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Don't Let's Go To The Dogs Tonight



Synopsis

How you see a country depends on whether you are driving through it, or live in it. How you see a country depends on whether or not you can leave it, if you have to. As the daughter of white settlers in war-torn 1970s Rhodesia, Alexandra Fuller remembers a time when a schoolgirl was as likely to carry a shotgun as a satchel. This is her story - of a civil war, of a quixotic battle with nature and loss, and of a family's unbreakable bond with the continent that came to define, scar and heal them. Shortlisted for the Guardian First Book Award in 2002, Alexandra Fuller's classic memoir of an African childhood is suffused with laughter and warmth even amid disaster. Unsentimental and unflinching, but always enchanting, it is the story of an extraordinary family in an extraordinary time.

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Customer Reviews

After reading Entertainment Weekly's review of this book, my curiosity led me to purchase it for my wife, since she enjoys reading true tales of other women. However, I started reading it before she did and I quickly was drawn into Alexandra Fuller's world. Her style is a little disconcerting at first (simply because she is speaking in her own voice and the language and slang she grew up with), and it takes a while to fall into the flow of her jumping around in her life in the early chapters, but I almost immediately was drawn into her world. I really enjoy writers who have a style all their own and Fuller definitely has her own unique voice. Her language is sometimes choppy, but it stills conveys

meaning and understanding. What I particularly liked was the subtle way she conveyed the changing of the guard in Africa, as black rule began to become the rule, rather than the exception. Without directly commenting on the changes either positively or negatively, she conveys the confusion that the change brought about and suggests that whether blacks or whites are in control, the common people of most African nations remain oppressed by their leaders. I think Ms. Fuller makes it clear that regardless of their race, whites and blacks are Africans and that something must eventually be done about the oppressive political environment present in so many African nations. This book is particularly relevant given the recent turmoil over the apparent re-election of Robert Mugabe. I was fascinated by her mother, but wished she had provided more information about her sister. At one point she hints that her sister may have been molested by a neighbor and that a neighbor may have attempted to do the same to her, but she is vague on details, perhaps deliberately so.

Dissatisfied reviewers of Alexandra Fuller's "Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight" tend to dwell on the degree to which the book fails to conform to their own agendas and expectations. These reviewers lament Fuller's perceived lack of attention to women's issues, the plight of black Zimbabweans, and the horrors of the Rhodesian War, to name a few. In other words, rather than praise Fuller for the story she tells, they criticize her for stories they believe she fails to tell. Too bad for them; they are missing out on a great book. In addition to being smart, funny, entertaining, and well-written, Fuller's memoir provides invaluable insight into the end of white rule in southern Africa. The Fullers are hardly members of a wealthy, landed, colonial ruling class. They are poor, rootless, prone to drinking and fighting. Where is the privilege, however minimal, for which they and other white Rhodesians fought? Why on earth would they stay on in places like Zambia and Malawi after the end of white rule? Fuller offers no definite answers to these questions -- though possible answers lurk in the loving and intricate passages in which Fuller describes the sights, sounds, and smells of southern African life. As the story of ordinary white Africans living through a defining moment in southern African history, this book works particularly well. Those who enjoy Fuller's book might also want to read "Mukiwa," Peter Godwin's equally excellent memoir of growing up in white Rhodesia. Godwin (who, like Fuller, spent much of his youth in the eastern part of Rhodesia, near the border with Mozambique) is about ten years older than Fuller. As such, he offers more about the origins of the war.

If there's one thing Alexandra Fuller can do, it's write. This unsentimental memoir of a white African childhood on various hardscrabble farms from 1972 to 1990, amidst periods of "unrest," including

Rhodesia's long struggle against white rule, captivates as it horrifies. With humor and unflinching honesty, Fuller immerses the reader in the welter of smells, searing heat, torrential rains and myriad dangers from man, animal and plantlife. Her opening: "Mum says, 'Don't come creeping into our room at night.' They sleep with loaded guns beside them on the bedside rugs. She says, 'Don't startle us when we're sleeping.' 'Why not?' 'We might shoot you.' 'Oh.' 'By mistake.' 'Okay.' As it is, there seems a good enough chance of getting shot on purpose. 'Okay, I won't.' "With these few lines, Fuller captures her tone - fluctuations of fear, bewilderment and humor. Her story is told primarily in present tense from her childhood point of view, though she skips around in chronology in order to follow theme threads: school, war, poverty, her mother's alcoholism and unpredictability. Her mother, Nicola, is ferocious, larger than life; a woman who can drag her daughter off without breakfast to spend the day on horseback rounding up wild cows or laze away a rainy day sprawled with both daughters on her bed reading. A woman whose manic-depressive tendencies were exacerbated by the heartbreaking deaths of three of her five children and exaggerated by alcohol. She's brave, unpredictable, loving and scary. Racism in Fuller's world is a given, unquestioned by the child who sasses her nanny by threatening to fire her. Her parents are so poor they sell Nicola's rings each planting season and redeem them at harvest. Yet they have a houseful of servants and field hands.

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