



Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness

Alexandra Fuller

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Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness tells the story of the author's mother, Nicola Fuller. Nicola Fuller and her husband were a glamorous and optimistic couple and East Africa lay before them with the promise of all its perfect light, even as the British Empire in which they both believed waned. They had everything, including two golden children - a girl and a boy. However, life became increasingly difficult and they moved to Rhodesia to work as farm managers. The previous farm manager had committed suicide. His ghost appeared at the foot of their bed and seemed to be trying to warn them of something. Shortly after this, one of their golden children died. Africa was no longer the playground of Nicola's childhood. They returned to England where the author was born before they returned to Rhodesia and to the civil war. The last part of the book sees the Fullers in their old age on a banana and fish farm in the Zambezi Valley. They had built their ramshackle dining room under the Tree of Forgetfulness. In local custom, this tree is the meeting place for villagers determined to resolve disputes. It is in the spirit of this Forgetfulness that Nicola finally forgot - but did not forgive - all her enemies including her daughter and the Apostle, a squatter who has taken up in her bananas with his seven wives and forty-nine children. Funny, tragic, terrifying, exotic and utterly unself-conscious, this is a story of survival and madness, love and war, passion and compassion.

Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness Details

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From Reader Review Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness for online ebook

Chrissie says

Years ago I read Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight by Alexandra Fuller. I loved it. I have been very foolish in not picking up this book sooner. You do not need to read both, but I would highly recommend it. This is "awful book number two", as the author's Mom would call it. The two books are about the author's family, their time in "Central Africa", that is to say Kenya, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi. The reason why I really love these books, and I love both of them, is that the writer talks about hardships you cannot imagine, and she does it with humor. In addition you learn about life in the African countries named. You learn through the experiences of this family. If you have read the first book, you simply must read this, the second "awful book", because it clearly shows why the mother is who she is - in all the wonderful and hopeless and horrible details.

I listened to the audiobook. I want you to taste the humor and style of writing. Please go to the link here and click on the sample button below the audiobook at the Audible site:

http://www.audible.com/pd/ref=sr_1_3?...

I want you to test and see if you enjoy her particular style. That is why I have included the link.

So.... I loved the author's writing style. I loved the humor. What else did I love? Why was it that I could not stop listening? Beside that I though the history of colonial overthrow was expertly woven into the story, and that isn't so strange since the family lived through these events, it was the understanding of who her mother was that I loved most. Maybe this sounds a little strange, but I like reading books to understand people. I like reading books to understand life, and life throws whoppers at all of us. Doesn't it? Life is throwing whoppers at this family from day one to the very, very end.

And finally, I feel that the author has a wonderful way of relating to her annoying, ever so self-assured mother. I came to understand that mother and I came to admire the author's ability to accept her mother for who she is. You have to read the books, both books in fact, to understand. I not only learned historical facts, but I also learned on a personal level how one should/could relate to a strong, some times terribly annoying Mom.

Here is a link to my review of the earlier book: <http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/...>

ETA: I forgot to tell you: if you love animal stories, then this is another reason to read the book. It is filled with stories about the family's pets.

Deborah Gray says

I normally don't read other people's reviews before I do my own, because I don't want to be influenced. I can see why I thought this was a good idea. There are too many wildly differing opinions on this book, which is about par for the number of different personalities reviewing them, but they did start to make me wonder if I was crazy to love it.

Because I did love this book. Alexandra Fuller writes beautifully with such wit and clarity that I was

captivated. I didn't care that some of these stories are small vignettes without tremendous consequences; together they made up the whole that is "Nicola Fuller of Central Africa" and I found it satisfying, enlightening and engaging. I learned far more about Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and the conflicts within Africa, from a very intimate viewpoint, than I ever knew before and that in itself was worth the price of admission. There is heartbreakingly personal tragedy in this book and triumph of an indomitable spirit, blended with such bipolar, haphazard child rearing that makes one wonder how the author ever made it to adulthood unscathed, or at all.

In some ways, Nicola Fuller doesn't deserve to have a memoir written about her. She so greedily hogs the limelight that her daughter is really just catering to her insatiable need for attention, but in the end it's those very traits that create a lifetime of antics and adventures we want to read about, told with the skill of a gifted writer.

