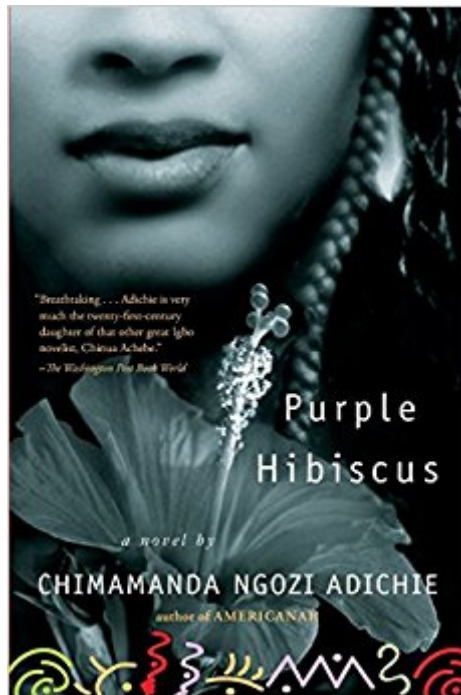


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Purple Hibiscus: A Novel



Synopsis

Fifteen-year-old Kambili and her older brother Jaja lead a privileged life in Enugu, Nigeria. They live in a beautiful house, with a caring family, and attend an exclusive missionary school. They're completely shielded from the troubles of the world. Yet, as Kambili reveals in her tender-voiced account, things are less perfect than they appear. Although her Papa is generous and well respected, he is fanatically religious and tyrannical at home—a home that is silent and suffocating. As the country begins to fall apart under a military coup, Kambili and Jaja are sent to their aunt, a university professor outside the city, where they discover a life beyond the confines of their father's authority. Books cram the shelves, curry and nutmeg permeate the air, and their cousins' laughter rings throughout the house. When they return home, tensions within the family escalate, and Kambili must find the strength to keep her loved ones together. *Purple Hibiscus* is an exquisite novel about the emotional turmoil of adolescence, the powerful bonds of family, and the bright promise of freedom.

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Customer Reviews

Purple Hibiscus, Nigerian-born writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's debut, begins like many novels set in regions considered exotic by the western reader: the politics, climate, social customs, and, above all, food of Nigeria (balls of fufu rolled between the fingers, okpa bought from roadside vendors) unfold like the purple hibiscus of the title, rare and fascinating. But within a few pages, these details, however vividly rendered, melt into the background of a larger, more compelling story of a joyless family. Fifteen-year-old Kambili is the dutiful and self-effacing daughter of a rich man, a

religious fanatic and domestic tyrant whose public image is of a politically courageous newspaper publisher and philanthropist. No one in Papa's ancestral village, where he is titled "Omelora" (One Who Does For the Community), knows why Kambili's brother cannot move one of his fingers, nor why her mother keeps losing her pregnancies. When a widowed aunt takes an interest in Kambili, her family begins to unravel and re-form itself in unpredictable ways. --Regina Marler --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

By turns luminous and horrific, this debut ensnares the reader from the first page and lingers in the memory long after its tragic end. First-person narrator Kambili Achike is a 15-year-old Nigerian girl growing up in sheltered privilege in a country ravaged by political strife and personal struggle. She and her brother, Jaja, and their quiet mother, who speaks "the way a bird eats, in small amounts," live this life of luxury because Kambili's father is a wealthy man who owns factories, publishes a politically outspoken newspaper and outwardly leads the moral, humble life of a faithful Catholic. The many grateful citizens who have received his blessings and material assistance call him omelora, "The One Who Does for the Community." Yet Kambili, Jaja and their mother see a side to their provider no one else does: he is also a religious fanatic who regularly and viciously beats his family for the mildest infractions of his interpretation of an exemplary Christian life. The children know better than to discuss their home life with anyone else; "there was so much that we never told." But when they are unexpectedly allowed to visit their liberated and loving Auntie Ifeoma, a widowed university professor raising three children, family secrets and tensions bubble dangerously to the surface, setting in motion a chain of events that allow Kambili to slowly blossom as she begins to question the authority of the precepts and adults she once held sacred. In a soft, searing voice, Adichie examines the complexities of family, faith and country through the haunted but hopeful eyes of a young girl on the cusp of womanhood. Lush, cadenced and often disconcerting, this is an accomplished first effort. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The author lives up to her bow to Chinua Achebe, after reprising the title of his most famous book in her first sentence. Things indeed fall apart both in the heroine's family and in Nigeria. The father's religious fundamentalism is confronted with the warmth and humanity that can be found within his own church and in the native religion of the village and tribe of his own father. The father's physical brutality towards his wife and children is displayed as the engine of destruction of the family and of himself. His character is not simplified to that of a brute but made plausible as an outgrowth of

colonialism and an instilled sense of inferiority of the religion and customs of his fathers. The absence of rule of law under a new dictator compounds the family's travails. The depiction of family life in the wealthy household of the father as contrasted with the warmth and openness of the refuge his far poorer sister and her children provide is strong. The plot is well developed combining a coming-of-age novel with elements of a thriller.

