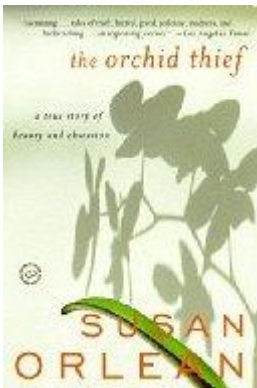


The Orchid Thief

Book Review



For the past two centuries the English, Europeans and Americans have been plundering the tropical world for orchids, but today there are national laws and international conventions to protect wild species. Just under ten years ago there was a case of orchid poaching in the Florida Everglades. A white man and three Indians were accused of removing orchids and bromeliads from a national park that also was part of an Indian reservation. The conflicts of interests, laws, morals, love of plants and desire for money make a great story.

You must read **THE ORCHID THIEF – a true story of beauty and obsession** by Susan Orlean. It is in our local Bribie Island Library in the biographies at 635.93440...

Susan Orlean, a staff writer for the New Yorker and other top magazines, knew nothing about orchids when she followed up an intriguing newspaper article mentioning the arrest of the poachers. *“Sometimes this kind of story turns out to be something more, some glimpse of life that expands like one of those Japanese paper balls you drop into water and after a moment they bloom into flowers, and the flower is so marvellous that you can’t believe there was a time when all you saw in front of you was a paper ball and a glass of water.”*

As Susan Orlean became involved in the fascinating world of orchids she discovered histories, romances and adventures, the addiction of collecting living things and the even more virulent disease of growing and collecting orchids. Her book is not just about the Ghost Orchid but also tells of explorers, scientists and smugglers. It tells of the great orchid hunters such as Hooker and Robelin and their often violent ends; and it tells of the patrons like Sander, Lowe and Linden who financed them.

Susan Orlean takes us with her to many places: from an American Orchid Society Gala at a millionaire’s mansion and to wading through the swamps of the Fakahatchee Strand looking for *Polyrrhiza lindenii*. We are introduced to leading figures of the American orchid world, and taken to Kerry’s Bromeliads where 329,000 square feet of greenhouses hold 3.6 million orchids and 1.4 million bromeliads.

But what do Australian pine trees and melaleucas have to do with this story?

What do the following characters have in common?

Michihiro Fukushima, founder of J A L;

Clarence Darrow, creator of Monopoly;

Lord Mansfield, owner of Royal Lochnagar Single Malt distillery.

What is the connection between Paxton, Cavendish bananas, *Victoria amazonica*, and the Crystal Palace?

Read **THE ORCHID THIEF** and enjoy finding out.

By Ian McLaren