Kelly says

You know that game where you choose the 4 or 5 people, fictional, dead or living, with whom you'd like to have dinner? I'd invite Tim, Nicola, Van and Bobo Fuller.

Just reading the first page I was struck by and immediately drunk on how much I love Alexandra Fuller's writing. I was straight back with my bare feet on the ground in Africa, surrounded by this wild bunch, the tick-infested dogs, the chirping tree frogs, the curious elephants and crocodiles, and in the middle of everything, somehow directing the troupe but also bending to the inconsistent winds of war, clans, and apartheid: the Fuller family.

I absolutely adore Nicola Fuller's voice as she tells her own story, so matter-of-factly, though it's full of death, danger, unbelievable courage, and relentless work and hardship. This woman is indomitable. She's overflowing with love of life, with opinions, with stories, and, of course, with drink. She is a super woman!

I could walk side-by-side, day-by-day, through this family's history of joys and sorrows in Africa, as long as Alexandra Fuller is steering the ship. While I enjoyed her magical, lyrical writing style better in *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight: An African Childhood*, which was more intimate and raw, this was still excellent.

Brian Sweany says

In 2001 Alexandra "Bo" Fuller's *DON'T LET'S GO TO THE DOGS* took the publishing world by storm. It was named the Booksense Non-Fiction Book of the Year and won the Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize, hitting the bestseller lists of the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, and Boston Globe. "A classic is born," hailed Publishers Weekly in a starred review. "This is not a book you read just once, but a tale of terrible beauty to get lost in over and over," added Newsweek. The book has since gone on to sell more than a half-million copies and to this day averages nearly 150 copies sold every week.

Bo Fuller followed *DOGS* with two equally acclaimed narrative nonfictions--*SCRIBBLING THE CAT* and *THE LEGEND OF COLSON H. BRYANT*--but she never quite duplicated the success of her debut memoir. Readers wanted to know more about Fuller's eccentric family. Quite frankly, they were still interested more in where Bo had been than where she was going.

COCKTAIL HOUR UNDER THE TREE OF FORGETFULNESS is the answer to those readers. Not so much a memoir of Bo's life, COCKTAIL HOUR is a biography of her mother, Nicola Fuller of Central Africa (as she calls herself). And whereas the narrative has that same strikingly unsentimental voice as DOGS, cloaking tragedy in humor and love in the stiff-upper-lip sensibility of British expats, there is something different going on with COCKTAIL HOUR. The book reads more as a love letter from Bo to her mother. Informed by several years' worth of post-DOGS interviews, I got the sense early on in reading COCKTAIL HOUR that Bo has always felt she owed her mother an apology for DON'T LETS GO TO THE DOGS TONIGHT, a book referred to by her mother only as the "Awful Book." I think Bo does that and more, managing in her own inimitable way to convey sentiment without sap, love without lavishness. She is her mother's daughter, after all.

Grburbank says

Alexandra Fuller wrote of her African childhood in *Don't Lets Go to the Dogs Tonight*—known afterward to her family as the “Awful Book”—and her fey mother, Nicola Fuller of Central Africa, emerged as the most memorable character. In *Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness*, Fuller returns to that harshest of continents to chart her mother’s life and memories as a one million percent Highland Scottish woman who grew up in the perfect equatorial light of colonial Kenya, who led a hardscrabble life in war-torn Rhodesia, who lost children, land, and sanity before courageously achieving an “African kind of peace” on a farm in Zambia under her Tree of Forgetfulness.

A notch below the Awful Book, Fuller’s writing is beautiful, engaging, and compassionate in capturing her mother’s voice and a life Worthy of Fabulous Literature. Highly recommended.

