



Between Two Worlds

Katherine Kirkpatrick

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On the treeless shores of Itta, Greenland, as far north as humans can settle, sixteen-year-old Inuit Billy Bah spots a ship far out among the icebergs on the bay--a sight both welcome and feared. Explorers have already left their indelible mark on her land and its people, and a ship full of white men can mean trouble.

The ship carries provisions for Robert E. Peary, who is making an expedition to the North Pole. As a child, Billy Bah spent a year in America with Peary's family. When her parents went to America years later, they died in a tragic scandal. Now, Peary's wife, daughter, and crew are in Itta to bring him supplies. Winter comes on fast, and when the ship gets caught in the ice, Billy Bah sets out to find Peary. The journey will imperil her life, and that of the man she loves.

By turns lyrical and gripping, *Between Two Worlds* is an impassioned coming-of-age novel set in a land of breathtaking beauty and danger, where nature and love are powerful and unpredictable forces.

Between Two Worlds Details

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Author : Katherine Kirkpatrick

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From Reader Review Between Two Worlds for online ebook

Debbie says

Katherine Kirkpatrick's Between Two Worlds is another example of an author and major publisher trying to tell a Native story, but failing. It is getting good reviews, which represents another fail in the reviewing world.

The protagonist in Kirkpatrick's story is supposed to be an Inuit teen, Billy Bah, who was the seamstress for Robert E. Peary, one of the white men who claimed to reach the North Pole (I used 'white' deliberately because all the fuss over "first" white men to reach this or that place always make me pause).

As I read Between Two Worlds I thought
"this does not strike me as an insider's voice."

There are certain things about Inuit people that most people take to be fact. Here's two: They rub noses. The men get trade goods by offering sex with their wives as their unit of trade. Generally, there's a kernel of truth in such things, but when they seep into an outsider's conscience as THE thing(s) they know about a people, that outsider "knowledge" is vividly on display as ignorance and stereotype.

The degree to which that "knowledge" has come to pass as legitimate information explains 1) why Kirkpatrick could write such a book, 2) why her editor at Random House would not spot the outsider perspective, 3) and why reviewers give the book a thumbs up.

So. Rubbing noses. Everyone knows that is the way Eskimos kiss, right?

Wrong! It is actually a gesture of affection called a kunik by those who do it. In this article, David Joanasi, of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, says "When you're an infant and a little kid, your parents and older siblings sniff you and rub your face with their nose", and Erin Eckman, who is Inupiaq and works for the Alaska Native Heritage Center said "Growing up in Alaska, I only really saw women do it to babies."

Did you notice how many times Kirkpatrick uses "rubbing noses" in the story? I did. 17 times. That doesn't strike me as good writing... I have more to say, over at my site: <http://americanindiansinchidlenslite...>

Lisa says

This novel tells the story of a 16-year-old Inuit girl known as Billy-Bah, who has spent a year as a child living in Washington D.C. with the family of Lt. Peary, has returned, is married and has only memories of America. Her parents were taken to America but contracted illnesses and died there. Now, with Peary living in the north full time, supply ships come and go, and this one carries his wife and daughter. Billy-Bah's husband trades her "favors" with the sailors for supplies like wood, guns and bullets, but when she falls in love with Duncan, her world turns upside down. Based on historical characters, this story about the effects on the Inuit culture because of the contact with the outside world feels like a much more mature Julie of the Wolves.

cross posted to <http://kissthebook.blogspot.com> CHECK IT OUT!

Raena says

I received this book through a goodreads giveaway. I was never completely sure who this book was written for. The writing style seems targeted at a young crowd, but some of the themes were much older, in particular the trading of wives for goods and the "needs" of a ship of men.

The book was very loosely based on a true story, but for a primarily oral storytelling culture the author didn't have much to go on except turn of the century white people's journals. The book didn't really ever have a big story to tell, but this was probably because the author didn't want to extrapolate too much from the way things happened. While the story seemed to be the culture and customs of the Inuits, it was never quite compelling enough.

