



# Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight: An African Childhood

*Alexandra Fuller*

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When the ship veered into the Cape of Good Hope, Mum caught the spicy, heady scent of Africa on the changing wind. She smelled the people: raw onions and salt, the smell of people who are not afraid to eat meat, and who smoke fish over open fires on the beach and who pound maize into meal and who work out-of-doors. She held me up to face the earthy air, so that the fingers of warmth pushed back my black curls of hair, and her pale green eyes went clear-glassy.

“Smell that,” she whispered, “that’s home.”

Vanessa was running up and down the deck, unaccountably wild for a child usually so placid. Intoxicated already.

I took in a faceful of African air and fell instantly into a fever.

In **Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight**, Alexandra Fuller remembers her African childhood with visceral authenticity. Though it is a diary of an unruly life in an often inhospitable place, it is suffused with Fuller's endearing ability to find laughter, even when there is little to celebrate. Fuller's debut is unsentimental and unflinching but always captivating. In wry and sometimes hilarious prose, she stares down disaster and looks back with rage and love at the life of an extraordinary family in an extraordinary time.

From 1972 to 1990, Alexandra Fuller—known to friends and family as Bobo—grew up on several farms in southern and central Africa. Her father joined up on the side of the white government in the Rhodesian civil war, and was often away fighting against the powerful black guerilla factions. Her mother, in turn, flung herself at their African life and its rugged farm work with the same passion and maniacal energy she brought to everything else. Though she loved her children, she was no hand-holder and had little tolerance for neediness. She nurtured her daughters in other ways: She taught them, by example, to be resilient and self-sufficient, to have strong wills and strong opinions, and to embrace life wholeheartedly, despite and because of difficult circumstances. And she instilled in Bobo, particularly, a love of reading and of storytelling that proved to be her salvation.

A worthy heir to Isak Dinesen and Beryl Markham, Alexandra Fuller writes poignantly about a girl becoming a woman and a writer against a backdrop of unrest, not just in her country but in her home. But **Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight** is more than a survivor's story. It is the story of one woman's unbreakable bond with a continent and the people who inhabit it, a portrait lovingly realized and deeply felt.

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