Melissa says

To read Fuller's books is to immerse yourself in the history of Africa, and most of it is pretty tragic and tough to fathom. While Fuller's mother reminisces about her Scottish ancestors, she herself is haunted by the Tasmanian natives forced into slavery on the family's ancient estate. I can't imagine how hard it must be to reconcile the fundamental need to see all people as equal with an entire family history predicated on the belief that they are not. Rhodesia's appalling history, that the lives of 250,000 white settlers should be so much more important than the 6,000,000 indigenous blacks who were there first, is tough to swallow. But that was their lives nevertheless. In the midst of the entitlement and privilege of white Europeans who found Africans to be, in the words of Rhodesia's prime minister, "uncivilized savages," these people lived, tried to realize their dream of a farm, their children lived or died (mainly died, and although I knew of their deaths from Fuller's perspective from her first book, it was even more heart-rending to hear of them from her mother's). I hope that I can marvel at the specter of a hard-drinkin', man's-shirt wearin', dog pack trailin', bipolar Nicola Fuller, mourn her dead children and be amazed at the circumstances of her life even as she speaks of determination to be White and stay White in Rhodesia.

I think I'm essentially trying to write a review that assuages my white guilt about loving this book. I am absolutely fascinated by Alexandra Fuller's family. Their pictures, their nicknames, their expressions, their drinking. I would love nothing more than to sit down & pore through every one of her photo albums. Their experiences are just so bizarre and heartbreakin. Does it make it better that the colonialism & racism both

from this book and *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight* are slightly tempered here by her parent's experiences managing a black landowner's tobacco farm in Malawi after the war in Rhodesia? It is, in Nicola Fuller's words, "A short, sharp education on how to live and behave in a black African country run by black Africans." Can you be fascinated by people and love reading about them while at the same time abhorring the dominant philosophy of their lives?

Geeta says

I read DON'T LET'S GO TO THE DOGS TONIGHT many years ago, so I don't remember it well, which is probably a blessing since this book apparently covers some of the same material, only this time from Fuller's mother's point of view. Nicola Fuller is a self-absorbed narcissist prone to the "wobbles," periods of depression/manic behavior. She is also completely unapologetic about white rule in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), where much of this book is set. It's a testament to Fuller's skill as a writer that she's able to write about her mother with empathy and clarity, while at the same time making her flaws and weaknesses clear.

Fuller is also very good with writing about the history of the region, the brutality of colonialism, and the war. She finds a good balance between her own point of view and allowing her subject, i.e. her mother, to speak for herself. And she's very good at creating suspense, especially if you haven't read the first book or you've forgotten it (btw, this means nothing about Fuller's writing--I forget everything I read, especially if I'm not teaching it). I read the book in a week; every time I picked it up, I couldn't stop reading, I probably read it too fast and now will have to read it again to understand more clearly how Fuller finds this balance between narrator and subject.

Edward says

What happened to all of those whites who once lived good lives in Rhodesia and east central Africa? That is, before the civil wars of the 60's and early 70's turned the countries over to native Africans. Many left, of course, but some remained, and Fuller's book is a tribute to her parents who stayed on. It's a followup to her earlier book, DON'T LET'S GO TO THE DOGS TONIGHT about her childhood growing up in this volatile environment. She married and left Africa, and returns only to visit her aging parents.

They were originally Scottish highlanders who settled in Africa and made it their home. As she writes, "land is Mum's love affair and it is Dad's religion." They love the country, just as their ancestors loved the rugged west coast of Scotland, and both want to be buried in Africa." Her father fought in the African wars to retain British rights, but when those wars were ultimately lost, he hung on, working as a manager on various farms. He says, "You put your blood and sweat into a place and then . . . there's a coup, squatters show up, the wind changes direction, and suddenly it's all gone. No, there's no point, but you can still work in Africa without trying to own any of it." It was a tough life, Fuller's mother losing three of her five children, two to disease, one to a tragic accident, and most of all the youthful innocence she had when she first came to Africa. She suffered from serious bouts of depression and alcoholism.

Fuller gets much of the fascinating story from her parents while they sit having cocktails under a tree

actually called the "tree of forgetfulness. A native explains that "if there is a sickness or you are troubled by spirits, then you sit under the tree of forgetfulness and your ancestors will assist you. It is true, all of your troubles and arguments will be resolved." Whether they are or not is an open question, but Mum believes it "two million percent". To live in this part of Africa you have to have faith in a better future or else you'll succumb to despair.

