



Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness

Alexandra Fuller

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Selected by *The New York Times Book Review* as a Notable Book of the Year Alexandra Fuller returns to Africa and the story of her unforgettable family.

In *Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness* Alexandra Fuller returns to Africa and to her unforgettable family. At the heart of this family, and central to the lifeblood of her latest story, is Fuller's iconically courageous mother, Nicola (or, Nicola Fuller of Central Africa, as she sometimes prefers to be known). Born on the Scottish Isle of Skye to a warlike clan of highlanders and raised in Kenya's perfect equatorial light, Nicola holds dear the values most likely to get you hurt or killed in Africa: loyalty to blood, passion for land, and a holy belief in the restorative power of all animals. With a lifetime of admiration behind her and after years of interviews and research, Fuller has recaptured her mother's inimitable voice with remarkable precision. *Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness* is as funny, exotic, terrifying and unselfconscious as Nicola herself.

We see Nicola as an irrepressible child in western Kenya, then with the man who fell in love with her, Tim Fuller. The young couple begin their life in a lavender colored honeymoon period, when east Africa lies before them with all the promise of its liquid honeyed light, even as the British empire in which they both once believed wanes. But in short order, an accumulation of mishaps and tragedies bump up against history until the Fullers find themselves in a world they hardly recognize. We follow Tim and Nicola as they hopscotch the continent, restlessly trying to establish a home, from Kenya to Rhodesia to Zambia, even returning to England briefly. War, hardship and tragedy seem to follow the family even as Nicola fights to hold onto her children, her land, her sanity. But just when it seems that Nicola has been broken by the continent she loves, it is the African earth - and Tim's acceptance of her love for this earth - that revives and nurtures her.

A story of survival and war, love and madness, loyalty and forgiveness, *Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness* is an intimate exploration of the author's family and of the price of being possessed by this uncompromising, fertile, death-dealing land. In the end we find Nicola and Tim at a table under their Tree of Forgetfulness in the Zambezi Valley on the banana and fish farm where they plan to spend their final days. In local custom, the Tree of Forgetfulness is where villagers meet to resolve disputes and it is here that the family at last find an African kind of peace. Following the ghosts and dreams of memory, *Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness* is Alexandra Fuller at her very best.

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