



The Fall of Saints

Wanjiku wa Ngũgĩ

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In this stunning debut novel, a Kenyan expat is living the American Dream until she uncovers her husband's secrets and opens a Pandora's box of good versus evil.

In this stunning debut novel, a Kenyan expat living the American dream with her husband and adopted son soon finds it marred by child trafficking, scandal, and a problematic past.

Mugure and Zack seem to have the picture-perfect family: a young, healthy son, a beautiful home in Riverdale, New York, and a bright future. But one night, as Mugure is rummaging through an old drawer, she comes across a piece of paper with a note scrawled on it—a note that calls into question everything she's ever believed about her husband . . .

A wandering curiosity may have gotten the best of Mugure this time as she heads down a dangerous road that takes her back to Kenya, where new discoveries threaten to undo her idyllic life. She wonders if she ever really knew the man she married and begins to piece together the signs that were there since the beginning. Who was that suspicious man who trailed Zack and Mugure on their first date at a New York nightclub? What about the closing of the agency that facilitated the adoption of their son?

The Fall of Saints tackles real-life political and ethical issues through a striking, beautifully rendered story. This extraordinary novel will tug at your heart and keep it racing until the end.

The Fall of Saints Details

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Author : Wanjiku wa Ng'g?

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From Reader Review The Fall of Saints for online ebook

Jen says

I will give the author credit, the book ended up a lot "tidier" than I thought possible. There were so many loose ends and different possible plots at the beginning, I was not sure it would all get cleared within three hundred pages. That being said, I really did not like this novel. It was poorly written (which, I feel horrible saying) and there was a dramatic over-use of foreshadowing. Blah blah blah... I would think about this later in the jungle, fighting for my life.... blah blah blah... I would remember this later looking at the Kenyan stars.... Blah blah blah etc. (I made those lines up, but you get the picture I'm driving at).

And I totally understand almost from the beginning that Kobi is Zach's son. BAM. Not so much a surprise. The killing of infants was an unpleasant surprise, but that combined with Zach's confessions made the whole story more ludicrous.

Felicity Gibson says

'The Fall of Saints' by Wanjiku wa Ngugi

Read 18th March 2014

When I requested this book I had no expectations except that it would be fiction. I liked the blurb. It turned out to be a mystery novel. The book started well, though I thought the characters were not convincing enough. Mughue was lovely but did not portray herself as a beautiful woman. Certainly, Zach her husband was too perfect. Friends they encountered were all too celluloid and unbelievable. So here is the plot: beautiful African woman falls in love with successful lawyer in America and they start to live happily after. That was the beginning. Everything perfect. Maybe the author wanted us to be lulled into this mood of middle class happiness. Then the arrival of Kobi. Another happy event to complete their happy marriage. WHAM – events start happening, piling up – unpeeling with no answers. Things start to get difficult. The middle of this story worried me greatly; a situation where men stand with guns over their heads threatening them out of the blue. Suddenly, the absence of Zach, away on business - the friendship of an old acquaintance from College days from the Police Department. I could go on and on. Oh yes, there is a best friend, a wonderful singer, entertainer and so close to the protagonist. The reader trusts her implicitly. Things don't measure up. Friends are suspects. The suspense was fine and it was threatening; it kept me on my toes for a few chapters. However there were incidents when the situation was forced and not real. Just action packed in for the sake of action. Overflowing without need. The scenes in Kenya were descriptive and powerful. However this novel has the potential to be better. The element of suspense was fine but some of the situations that the characters were facing felt unreal and totally ridiculous. Far more editing needed to change from a mediocre story to a really good story.

I give this novel 2 stars.

Danny says

Wanjiku Wa Ngugi's debut novel entices the reader with an interesting premise that has the potential to be

different, and yet remain in the comfort zone of the “don’t trust your spouse” sub-genre that has dominated 2013/2014. In reality however, it falls a little short.

As an expat myself, I am always interested in stories told from the point of view of a person who is not on home turf. That element, added to the fact that it had potential to explore modern African culture, is what initially attracted me. The novel has all of these aforementioned elements, but the exploration of each one is rather lackluster. It is almost like an imposter, a fake, trying to emulate these experiences, has written the story, and that is really disappointing. Disappointment is the main feeling I experienced when reading this novel.

The suspense element was fine; it wasn’t particularly nail-biting, but it kept you on your toes for a few chapters. However, some of the dialogue and the situations that the characters faced, felt very trite and forced, resulting in a lot of eye rolling and mutters of “really?”.