This all sounds negative. I liked the book, but didn't love it. I learned a few things and really liked the pictures and historical notes at the end. The book was easy to read and didn't take me long and it was interesting to see a different perspective on marriage and death and life in general.

Niffer says

I received this book through a Goodreads First Reads giveaway.

This is a very interesting book based on the life of an Inuit girl/woman (in the book she was 16 but had been married for several years) who knew the explorer Peary and lived for a year with his family in this US. It is a well written exploration of the cultural conflicts she likely faced as well as the interactions between her community and the explorers.

The author obviously did extensive research and reached out to modern Inuits to bring the story to life. In particular she sometimes had the main character poking fun at or being amazed by the odd habits of the explorers (they don't eat their meat raw, they don't see the advantage of living in igloos or wearing furs to stay warm, etc.).

I will admit I was a little surprised at the amount of sex in the book. It was obviously a cultural norm (and nothing in any way explicit) for the men to trade their wives for goods, services, etc., and the main character frequently comments about it and actually spends a couple of chapters as a "traded" commodity with one of the explorers (and she actually influenced the trade by making suggestions to her husband about what he could get in return). The book is definitely worth reading, the trades obviously true to the culture and not in any way graphic, but I feel as though it is worth mentioning.

Anna N.~Take A Shot In The Face Of Fear! says

Rating: 2.5

I won a copy of this book for an honest review. This will never effect how I like or rate a book.

And in all honesty I'm sad I couldn't like this book more. I was really looking forward to it, it has a really great cover and it sounded like it would be an interesting story. Really though I just found myself bored. Constantly putting the book down and finding other things to do. Which for a book that's only 261pgs that's pretty sad. So let me try to say some good things about the book before getting into the bad.

I liked the writing style, it was easy to read. I also really liked the cast of characters and the way to help pronounce the names. Then for me personally I did enjoy seeing this time period and really this way of life that I don't see often even in realistic fiction. It was interesting and even though I may not have liked some of it (Namely the trading of wives as objects) it was fascinating to read about. Which could be why I enjoyed all the real information that was given at the end of the book. Lastly I enjoyed the end of the book. It took me a long way to get there but I was happy with it's ending which is why my rating for the book is a 2.5.

Now on to the bad. Which really isn't that much but at the same time made the book hard to read. For me it felt like even when things were happening that there wasn't much going on which is fine in some books when you have good, sometimes great characters to spend your time with but here not so much. I didn't like any of these people. The main character I liked the most but even then I never felt fully on her side, she was just the most likable. She finally took charge of her own life by the end but I felt she should of done so before. In the facts at the end of the book it sure sounded like she did. Still here it was just hard for me to want to read about this character who was surrounded by even more unlikable ones. To be fair though I'll exclude Marie and Navarana, since I did actually like them. For how often I had to tell myself to remember the time period and that this is how they grew up and things like that I also found myself asking, "Yeah, but do they really have to be this unlikable?" In the end I've come to the decision that no, they really don't. For me you have to have one or the other, if it's a really good book both but I can't have a nothing much happening plot and unlikable characters. For then it is no fun to read. Hence why it took me so long to finish a relatively short book.

At the end of the day the book wasn't horrible it just wasn't right for me. I would still recommend it as I would all books, even the ones I do hate. Since there will always be someone that will like a book that I didn't. Though I wouldn't recommend it to children. Teens and adults definitely though.

Tiffany Toms says

I received this book through a Goodreads giveaway.

First off I have to say that I have no idea how this book is considered a teen book, but nonetheless I enjoyed it thoroughly!

This book is based on the actual exploration of Robert Peary to reach the North Pole first, but the story revolves more around the Inuit culture during the late 1800s. Eqariusaq nicknamed Billy Bah by Peary's wife and daughter faces the reality of her life and searches for answers on her parents disappearance and how she can live a life that will bring her freedom and happiness. Many of her own people didn't accept her because her husband traded her to the white men and, and white folk didn't accept her because she was an Inuit.

Katherine Kirkpatrick does a wonderful job giving us insight into this young woman's struggle between the world she lived in for a year and the world she lives in now. How the main character goes from being a used good to a woman who lives life on her own terms is very heart wrenching.

