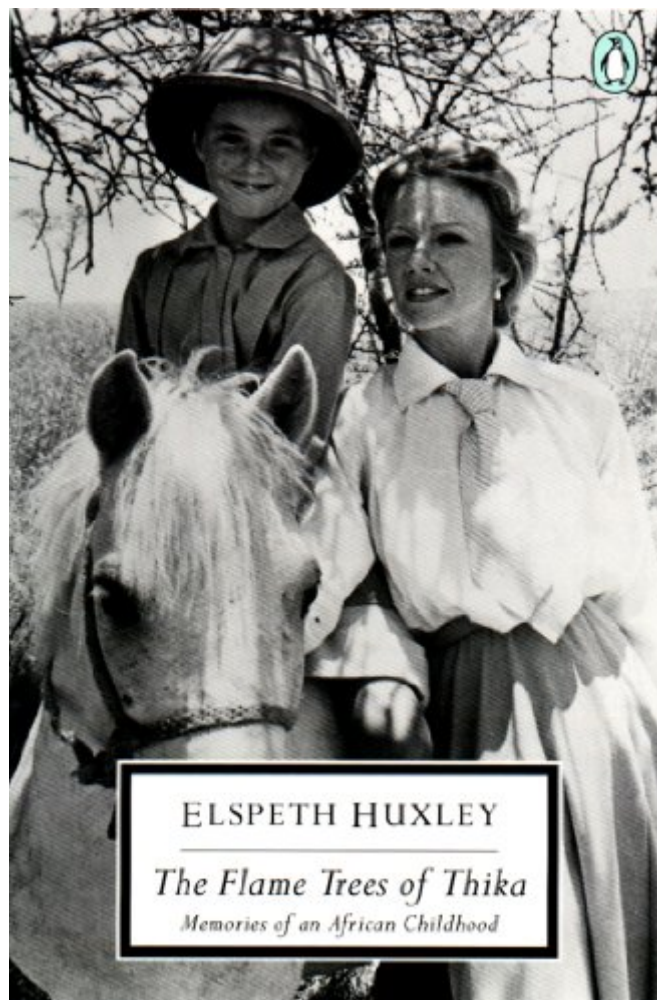




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The Flame Trees Of Thika: Memories Of An African Childhood (Classic, 20th-Century, Penguin)



Synopsis

In an open cart Elspeth Huxley set off with her parents to travel to Thika in Kenya. As pioneering settlers, they built a house of grass, ate off a damask cloth spread over packing cases, and discovered "the hard way" the world of the African. With an extraordinary gift for detail and a keen sense of humor, Huxley recalls her childhood on the small farm at a time when Europeans waged their fortunes on a land that was as harsh as it was beautiful. For a young girl, it was a time of adventure and freedom, and Huxley paints an unforgettable portrait of growing up among the Masai and Kikuyu people, discovering both the beauty and the terrors of the jungle, and enduring the rugged realities of the pioneer life.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Set in early 20th Century Kenya, this book reminded me of Beryl Markham's *West With the Night*, or even *Out of Africa*. Elspeth Huxley retells her childhood growing up in a family of English settlers, who, new to Africa, rather naively purchased some land unseen and nevertheless somehow make a go of it. As an only child she is often left to her own devices and makes friends with people of all ages and cultures - the Kikuyu, the Maasai, and the few settlers around them, including a grumpy old Boer. I loved this book. I loved how the characters come alive through the observations of a

young girl and how this allows us to observe the colonial lifestyle of those times through the eyes of both blacks and whites, as the author identifies with and gives voice to everyone she encounters. And I loved the brief appearance of a doomed romance, almost so fleeting to be missed entirely. A great piece of storytelling for an excellent glimpse into colonial Africa.

One marvel to me is how Mrs. Huxley keeps her six year old self alive in the telling of this wonderful tale. Her six year old thinking, energy and expressiveness enliven every page. She and her parents do accept things and the people as they are. They do not judge nor proselytize. They are all warm, loving and fun loving people. For the time, eccentrics. As a matter of fact some of the repartee that flies between Lettice and Tilly, sometimes Tilly and Robin could have come from a Noel Coward script for the 1920's theatre. The backdrop and ever looming beauty and terror of the African bush is so rich one can smell it. And it is so sad to see that in 100 years little has changed between the tribes, the whites and the bush. All surviving, just barely.

In 1913 Elspeth Huxley moved to Kenya with her parents, who wanted to start a coffee plantation. They stayed until her father went to fight for England in the First World War. This book recounts this part of their lives. After the war was over the family returned to Kenya and Elspeth stayed until leaving for college as a woman—recounted in the book *The Mottled Lizard*. This book is a really entertaining read about their life in Kenya from the viewpoint of a young girl. Her mother is a common sense housewife who runs the family and her father is a nice chap who has a lot of big dreams—most of them impossible to fulfill. We also get to meet a fair number of natives, and their interactions with the English settlers are the most interesting parts of the book. They spent thousands of years building their culture when, out of the blue strangers came to their land, took some of it, and built their homes on it. Sort of like if E.T. and his group came down and built their homes in Central Park. This book does an excellent job of describing the natives and the wildlife of Kenya (before most of it was killed and the rest kept in parks). I give it my highest recommendation.

I really enjoyed this as a story or should I say biography and the bird's eye view of the African culture at that time was intensely interesting.

First, the illustrations are a Major bonus for the price of the book! The story is fascinating, of a time and place most of us have not nor will experience. It is honest and can be unsettlingly raw; I hate to hear of pain to animals, and was undone several times, but this is Africa and a native culture with

survival on its mind. Each person was drawn clearly and dispassionately, yet with compelling personalities set in very challenging circumstances. A terrific read on pioneering and the individuals who chose to settle in that harsh, foreign land, the continent, native animals and history- I loved it even when I hated the reality of it.

Excellent. My wife and I lived in Thika and the description of the area and people right on.

An outstanding novel full of the history and life in colonial Kenya. Beautiful prose that takes your breath away. They don't write 'em like this anymore!

The descriptions of the land, animal cruelty, and natives were very interesting. The main characters were not very developed. The events surrounding World War I in Kenya were confusing.

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