Africa is full of life and incredible beauty, but it's also full of decay and death, and Fuller captures both in this very interesting book.

Audra (Unabridged Chick) says

I'm having such a difficult time writing this review even though I loved this book (or maybe as a result of loving it!). As a memoir/biography, it had my favorite elements: compelling individuals, a wry writing style, and a tumultuous setting in a location and era I enjoy.

I found myself describing this to friends as a kind of apology to Fuller's mother, Nicola, for *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*, Fuller's memoir of growing up in Rhodesia during the violent conflicts there. What I've read so far of *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight* so far is honest (brutally, amusingly, depressingly) and unflinching, and Fuller's mother isn't the most sympathetic. In this book, Fuller goes back to look at Nicola's childhood, her parents, her experience in Africa, her love for the land, and the impact of the violent losses in Nicola's life.

What I so appreciated about Fuller's writing was her balance of affection for her parents and an awareness of the implications of their choices. She's no colonial apologist or 'when we' romanticizing the era of British control in Africa. She writes about the violence of late 20th-century Kenya and Zimbabwe succinctly and in a way that felt fair and accurate, that acknowledged the pain and losses on both sides of the conflicts.

By the end of this book, I felt like I knew the Fullers a little. I liked them (even if I think Nicola Fuller is probably more fun to read about than live with) and I am wholly an Alexandra Fuller fangirl. This slender book packs a lot of punch and I can't recommend it enough. Even if the setting or era is alien to you, give it a try as Fuller's writing sucks you in and makes you care. (Plus, lots of extras to guide the reader: maps, a glossary, cast of characters, etc.)

(If you do end up reading this, you absolutely have to check out the photo album on Fuller's website after: it was a delight seeing more of the names and places that were familiar to me. I squealed at the sight of the orange Le Creuset pots on a window sill.)

Jessica says

Several years ago, I read Fuller's *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*, a memoir of her young life as a white girl in Southern (NOT South) Africa, and although I don't remember the specifics, I do remember that I closed the book with a sense of history and humor, so I was pleased to see that she'd published a new book. This one, *Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness*, does not disappoint. This time around, the author sets her sights on the experiences of her parents, especially her mother, Nicola. The book starts out feeling somewhat glib and suspicious, but as Fuller settles into the narrative, the rich stories of her parents' lives

unfold - her mother's childhood in colonial Kenya, her father's rootlessness, their falling in love and decision to stay in Africa, despite the wars for African independence that rolled across the continent in the sixties and seventies. As Fuller recounts the experiences of her family in Rhodesia, Zimbabwe, and Zambia, two feelings settled over me: this was really a love story ("Tubs" and Tim are obviously deeply in love, even after all these years - and the author deeply loves and admires her parents, no matter what), and that none of the family will ever really recover from her parents' decision to stay in Africa no matter what the consequences. Fuller creates an achingly beautiful and heartbreakingly piece of work here, which manages to evoke the beauty and horror of the "Dark Continent" as well as the optimism and determination of her parents' personalities. She deftly weaves personal experience with the historical realities of Kenya, Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, and Zambia, which makes her effort especially remarkable. In the end, I closed the book feeling thankful, sad, and deeply in need of a cocktail. Cheers to Alexandra Fuller and her amazing love song to her family.

Laurie Notaro says

Great follow-up to her first book. Let's Don't Go To the Dogs Tonight. I love her writing.

Alistair says

I loved this but then I loved Alexandra's previous memoir of life growing up in Africa with her parents "Don't let's go to the dogs tonight".

This is more a tribute to her mother Nicola Fuller of Central Africa. I suspect that the first book led to a rift between mother and daughter particularly as it unflinchingly reveals her excessive drinking and depressions and Nicola constantly refers to it as "That Awful Book" but this is a more rounded portrait and a love letter to her parents and to Africa.

Nicola Fuller is a no nonsense, jaunty out-doorsy type who adores animals, the warmth and freedom of Africa, its colours and smells and probably in real life came over as great fun. At least some of the time she is but she also herself acknowledges her funny moods and mental wobbliness.