After reading this book and the historical information included, I was given a fascinating look into a culture I was not familiar with and a historical event that I knew only the basics about.

Becky says

Between Two Worlds was an interesting and thoughtful novel. The novel is set in Greenland at the turn of the twentieth century. It is told from the native perspective, a young woman named Eqariusaq, nicknamed Billy Bah by Robert E. Peary's wife and daughter. The novel explores the tension between the heroine's "two worlds." On the one hand, as a child, she went with Peary and lived with his family for about a year in the United States. Several years later, her parents also traveled with Peary. But they never returned, along with the other natives Peary had selected. Those natives did not have the personal connection, the friendship. These men and women were to be studied by a museum. Between Two Worlds tells young readers of their fate and treatment--or mistreatment as the case may be. Readers learn alongside the main character. On the other hand, her home is her HOME. Spending time with white people (qallunaat) did not change who she was, did not change her way of life, her culture, her beliefs. She did not trade in her spirituality, for example, for that of the white men. Since her time with Peary's family, she has grown up and gotten married. She's still super young for marriage by today's standards, but today's standards just don't apply to ANY part of this novel.

One of the novel's greatest strengths, perhaps, is that it presents the facts with little or no judgment at all. How husbands and wives treated one another, how women fit into the community and village life, it's something that modern readers will question perhaps. Especially in terms of how husbands traded their wives amongst themselves in addition to trading them to the white men. Part of a woman's value was the value she could bring her husband. A wife's body could be sold or traded. Eqariusaq's husband, Angulluk, loved to trade his wife a lot, especially to the white men. He loved how he could use his wife to obtain guns and bullets and planks of wood. I should also point out that men and women could decide to separate or "divorce." Marriage did not mean forever. Women could decide to discard one man in favor of another, in favor of a better. Billy Bah takes comfort in that fact as she seriously considers leaving her husband; she has little respect for him since he's lazy and greedy.

Between Two Worlds is a contemplative novel. Our heroine is very much torn in what she wants and what she needs. She is questioning her past, her present, and her future. Her memories of the past are bitter and sweet. There are memories she cherishes, for better or worse, but she's more analytical than she was as a child. There were things that happened to her in America that through her innocence she did not see as damaging or painful, but, upon growing up and growing wise, she realizes things aren't that simple. For example, she has happy memories of Peary's wife and daughter. Seriously happy memories. Yet, as an adult, as she meets them again after years apart, she realizes the complexity of the situation. Mrs. Peary is willing to risk the lives of the natives without a thought, without a thank you. She commands and expects obedience. She simply does not see the natives as being equally human, equally of worth.

I thought it was a compelling read. It presents a whole other world to readers.

Margo Berendsen says

Based loosely on the life of a real person, a young woman in 1900-1901 who was one of the natives who helped the first white man, Robert Peary, his team and his family, in his exploration of Ellesmere Island, leading up to his claim of reaching the North Pole in 1909.

Loved reading about these Arctic adventures from the perspective of a native, and a girl to boot! Eqariusaq was a spirited girl, too - loved her outspoken but sometimes wistful character. She was part of the tiny population of polar Inugguit (commonly known as polar Eskimos) which numbered only a few hundred a century ago, about 700-800 now. Her story and her people were so fascinating to me I googled more about the modern Inugguit and found an excellent series of articles by Stephen Pax Leonard with the Guardian publication.

In the extensive historical notes at the back of this book, I found it very interesting that the author had first written a story about the Snow Baby, which was based on a book written by Robert Peary's wife about her travels with her husband in the Arctic and where their young daughter, Marie was born and spent many years with them. In the Snow Baby, the Pearys write about Billy Bah, the nickname of the Inuit girl who became their nanny. They even took Billy Bah back to NY and Washington DC with them. The author thought it would be interesting to write another story from the perspective of Billy Bah (Eqariusaq).