However, in amongst the negative points, there were a few positive aspects. The scenes in Kenya were interesting and descriptive. They felt organic and genuine for the majority of the time. Also, as previously stated, the main protagonist, Magure, did have some potential moments that manage to escape from the disappointing moments.

It really wasn’t a bad read, but I think I set myself up to expect a lot more than I received. I definitely recommend you try it; after all, there are far worse books out there, and the author will hopefully produce a stronger novel in the future.

Yumecosmos says

A thriller with an interesting concept that falls victim to lackluster execution.

A good mystery, like a good magician, does its tricks in full view of the audience. An astute reader should be able to solve it before the characters do. There's a red herring, there's subverting expectations, and then there's outright cheating your reader. There are too many times in this book when the characters figure something out using information that was withheld from us, or a plot twist is so contrived that even someone who thinks of it would dismiss it as ridiculous. In particular I'm thinking of (view spoiler).

The blurb on the back promises a fast-moving plot, and on that front the book certainly delivers. I enjoyed the not-entirely-chronological narration and the occasional streams of consciousness that tend to crop up when Mugure is under pressure. (There was, however, one significant plot hole where Mugure remembered the Rhino Man's accent on the phone... before the phone call actually occurred.) Things really get cooking in the second act, when the action moves to Kenya. I enjoyed seeing Mugure finally take some action, face and overcome her fears, and start finding answers. I still wish she had relied on her male allies a little less, and would liked to have seen more of Jane, but all in all it kept me turning the pages. I had a pretty good read on most of the characters by this point, but I didn't see (view spoiler) coming at all. That shock, and the scene where Mugure realizes this is bigger than her family and resolves to help the other women, were the high points in this book for me.

The ending is not entirely satisfying. I had hoped that Mugure's search for her father would eventually dovetail with the mystery plot, or at least provide her with some critical character development that would give her the strength to confront her enemies. Instead it felt like a separate, parallel storyline that hastily concluded after the mystery was solved. Oddly enough, this is one place where the author sets up all the dominoes, then inexplicably declines to knock them over. I expected Wangeci would turn out to be (view spoiler). But no. More disappointing was the lack of any real epiphany in the scene where Mugure finds her father's garden. It seems like it should be a hugely emotional moment for her, and she barely reacts. Then came (view spoiler) and the book is over. I feel like too many of the wrong loose ends were tied up.

With all that said, this is certainly not the *worst book ever*. Mugure may not be the most compelling heroine, but she's likeable enough. I was rooting for her and her son, and the antagonist is truly horrible. Not a life-changing book, but maybe a decent airplane read.

Nancy says

The subject matter is substantial in this novel. The author tells how babies are trafficked in Kenya by way of women signing away their uteruses. The women are held in a life of slavery of artificial insemination and fear. Human trafficking and slavery in order to supply the demand of adoptable babies and much more sinister activity is the theme.

The progression of the novel and the way it evolved had me scratching my head. The protagonist is a Kenyan citizen who marries a first generation Estonian immigrant. They fail to conceive and adopt a toddler they name Kobi. There is extraneous detail about the Kenyan father who had little to do with his daughter besides paying for her from afar and the Estonian father and grandfather that had tenuous ties to the story. Also a component of Caucasian man being evil and enslaving the black people but I found little evidence of this through the story besides anecdotal snippets. This argument just seemed out of place in the novel but the characters kept bringing it up. It was a near non-sequitur.

Although the subject is important, as I mentioned, the protagonist begins her Maverick quest when she bores of shopping in high end Manhattan stores and accidentally stumbles upon a torn piece of paper with her son's name on it, a company name, and a phone number, written by her husband. Suddenly, that cryptic and meaningless paper becomes the catalyst for her running around New York, seeking answers without having the first idea about the question because the clues are not enough to make a sane woman disrupt her meaningless shopping schedule to do so.

Naturally, by the end of the novel, her irrational suspicions of foul play to an adoption which she had absolutely no involvement in procuring (Hello? How involved would YOU be in the adoption of your child?) and she ends up in Ohio with an ex boyfriend (inappropriate and non sequitur) where she entrusts her son to virtual strangers and runs off to Kenya and transforms herself from rich, soccer mom to sharp shooter that everybody wants to kill. The leaps induced whip lash. My neck is still aching.