It must be said that this is not a story of rich colonialists with partying, drugs, corridor creeping and general spoilt bad behaviour. Mr and Mrs Fuller are pretty poor although well bred and are wedded to the soil and to planting and reaping. They are khaki land rover types and English with their horror of sentimentality and bad manners, a casual ease with profanity and a deep mistrust of humourlessness.

They live through the mau mau uprising, the takeover of Rhodesia and the white farmers, the declaration of Independence, the civil war, two children dying in infancy, one child drowning, her several years of mental illness, until finally coming to rest in Zambia.

Of course their views on white superiority are a totally non pc but they are not bad people they just have some firm views based on life and the end of an elephant charge.

Mr Fuller is the strong silent type who has probably put up with a lot but the sight of the two of them glazies raised high on their verandha in the late evening tells of a hard unglamorous incident filled life survived with devil me care humour.

The cover has a photo of Nicola Fuller as a child hand in hand with her best friend Stephen Foster, a chimpanzee. I found the title of the book a bit fluffy, the memoir most certainly not.

Belinda says

3,75 sterren - Nederlandse paperback - Ik heb dyslexie -

- en in 1908 arriveerden er ruim tweehonderd Boeren per schip in Mombasa, Kenia. Ze namen de trein tot Bajuku, waar ze inheemse ossen kochten. Eind mei begonnen ze aan de steile klim vanuit de Riftvallei naar hun nieuwe thuisland. -

Dit verhaal, welke speelt over honderd jaar wordt verteld door een dochter van de familie Fuller. Het is een boek wat verhaalt over kolonisten in Afrika. Met wat uitstapjes naar Schotland, China en Nederlands Indie. En wat heeft de familie een veerkracht. Het leven is echt niet makkelijk. Ontberingen, ziektes, oorlog, wanbetaling en sterven van kinderen. Ze passeren alle de revue.

- de verpleegkundige nuchter als de meeste Afrikanen, zei niet onvriendelijk tegen mijn ouders dat ze de keus hadden: ze zouden weggaan en hun dochter te eten geven, of blijven en hun zoon zien sterven. -

Geen droge ogen dus. Waarom toch niet de volle 4 sterren omdat in het begin het verhaal maar niet op gang komt. Vanaf het midden tot eind hebben mij meer bekoord. Heb dit boek uit een mini bieb. Hij gaat dus snel weer naar een mini bieb om door een ander gelezen te worden.

- Toen Margot Fonteyn naar Manchester kwam, zei mama , moest ik met de vrouw van de melkboer naar de balletvoorstelling. Het was heel aardig van haar om mee te gaan, maar ik denk dat ze nooit bekomen is van de schonk dat ze Rudolf Noerejev in een maillot zag. - ???

SwensonBooks says

(Read the original post by [clicking here](#).)

Alexandra Fuller's latest book, *The Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness*, continues to roam around in my imagination more than a month after I finished reading it. She is a memoirist who transports the reader to a time and place you could never otherwise know and experience it with compassion and good humor.

Even her title invites the reader to the place in the African village where people meet, talk, discuss, negotiate, laugh, drink, sing, forgive and forget. One central tree where the shade provides a gathering place. The Tree of Forgetfulness is a symbolic spot where sitters anticipate the amnesia that lets them forget the past: slavery, war, violence. The central figure in this story, Nicola Fuller, is much like this tree herself. And she holds court there during the cocktail hour.

If I told you this book was about a mother who lost two children, drove around with an Uzi across her lap with an infant and toddler strapped in, suffered from alcoholism and depression, and lived the life of a white Rhodesian, I'm guessing you wouldn't really be interested. Not a character most of us are interested in getting to know better.

But if you read Fuller's first memoir, *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight: An African Childhood* (2003 Random House Trade Paperbacks), then you already know the larger than life stories of Alexandra's mother, Nicola, and her father and itinerant farmer, Tim, Fuller are page turners. Alexandra Fuller returns to the subject of her childhood in Kenya and writes as the memoirist of parents who intend to spend their final days in the Zambezi Valley.