As a high school student, I found that this novel broadened my perspective of the Nigerian culture. *Purple Hibiscus* was a rather complex book to read due to the change from past to present. The theme gave a religious and tense tone throughout the novel. Overall, the story was very compelling and enriched me with a new knowledge about the African culture that I never knew about. I personally did not connect with the main character because we come from extremely different backgrounds but Adichie made all of her characters so full of life which is what made it so enjoyable to read. As for the author, I would have enjoyed a fully completed ending. It ended very abruptly but enough room was left to imagine or make up my own ending for the characters. I would recommend this book to teens and young adults. The reason is because there are many real life events that took places and older readers can comprehend better in comparison to a younger reader.

This is the second novel I've read by this amazing Nigerian writer, and it was as glorious as the first. The theme is familiar -- a young girl comes of age, stubbornly clings to a love of her father although he is an abusive brute, and falls deeply in love with a man who can never be hers. However, the texture of the novel is purely Nigerian. Adichie makes the reader see the landscape, hear the dialect, and feel the winds, rain, temperature -- even the potholes in the road. The coming-of-age saga is only a part of the narrative's extensive sweep, which draws in the effects of political repression, the clash between Western and traditional African religion, the oppression of women, and the horrors of family violence perpetrated by an autocratic father with no attempts by other family members to stop it -- because they would become the next target.

This book touched me deeply. Unlike other reviewers I did not feel that it was particularly about Nigeria despite detailed descriptions of landscapes and horrifying living conditions. I think that what gives this book its universality is that it could have happened anywhere in the world. It is a story of fanaticism, cruelty, madness, silence, courage and denial. Hillel Halkin MD (full disclosure -my husband) has just published a new book -*Telling Silences: A Doctor's Tales of Denial*- in which patients' silences like those of the two children in *Purple Hibiscus* cry out for help and the doctor's

efforts to break through the silences are only partly rewarded with success much like those of the children's courageous aunt. It is perhaps this connection to real life experiences that has left me so moved when reading this marvelous book. I have also read *Half of a Yellow Sun* and I highly recommend it to anyone who loved *Purple Hibiscus*.

I have read novels as good as this (ie: *To Kill a Mockingbird*) but none better. The complex, flawed characters, the setting coming apart around them, the brave, the weak, the intimidation, the Good, the Bad and the Ugly all wrapped into One, the colonizers and the colonized minds they create--a most interesting case study for Albert Memmi and Frantz Fanon--, the religious zealotry that keeps on growing today destroying its believers as well as those affected. I found the end shocking, but in line with the character development. In my opinion, the zealotry was misplaced. In our day and age there are other Christian groups more prone to harbor such fanaticism.

A young girl and her brother are terrorized by a tyrannical father. Her mother brutalized by his total control over her life and the lives of her children. The backdrop of African culture as seen through the eyes of a young girl makes the story compelling. A great examination of youthful optimism played against the daily routine of abuse and control. Beautifully written.

At the beginning, it was difficult to be engaged with the main character. But when the aunt of the protagonist enters into the story, everything improves. Then, a world full of nuances appears and I really enjoyed the book. The end is not predictable, but at the same time is not surprising... when you know what happened. Another feature of this tale I liked very much was the description of the clash of cultures, and how some people interpreted that being open to Western education meant quitting old customs, leaving aside traditional religious practices, etc. The perspective of a young girl is an achievement of the author to provide the story with some bewilderment and distance. Highly recommended.

I first became acquainted with Ms. Adichie's writing with her book *Americanah* and from there I quickly read everything she's written. She can tell a story like few others can. She fully develops characters and everything that surrounds them (where they live, political and economic times, social standing, etc.). I have a hard time putting down her books - they consume me. I would recommend one starts off with her book *Americanah* or *Half of a Yellow Sun*. I also loved her book of short stories.

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