Bottom line is that I read it as an ARC so I reserve final judgment but IMHO, it needs a lot of work to be believable

Isis Smith says

I was initially excited to read this work by the daughter of Ngugi Wa Thiongo, whose writings greatly inspired my own thoughts. I must say, I am somewhat disappointed.

There is SO MUCH wrong with this book. It just isn't good writing. There's no character development. And too many things that happen are just clearly non-sensical.

However, I somehow still found myself engaged. You have to stop trying to make the story make sense, and just flow with it. At some point in the story, you understand what the author was trying to do, and your mind starts to fill in the gaps--or at least mine did, and I finished the book in a day (although I did skip some paragraphs here and there).

I appreciate the author's attempt to bring awareness to the issue of women being exploited or enslaved b/c of their abilities to bear children, illegal adoptions, and the disgusting practice of birthing children just to kill them and farm their organs--which is really the inspiration for this novel.

I would actually love if a director with a vision would pick up this story and make it into a movie. With just a bit of adaptation, I think this could be an excellent suspenseful thriller + international political drama.

Linda Brown says

Some of the early reviews of the Fall of Saints by Wanjik? wa Ng?g? noted the serious issues it brings to light - the International exploitation and trafficking of the products of women's bodies from poor regions of the world to service the bourgeois life styles abroad, - but reacted with impatience at the apparent naivety of the main character in the opening pages of the novel, this clouding their judgement about the literary and aesthetic qualities of the novel. They completely missed the drama of a woman who rejects the uneasy comfort of victim-hood and seizes back her agency. From being acted upon, she becomes an actor in the drama that is her life.

Mugure, a student turned illegal immigrant, leads a life of hide-and-hope-not-to be found in the streets of New York, a source of cheap labor to any who would hire her. She falls in love with a rich white lawyer, but she is not sure if the prospects of securing a green card is not what makes her heart beat. And then terror strikes at her married bliss: she is unable to have a child. They decide to adopt a biracial baby from Kenya but it is her rich husband who makes all the arrangements and has the child brought home. Grateful and fearing to lose her new found security, Mugure naively accepts every explanation about the adoption and the odd things that begin to happen around her. But underneath the apparent naivety and timidity is a curiosity that makes her want to know more about the adoption, and flies back to Kenya to find out.

What she encounters in the slums of the country – a modern day plantation but now for the production of babies for sale to the rich and powerful in Europe and America– makes Mugure shed off her timidity and her new bourgeois life style of shopping and mindless consumption, to go into the bottom of this. What she finds is pure horror, entirely beyond even her wildest imagination, a pawn in a well-oiled international ring of evil. She decides to fight the evil. What was started by curiosity is now driven by force of conviction. Her actions incur the wrath of the forces of evil who are determined to eliminate her. She refuses to bow down to power. The transformation of a woman without a sense of her own agency, often at the mercy of her male dominated environment, into a one who rejects victim-hood and finds her agency, is compelling drama and a moving testimony to the power of resistance to evil. In trying to change the conditions around her, Mugure changes herself.

Mugure's story reminds the reader of the song that the women of South Africa used to sing in the struggle against apartheid:

Now you have touched the women
You have struck a rock,
You have dislodged a boulder.
You will be crushed..

Amber Thomas says

I picked this up at the library without having any idea about the reviews on here. I'm glad for that, because I came in without a preconceived ideas. I liked it pretty well, but I can understand with the subject matter can be... ick. But it was a good story. I don't normally read a)thrillers, b)um, novels not written for teenagers, but

as an English major I have read several books about post-colonial Africa and have a frame of reference for this novel and the complicated context.

The basic concept is this: a Kenyan ex-pat Mugure marries a rich lawyer Zach, and becomes a stay-at-home-mom when they adopt Kobi from Kenya. She finds some shady paperwork relating to the adoption. She gets threats for asking questions. She decides to look further into it and it takes her into a crazy life-and-death investigation, making her question everyone she knows, and ends up leading her to Kenya where she discovers a horrifying truth.

(Spoiler)

She discovers that there's essentially a baby mill in Kenya that pays poor women to reproduce until they can't anymore. It is later uncovered that it's both for adoption and stem-cell research. Yeah, way disturbing. It turns out Kobi is a product of this "mill" (for a lack of a better term), and while Mugure is uncovering the truth she meets his birth mother.

Wanjiku Wa Ngugi reminded me of her father, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, in that she wrote a novel that drew her reader (at least, me) into the story and despite the events of the novel, leaves you with a bittersweet optimism by the end.