I found this book in the Middle Grade section of my library, and it reads like MG, but Billy Bah is already 16 when the story starts and has already been married 3 summers. A couple other shockers: within the first few chapters her husband trades Billy to the white sailors in exchange for bullets. Yup, he prostitutes her out. This is actually a common practice among Inuit men and women in general (according to the story; other reviewers have taken issue with this fact), and it isn't a big deal to Billy, though she doesn't like it. However, Inuit women do have the right to divorce their husbands; they weren't helpless or slaves or without rights. Billy's husband is characterized as greedy and lazy at times, but at other times very brave and appreciative of Billy. The story gives a similar balanced characterization of Peary and the other white people: sometimes they do selfish things; sometimes they do noble things. Not all the explorers were white too - it was fascinating to learn that Matthew Henson, Peary's right hand man, was a black man!

The story is full of adventure and cultural tidbits about the Inuits and explorers over a century ago. A lot of facts of living in the Arctic I remember from another fantastic book, Julie of the Wolves, but these Inuit people lived even further north. Some new things to me though was the hunting of musk ox and narwhal; how important feasting was to these people; how often they went without food at all; how they called the Northern Lights "the ancestors"; how Billy would talk to her dead parents (there's a bit of a mystery about what happened to her parents).

An example of some of the different attitudes of the polar Inuits: The white men feeling sorry for the orphan boy, who Billy nicknames Bag of Bones. "They didn't realize that orphan boys, left to care for themselves, often became our people's best and bravest hunters."

And one of my favorite excerpts:

Duncan, a white sailor on the ship the Windward, talking to Billy Bah:

"You went to America. What was that like for you?"

Shy, I pulled my comforting kaputak up around me. "America is very crowded. The food has no flavor! Winters are not nearly so cold. Your pee never freezes in midair! Hah!"

I'd added this last detail because it was the sort of tidbit that my fahter, a wonderful storyteller, would have included.

Duncan laughed.

"Tell me," I said. "What do you think of my land?"

He grinned. "The glaciers are beautiful. The stars... and yes, it's strange! In this cold, like you say, pee freezes! The hair on my face stops growing."

"Why did you come here?"

He leaned toward me, eyes shining, as if he'd just returned from a hunt. "An Arctic voyage - ah. I love danger. I feel sharp and alive when I risk my life every single day."

"But living here is not dangerous."

His eyebrows lifted. "No?"

I said what my father had once told me: "It's mostly fools or the young who die in accidents. We know how to gauge the snow, and to wait until the right time to travel. Things happen very slowly here."

Jill says

This book was a fascinating look at Inuit / Eskimo culture and the history of their interactions with Europeans. I had no previous knowledge of these people, and this story was a great way to dive in. I really enjoyed how the author had Billy Bah walk the line between the (to my modern, feminist eyes) misogynistic culture that she grew up in and her desire to follow her own path. At times she felt most comfortable being told what to do by her husband, and at other times she wanted nothing to do with him. Kirkpatrick toes this line in a very satisfying way, without making Billy Bah seem wishy-washy or one dimensional.

A heads-up for conservative readers - this book is upfront about the Inuit's sexual habits. I'm pretty cool with sexuality in books, and I still found myself a little shocked. Wife sharing? Um, isn't this a teen book? But it makes sense for their culture, and the story would not have worked without honesty about this issue. Still, it's worth an FYI.

In college I watched "Nanook of The North" for a documentary film class and memories of that film came back as I read about the "white man" misunderstanding the Inuit ways and seeking to bring them back as souvenirs, like they would a rock or a tool. I wish Kirkpatrick had asked, how do we do this still today? But that's another book for another time, I suppose.

Stephanie says

I was swept into another time and place as sixteen-year-old Billy Bah, an Inuit girl from Greenland in the early 20th century, navigates between the moral, spiritual and societal customs of her country and the America of the great explorer Robert E. Peary who has taken her there and back again. The struggle and mortal danger of living in the relentlessly cold and icy world of Greenland is gripping. The attention to detail

is fascinating as she hunts birds, climbs dangerous cliffs and sews sealskin garments so that her friends and family may survive in the cold. Eventually, as the young Billy discovers love and tenderness outside of her marriage to a thick-headed young man who takes her for granted, she begins to ask, "Who am I? What are my strengths? What can I do if the world is not the way I thought it would be?" And, as is the custom of her country, she calls on the spirits of her dead parents to help her.

