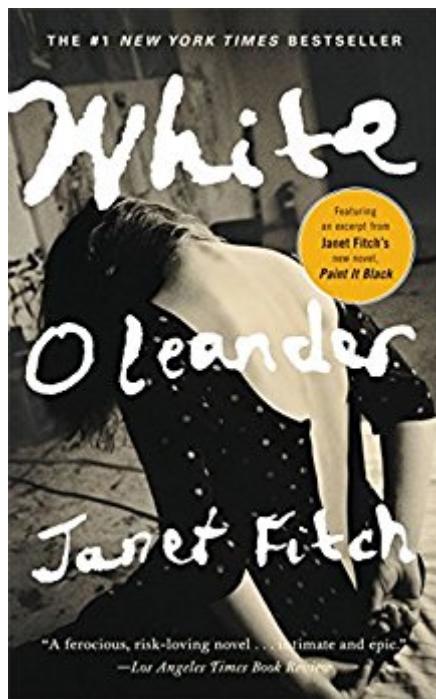


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White Oleander



Synopsis

Astrid is the only child of a single mother, Ingrid, a brilliant, obsessed poet who wields her luminous beauty to intimidate and manipulate men. Astrid worships her mother and cherishes their private world full of ritual and mystery - but their idyll is shattered when Astrid's mother falls apart over a lover. Deranged by rejection, Ingrid murders the man, and is sentenced to life in prison. *White Oleander* is the unforgettable story of Astrid's journey through a series of foster homes and her efforts to find a place for herself in impossible circumstances. Each home is its own universe, with a new set of laws and lessons to be learned. With determination and humor, Astrid confronts the challenges of loneliness and poverty, and strives to learn who a motherless child in an indifferent world can become. Oprah Winfrey enjoyed this gripping first novel so much that she not only made it her book club pick, she asked if she could narrate the audio release.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

White Oleander simply touched me more than almost any novel I have ever read. Astrid was a realistic character. Anyone who thinks that this novel was extreme and melodramatic in its portrayal of foster care obviously knows nothing of foster care or displaced children from dysfunctional homes. Having worked in inpatient psychiatric units with both children and adults in state custody, I am well

aware of how realistic Janet Fitch's book was. The things that happened to Astrid happen to children every day in this country. In fact reality is a little worse. The novel also presented the fact that we all receive blessings and curses from our parents. Ingrid was a sociopath who did whatever she felt like doing regardless of who got hurt. She ruthlessly dominated her child's life "I am your home" and seemed to feel justified in doing so. However she also was a brilliantly educated poet who passed on the gifts that helped Astrid to survive her years in foster care: strength, independence, and a love of learning, a sharp intellect. I saw Astrid as a survivor who was as together as anyone could be after 6 years in foster care. In life, and in White Oleander, there is no happily ever after, and there are always loose ends. Fitch made me laugh and cry with her liquid poetry. A testament to survival.

I could not put this book down! "White Oleander" was wonderful from the very first sentence to the very last and I have Oprah to thank for bringing author Janet Fitch to my attention. The story is narrated by Astrid - a teenage girl - who suffers through years of living in the foster care system while her mother Ingrid serves a life sentence for murdering her ex-lover. (I can just envision a younger Angelina Jolie-type playing the role of Astrid in the film version.) Each family that Astrid lives with has its own unique (yet sometimes cliched) cast of characters that are instrumental in shaping and transforming the young woman she becomes. This is a novel of self discovery the hard way. I personally cannot imagine the loneliness and terror that Astrid experienced while bouncing from home to home to home. Ingrid stays present in Astrid's unstable life through letters and occasional visits and their strained relationship is key to Astrid's development. The characters are so real, the writing style is beautiful, the plot moves swiftly and the story weaves the reader through every human emotion possible. While I'm not a fan of the Oprah Winfrey show, I am a fan of her book club and this novel ranks up there as one of her best picks.

While Oleander is a beautiful and lyrical piece of contemporary literature with a storyline and cast of characters like nothing I have ever read. It is the story of the incredibly complex relationship between a self-absorbed "free spirit" and the daughter who wants nothing more than to be loved unconditionally as a child should be. When Ingrid is jailed for murder, so starts the long and rocky journey of Astrid as she moves from foster home to foster home. Few people will go through in their entire lifetimes what this child experiences throughout her early teenage years. Her journey is difficult but the author keeps her readers engrossed until the very end. This is a wonderful book and I sincerely hope the upcoming movie does it true justice.

The raw brilliance of this novel is overpowering. From behind the rough exterior of the story's plot comes a true "coming of age" tale, told with the most beautiful and articulate language of words. I never believed that a book could truly take hold of your emotions and exhilarate your senses, but this story drew me into the folds of surprise, heartbreak, and amazing prose. The story is told from Astrid Magnussen's point of view. She is a young girl (story goes from age 12-18), who lives with her mother, Ingrid, who is a smooth, freeminded poet. They live in an apartment in Hollywood, California. They go to museums, read books by Dmitry and Dostoyevsky, and do poetry readings. Ingrid uses her charm to lure in men and have carefree relationships, but she gets too serious in one of these relationships. After the man breaks it off with Ingrid, she kills him. She is then put into prison and sentenced for life. So begins Astrid's life of foster care and life altering changes. Throughout the story, Astrid is at 6 different homes, including a children's center. Each home is filled with people and experiences that all take their toll on Astrid and her upbringing. These include: getting involved with a MUCH older man, gun shot wounds, starvation, and a death, to name a few. During her time at these homes, she corresponds with her mother with letters, in which Ingrid is still trying to shape her daughter...even through prison. Astrid soon realizes that her mother wants her to remain unhappy in these homes, so she will still be "needed" by her daughter, and so that she can still influence Astrid into becoming like her. This is a book where you hope and plead for a good ending, but you're never sure if it will happen or not. This book is remarkable. You'll be mesmerized by Astrid Magnussen adventures (or perhaps this is the repeated story of many fostered children throughout the world).

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