PopcornReads says

Wow - I just saw the overall low star rating for this novel, which I really don't understand. The subject is very uncomfortable, I grant you but...Here's my take on it: I've read several novels by Kenyan authors and enjoyed them all, so that's why I was initially drawn to *The Fall of Saints* by Wanjiku wa Ngugi. Then I read the publisher's brief description and knew this might be a controversial book to review but one well worth reading. It deals with international adoption, women's rights in other countries, betrayal, revenge, and all kinds of relationships.

As the protagonist is warned early in the novel, no one is who they appear to be. Should you read it? You'll have to read my review to find out because I can't honestly say. We all know the world has a seamy underbelly but there are aspects to it that are hush-hush. I believe nothing will improve for exploited women without awareness, outrage, and action against the barbaric way they are still treated. What do you think? Find out more at <http://popcornreads.com/?p=7180>.

Erin says

A thriller that visits the moral dilemma of human trafficking and slavery. Mugure appears to have the perfect family until the day she finds a note that calls her entire life into question. She begins to question the man she married and the child that she adopted. When she begins to ask questions, the threats begin. Her investigation takes her back to Kenya where she used to live. Was her whole marriage a lie?

I enjoyed this book. I thought the plot was really good and there was quite a bit of action in it. I wish there was a bit more character development. The book was a quick read. The beginning started out a bit slow but by the end it was pretty action-packed as Mugure got closer and closer to figuring out what was really going on. I found the book quite entertaining.

I received a copy of this book for free through Goodreads First Reads.

Bookworm says

This is just a bad book! I thought I'd switch back to fiction after reading a few non-fiction books. This was next in my queue and thought I'd try it out. Sadly, I was very disappointed.

Mugure is a Kenyan woman married to a first generation immigrant. She and Zack are married and want to have a child. But she can't. So they choose to adopt a child, named Kobi. However, Mugure discovers there's a lot more to her son's adoption than just the adoption.

What had a great premise (child trafficking, legality and ethics of adoptions, an immigrant story, etc.) failed horribly. Like other reviews state, I couldn't understand how this got past an editor. The writing is very pedestrian and initially made me wonder if it was a matter of translation or something else getting lost. I'm not sure, but I am comfortable in saying this is a bad book.

Sometimes the author jumps back and forth through time, clearly relating events in different time periods. Characters pop in and out but sometimes it's very jumpy and it's not clear to me if the author is trying to deliberately foreshadow their importance later or if she's just not very good in setting them up for the story. I somewhat disliked how the issue of Kobi's adoption came forth so early. Although I don't mind plot-driven books, this just seemed too rushed and out of place. And so forth.

I guess this was supposed to be a mystery/thriller but it does neither. Although the backstory is a mystery, I wasn't interested in finding out what the drama was. Overall I can't recommend and wonder who or why thought this book was actually good.

Don't bother. The average rating on Goodreads as of this review is about 2.2. That should tell you quite a bit.

Diane says

his debut novel started out so strong and hooked me quickly, but then slowly became confusing and outlandish as well.

Mugure is an expat from Kenya now living in the US. She has a nice life living in New York and is married to Zack, a successful attorney that she met while working at his law firm. When the couple is unable to conceive a child they adopt a little two-year old boy named Kobi.

One day several years after the adoption, she takes her husband's car instead of her own she finds a piece of paper with her son's name and a phone number on it. She's curious, but it isn't until later when she is searching for something in the office that she finds another suspicious bit of information with similar info that makes her question whether her husband and the agency that handled the adoption might just be hiding something from her.

Unable to leave her happy life in Riverdale, NY as is, she begins her own private investigation involving her best friend Melinda, who was once married to Zack's friend, a man who went from rags to riches supposedly in the landscaping business, but may have been involved in transporting illegal immigrants for a fee as well.

In her sleuthing she finds the adoption agency has closed its doors seemingly overnight and is now a curio shop. Her amateur investigation takes her from soccer mom to all sorts of dangerous people and locales, including a trip back to Kenya to find out more about her son and the truth about his adoption.

The story was riveting in parts, yet so far-fetched and all over the map at times that it became hard to follow. I don't want to dissuade readers from trying this debut novel as part of the story was really addictive, it's just that the story got too out of hand and it became too confusing to follow who was involved in the possible illegal and why.

