our understanding of the world. I highly recommend this book for bringing us face-to-face with the niggling edges of things, with what we think defines us, beyond where we do not dare to go.