Fuller recounts the African childhood of her mother, Nicola, and her father's British upbringing during the early part of the 20th century. The relations between whites and Africans, between rich and poor, majority and minority are shown, not told. Historical, cultural and political background information are woven into the story like a blind hem on a full skirt. Fuller is a gifted journalist and applies this skill by permitting her readers to make their own interpretations and draw their own conclusions.

Capturing the voice and irrepressible spirit of Nicola Fuller, Alexandra reveals her mother's love of animals, especially horses, her grit in struggling to scrape out a living, her negotiations to make a place in the world, and her reckless sense of adventure. But also the suffering of a woman who lost a child to an illness that could not be treated in such a remote location. A woman whose daughter drowned when she left her at home. A woman whose husband would be gone four days at a time working farm land miles away. A woman who drank. A force to be reckoned with, and a lady.

If you haven't read her first book, this one stands on its own. And you'll enjoy the first one, then, even more. You might be interested to know that Fuller's agent suggested she write another book about her mother and father. If you have read both, which do you think is better?

Between the two books, Alexandra Fuller wrote *The Legend of Colton Bryant* (Penguin 2009). The true story of a boy in Wyoming who loves to ride mustangs and fancies the rodeo, returns home to take a job on an oil-rig and is killed on the job. Where the great high plains meet the Rocky Mountains, hydro-fracking changes the landscape and its people. Fuller lives in Wyoming and captures the characters and sense of place to draw a landscape portrait of contemporary life.

Rare is the writer whose voice is so compelling that it doesn't matter what they write, you'll read it. For me, Alexandra Fuller is one of those rare writers.

Judy says

What's to say? Another winner by Alexandra Fuller. This memoir focuses on her Mum's life from her birthplace in Scotland to her residences in Zambia, Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, Botswana and Malawi. Mum is never boring and I am convinced that Fuller could just transcribe her conversation and it would be a bestseller. Cheers! to Nicola Fuller of Central Africa.

Marc Weitz says

Ever sat down with a friend for cocktails only to have them retell their same old stories without showing the slightest bit of interest in you? That was this book. This is the fourth book I've read from this author, which means that I've read all her books. Obviously, I've enjoyed them, or I would not have bothered reading this one. But the author rehashes many stories from her first book "Don't Lets Go to the Dogs Tonight," only this time from her parents' perspective and without the in-depth descriptions or emotions.

The author seemed to want to tell her parents' story, but I found that I don't care about her parents' story. This is the part where I felt the author didn't care about my needs. She just wanted to write a book about her parents, and we the reader better like it.

There were new stories, but they weren't all that interesting. When Alexandra Fuller tells her stories about her life, she is at her best. Let's hope she hasn't run out.

Margitte says

This book is a memoir of all the good and bad and how to survive in the African wilderness.

I find myself mesmerized, enchanted, sad, elated and pondering. Most of all, it was a great read. Sometimes I hollered with laughter.

I love these quotes from the book:

"No one starts a war warning that those involved will lose their innocence - that children will definitely die and be forever lost as a result of the conflict; that the war will not end for generations and generations, even after cease-fire have been declared and peace of treaties have been signed."

"Whether out of desperation, ignorance or hostility, humans have an unerring capacity to ignore one another's sacred traditions and to defile one another's hallowed grounds. ... Surely until all of us own and honor one another's dead, until we have admitted to our murders and forgiven one another and ourselves for what we have done, there can be no truce, no dignity and no peace."

".... although my father is profoundly English, by the time I am old enough to know anything about him, he is already fighting in an African war and his Englishness has been subdued by more than a decade on this uncompromising continent. In this way, the English part of our identity registers as a void, something lacking that manifests in inherited, stereotypical characteristics: an allergy to sentimentality, a casual ease with profanity, a horror of bad manners, a deep mistrust of humorlessness. It is my need to add layers and context to the outline of this sketchy Englishness..."

Those wars are still raging.

The most profound message I take from this book, apart from aspiring to be as resourceful and enduring as the author's mom, is this:

"But you can't have all this life on one end without a corresponding amount of decay on the other: in the morning my parent's maid, Hilda Tembo (Big H to the family), will sweep up half a bucket of insects carcasses and two gecko bodies from under the Tree of Forgetfulness. Months from now three of the Jack Russells will have been killed by a cobra in Dad's office, and one will have been eaten by a crocodile in Mum's fish ponds. And Dad will walk out of the bedroom one morning to see a python coiled in cartoonish perfection around Wallace (the late cat).

