



## **Book Review**

### **White Oleander**

By Janet Fitch

White Oleander begins the fictional account of 12 yr old Astrid, the only daughter of Ingrid, a single mother. Ingrid is a self-absorbed, intelligent, beautiful poet who works for a magazine, publishes books of her poetry and leads an eclectic, bohemian lifestyle. Ingrid is an unconventional mother with nontraditional values and beliefs and it is easy for the reader to feel that Astrid should have more structure and not be exposed to the lifestyle that she is.

Then when Ingrid is arrested for murdering one of her lovers and sentenced to life in prison, Astrid begins a horrifying journey through the foster care system and the reader looks longingly back at Astrid's life at home with Ingrid, as does Astrid. At each new foster care home, Astrid faces new cruelties, and has to reach deep within her to overcome and survive. The unconventional, bohemian lifestyle of Ingrid has now been exchanged for loneliness, abuse, poverty, and survival.

As Astrid grows up and learns to survive in the foster care system, she also, learns new insights about herself. She develops strength and independence and an assertiveness that she had never known. Astrid realizes dreams that she had always had are actually bits of memories from her distant toddler hood and her newfound independence from her mother gives her a new freedom to confront her mother with her memories, climaxing the story into an ironic twist the reader could not see coming!

Riveting and graphic, White Oleander is a disturbing, yet captivating tale. As I began reading, it was so easy to judge Ingrid as a mother, yet when Astrid was put into the foster care system, I would have given anything to have Astrid back with Ingrid. Their mother-daughter bond was functional, albeit their lifestyle eclectic. If you are looking for an interesting book that will hold your attention, White Oleander will certainly do that. I found myself reading all night and all day. White Oleander is certainly a must read for foster care and adoption workers. I highly recommend it.

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