A wonderfully rich book!

Terry says

An interesting and insightful glimpse at Inuit life.

Set in 1900, way above the Arctic Circle, this book is loosely based on a true story of a 16-year old married Inuit woman, and her interactions with her husband (a lazy 19 year old Inuit), explorer Robert E. Peary his family, the men accompanying Perry, and the greater Inuit community.

The adult male Inuit concept of trading his wife's sexual services to other men plays an important part in the book. For this reason, I would not recommend the book to immature or sensitive readers. However, there is no graphic sexual description, and the concept is essential to the plot.

The book is well written and obviously thoroughly researched. It reads very easily (like a magazine article, except for some of the complicated names). It does not have as much action as some dramas, but it won't keep you awake at night either. There is important historical material in the appendix which is very interesting. Subject to the note above, I highly recommend this book.

Disclosure: I was randomly selected from among numerous GoodReads readers to receive an advance copy of this book; I have read it and this is my honest evaluation. I have no connection with this author or publisher and have received nothing from anyone in consideration for publishing this review.

Yapha says

Eqariusaq, called Billy Bah throughout this book, is one of the Arctic Inuit in Greenland where Commander Robert Peary is staging his attempts to reach the North Pole. As a child she spent a year living with Peary's family in Washington, DC. When a supply ship comes looking for Peary and carrying his wife and daughter gets stuck in the Arctic ice for the winter, Billy Bah finds herself torn between two worlds. It doesn't help that her husband is trading her "favors" to the white men to gain ammunition and wood. She has some difficult decisions to make on who she wants to be. Based on real events, though I recommend reading Debbie Reese's article about it at <http://americanindiansinchidlrenslite...>

Pair this with Smiler's Bones by Peter Lerangis for a look at what happened to Billy Bah's parents. Grades 8 & up.

Jenna says

I received Between Two Worlds from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

Between Two Worlds is the fictionalized story of Billy Bah, a real Inuit woman who lived in northern Greenland in the late 1800s and early 1900s. After reading the historical notes at the end of the book (I read them first!), I spent a little time reading about explorer Robert Peary, the Inuit, and the two settings of the book online. Katherine Kirkpatrick has written Snow Baby, a nonfiction account of the childhood of Peary's daughter that I would like to read.

Life was difficult in Itta, Greenland, with bitterly cold winters and, at times, a lack of food. The Inuit were familiar with Peary from his previous visits, so when his crew (and his wife and daughter) stopped in Itta, many of the Inuit hunters wanted a ride on their ship to Ellesmere Island (which they called Musk Ox Land), in Canada, where the hunting was better. Billy Bah and her husband were among those chosen to go.

I was a little taken aback when Billy Bah alluded to her husband trading her to some sailors for guns and ammunition, but a few pages later, I realized it was common in their culture.

Now and then, a husband might lend his wife to another hunter for a few days, to help with his chores or to relieve his boredom during the long winter. Such trades were never made with outsiders. But Ally went to Peary so often, it almost seemed she had two husbands...

Two husbands...and a son with Peary's blue eyes.

Later, Billy Bah was traded to Duncan, a sailor on the ship taking the Inuit to Musk Ox Land. They spent a lot of nights together, and Billy Bah even encouraged her husband to keep trading her to Duncan. Yes, even the Inuit have love triangles. This one, though, didn't seem so terribly serious the way so many triangles do when the participants don't have much else to worry about. Though she was torn between her loyalty to her husband and her feelings for Duncan, Billy Bah was concerned with survival more than anything else. There was no room for relationship drama in Billy Bah's life.

Billy Bah truly was caught "between two worlds." Many of her own people didn't truly accept her because her husband traded her to the white men and, and the white people didn't accept her because she was Inuit. It was hard to watch her struggle with wanting Mitti (Mrs.) Peary's approval and friendship, knowing that Mitti Peary felt she was better than Billy Bah. Only Marie, the Pearys' young daughter, loved Billy Bah for who she was. It was painful for Billy Bah to come to terms with her feelings for Mitti Peary, Robert Peary, and the other white people as she slowly realized that they were hiding things from her, most importantly the fate of her deceased parents.