Jehree Anderson says

Novel overall has substantial subject matter, the author tells a story based off of true events that occur in Kenya where babies are trafficked and women there sign contracts to be artificially inseminated for money living a life of slavery and fear. The theme is based on these events and the high demand for adoptable babies from high society and the traffickers push to recruit Kenyan women to sign on to this contract to make large amounts of money. Overall the book was very jumpy was hard to stay focused on one segment for too long with the rapid changes forcing the reader to do more work in staying active, felt like reading a text book or article compared to a novel that just flows naturally.

Chaitra says

I should have run for the hills looking at the ratings on GR, but I didn't check it before requesting this turkey on NetGalley. More fool me. I agree with the other reviewers, this book makes no sense. I mean,

1. The "mystery" in the book starts when a bored suburban housewife gets tired of shopping, pokes around in her husband's pant pockets, finds a paper piece with a number and her adopted son's name on it. She screams conspiracy. It gets worse, this trouser pocket paper thing. Next she finds a paper with a man's name crossed out, and this "intelligent" person thinks that proves that her husband is keeping company with this said man who she also thinks without much reason is bad.
2. The lady who sees conspiracies in paper notes remarkably keeps her trust in her husband even when suited gunmen demand documents from him and tell them they'll keep their eye on him. Oh no, he's good as gold. Every one else? Well, they're Mafia because they're second generation Italians.
3. Once she's started to see bad things everywhere, she confides in a friend of hers who happens to be a cop. He tries to put reason into her head, but does she listen? And when something bad happens, her immediate reaction is to think - I confided in a cop, something terrible happened. So the cop must be to blame. Never mind that the cop had no clue about anything before she told him. Also, lets really not look at the husband. He can't have anything to do with it, right?
4. Every man she speaks to has designs on her. Because she's gorgeous, she's got a way with guns. Arrogant thing. She has intelligence too - she reminds us that at every possible opportunity. Never mind that every male hooks up with someone else pretty quickly and good for him.
5. Everything is repeated twice. One man says, abc vanished and xyz thinks heroine is crazy and has to be

committed. Two paragraphs later, heroine thinks, "why did abc vanish? why did xyz think that she's crazy?", to hammer in the suspense I suppose. Never mind that there's no suspense, any sane person would think she's crazy.

6. Two people say the same thing, they must be in communication. And it's never for good purposes. Oh no. It must be because they're out to get her because she's getting close to whatever crap thing she's looking for.

7. She gets together with two friends in her quest for answers. One is a defense attorney who has intimate knowledge of the people involved in this case, and who has a personal axe to grind with one of the ringleaders. The other is an investigative reporter who reports on exactly the kind of stories that this thing has the potential to be. Guess who is the person who has the right questions, the right attitude, the timing, the cojones to do actual investigative work? Yep. The bored suburban housewife who wouldn't recognize common sense if it danced in front of her in a tea-cozy.

8. She cracks the mystery, of course. How? By having the bad guys keep around incriminating evidence or speak of it in terms only slightly short of a neon sign. For example, a suited gunman asks for a "document" off her husband on their first date. At a later point, a "document" is used to humiliate a do-gooder Catholic nun. Since both are "documents" they must be linked, right? Of course they are. Never mind that our heroine has no reason to think her husband has ever set foot in Africa before her honeymoon. Similarly, someone speaks of a brown folder with some incriminating evidence. When she breaks into this place what else should she find lying around looking innocent (despite having a filing cabinet that's locked)? That's right. A brown folder. With incriminating evidence.

The writing is pedestrian, the plot is silly beyond compare. I wish I could say I wanted to throw my Kindle at the wall. I can't, because I kept reading it in horrified fascination. That's the reason for the 1 star, the unintentional hilarity.

Mandy says

To be honest, I don't really understand how this book came to be published, it's so bad. The synopsis makes it sound very interesting, dealing as it does with human and child trafficking and the enslavement of women in Africa, but the book is so poorly executed that it's hard to take seriously. A thriller set in the US and Africa it's the story of a young Kenyan woman living in America with her husband and adopted son. Seeming to be living the American dream, her comfortable life comes to an end when she discovers a scrap of paper which appears to suggest that nefarious activities are afoot. She sets off to uncover them. In a series of unlikely plot twists, all clumsily foreshadowed, with a cast of equally unlikely characters, none of whom are who they seem, poor dialogue and confusing trajectories, I found myself both bemused and irritated as I skipped to the end. Disappointing indeed.