"You learn not to mourn every little thing out there," Mom says. She shakes her head. "No, you can't, or you'd never, ever stop grieving. "

What my mother won't say - lost in all her talk of chemicals and pills - is that she knows not only the route grief takes through the blood but also the route it takes through the heart's cracks. What she won't tell me is that recovering from the madness of grief wasn't just a matter of prescriptions, but of willpower. "I sometimes used to envy the people you see running up and down the Kafue Road in hessian sacks," she said once. And it is true that Mum seriously considered that level of deep, irretrievable insanity an option. But instead, she took a different route and regained herself and that had very little to do with forgiveness: she forgave the world and her mind returned. She gave herself amnesty and her soul had a home again. The forgiveness took years and it took this farm and it took the Tree of Forgetfulness. It took all of that, but above all it took the one grief could never steal from my mother: her courage."

If you have read African authors such as Kuki Gallmann, writing a detailed account of their life in Africa, you will enjoy Alexandra Fuller's books as well, but the latter has just added a lot of oomph and humor to the situations. I really loved this book.

Homira says

This was a disappointment. I'd read her other books, and while none matched the wit and visceral life of *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*, the one about the African Soldier was okay, but I couldn't even finish this one it was so boring and such a re-hashing of her first book. Maybe I know Africa too well, but I felt an elitist tone to this one that I didn't pick up in her first book. The African Soldier one did leave me perplexed as to how someone could be privileged enough to just be able to hang around this guy for so long and what she was doing there making out with another guy with her husband and kids in Wyoming, but I got some history from the Rhodesian side, which is cool. Her mothers' story the 3rd time round is just not that interesting. Do others feel differently?

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

I love the title, but if I had a Tree of Forgetfulness, why then would I need a Cocktail Hour? This book gives some insight into the wackiness of Bobo's parents, especially her mother, "Nicola Fuller of Central Africa," whom we first encountered in *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*.

I think this passage from page 125 illustrates a bit of life for the often dissolute British colonials in Africa in the mid-20th century. A horse vet named Charlie organized hunts bringing together large groups of colonials, which often ended in wife-swapping:

"About a thousand bad-tempered dogs were draped everywhere, glaring at you as you ate," Dad says. And there was a parrot. "You would ask for the gravy and the parrot would shout, 'And you can fuck off too!'" Dinner usually ended with port in front of the fire. The generator was switched off at about midnight, and the guests faltered to bed with candles. "And then the corridor creeping started," Dad says. "Mum and I kept our door locked."

"Yes, I'm afraid so," Mum says. "Those people had to leave their children in a pram at the bottom of the garden until it was time to send them to boarding school because they all looked like the neighbor."

LindaJ^ says

Alexandra Fuller revisits the life she told us about in *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*, her first book. That book was written from a child's perspective. This book is written from an adult's perspective. In both books, Fuller focuses primarily on her mother but in this is more biographical. She provides family background for her mother (and some for her father). Her parents are African whites. Her mother grew up in Kenya and met her father there - Nicola Huntingford and Tim Fuller married and for 3 years of their marriage have lived in Southern (not South) Africa. They moved around quite a bit. War was all around them and Tim Fuller fought in the Rhodesian War, while his wife ran their farm. Nicola, while we are never told this, seems to be bipolar but even still she is incredibly courageous. This is a woman who lost 3 of her five children and yet chose to pull herself back up and get on with life.

The author pulls no punches in her books. Her mother calls her first book - the "Awful Book" - but still tells her daughter the stories of her childhood and her marriage. Her parents were/are proud white Africans. They, unlike most white Africans, stayed as white Africans lost control Southern African governments. They live without fear amongst native Africans.

This is the story of a heart drinking, truth telling, courageous family who lived a life that would have broken most families. Their story has more than its share of sadness. This book offers the opportunity to cry, to laugh, and enjoy these almost larger than life, often outrageous, people.
