



★ Breaking the Maafa Chain

Anni Domingo

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Based on the true story of Sarah Forbes Bonetta, Anni Domingo's epic historical novel honors the unbreakable bond between two sisters who are captured by slavers in a vicious raid on their African village, sold, and sent to two different countries—one to abolitionist England, where she becomes the "Black Princess" and Queen Victoria's goddaughter; the other to the unrelenting horrors of slavery on an American plantation.

The raid, in December of 1846, tears the children from all they know. Their village is destroyed, their family members are killed—even their names are taken from them. Salimatu becomes Sarah Forbes Bonetta, thus named by the British abolitionist sea captain who rescues her from sacrificial death at the hands of an African king. Taken to England, she becomes part of a new family, with all of her needs provided for by the queen. Meanwhile, her older sister, Fatmata, renamed "Faith," is stripped of all her human rights. Through it all, the girls never forget the love between them, and their searches for each other are both suspenseful and heartbreaking.

The book is powerful in detailing the cruelties of the transatlantic slave trade, and sensitive and intimate in its portrayal of the girls' struggles to maintain their dignity and hold on to the memories of their African heritage. "No matter where the white man takes me, he cannot steal my roots," thinks Fatmata as the slave ship carries her across the Atlantic. Though the sisters' fates are different, the book unearths the roots of the ignorance and prejudice that existed, and still exist, in America and in England.

With descriptions rich in sensory details, a narrative that forms a swift, irreversible current, and conversations imbued with emotion, Anni Domingo's story of the *Maafa*, the African Holocaust, is unforgettable.

KRISTINE MORRIS (January / February 2022)

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