I had a little trouble with the unfamiliar names of the characters, all As and Qs and Ks, but that's not the fault of the author. It wouldn't be right to name the Inuit Julia or Cheryl or John. There's a cast of characters in the front of the book and I kept referring to that. (That's one advantage of a physical copy over an ebook: it's easier to flip back and forth to both that cast of characters and the Inuit glossary in the back!) There's also a blank page for a map and I wish it had been included in the ARC. I was able to find the area of Itta (Etah, now abandoned) and Ellesmere Island via Google Maps. It's hard to believe people (130 of them in 2011) live so far north, at the top of the world, and hard to imagine their lives even now, 100+ years after the events

of Between Two Worlds. The average annual temperature there is 2° F; where I live it's 57° F.

Partly based on the real Billy Bah's life, partly generalized from information about various Inuit groups across Greenland and Canada, and partly fiction, Between Two Worlds is a fascinating look into a culture I know very little about.

Linda Branich says

This book is rated 14 and up. I received it free from First Reads in exchange for a fair and honest review. The manner of acquisition of this book in no way influenced my review.

This is a coming of age story about a 16-year-old Inuit Eskimo girl from Northern Greenland. I did not realize until I got to the end that it was loosely based on an actual person, who became a seamstress for Admiral Peary. There are photographs of her at the end of the book.

"Billy Bah", as she was known by explorer Robert Peary's daughter, is the main character. I have been fascinated by Perry since I was in second grade, and I enjoyed learning about Inuit customs and life. I also did not know much about Peary's family or how much he was gone from them.

Billy Bah accompanied Peary, his wife and daughter to the US when she was 9 for a year. Her parents and a few others from their village went to America without Billy Bah at a later date and died. Their bones were placed in a museum and kept there for about 100 years before they were returned to their home.

I do not wish to spoil this thoroughly enjoyable read by telling too much of the story. Read it for yourself and enjoy!

Sherri says

This fascinating adventure is "loosely based on the life of an Inuit (Polar Eskimo) girl known to explorer Robert E. Peary and his family" as Billy Bah, a nickname they gave her as her given name is Eh-karee-u-sak (Eqariusaq)

It's no easy life for Billy and the other Inuit living within the Arctic Circle at the turn of the century. At 16 years old, Billy is already married and known for her skills sewing animal skins and furs to make beautiful, durable clothing.

When a large ship arrives to their remote Greenland village, Billy is surprised to see the familiar faces of Peary's wife, Mitti, and daughter, Marie. When she was a child, she spent a year living with Peary's family and caring for baby Marie. Billy is the only native person to travel to America and return. Billy's parents chose to journey to America after her return home, but they died in New York.

Soon Billy finds herself torn between her home in Greenland and life with her husband and sometimes longing for a new life, perhaps even with the white man who she spends numerous evenings with because she was traded to him by her husband. It's part of life for some Inuit men to trade their wives for items they want, like bullets or guns.

Several times throughout the story, Billy recalls fondly her year with the Peary family, despite some difficulties in adjusting to the different clothes, weather and food. Also, other interesting Inuit culture is presented, including their ceremonies and beliefs surrounding those who die.

Now Peary's wife has returned to the Arctic with provisions for her husband who is off trying to find the North Pole. Despite the worsening weather conditions, Mitti makes wealthy offers to Billy's husband and other hunters to make the treacherous journey across icy land to find Peary. Tensions escalate when the ship becomes stuck in the frozen ice and resources for the crew and the Inuit become scarce.

Teens looking to explore a different time period will enjoy reading about life in the freezing Arctic and find Billy's life fascinating and want to know about her future. The book ends with pictures of the real Billy and Peary and includes additional information about those mentioned in the story.

{Other reviewers have found fault with the historical accuracy of some of the author's description of Inuit culture; I have no knowledge to judge the veracity of this story.}
