



Promise the Night

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Immediately compelling and action-packed, this carefully researched work of historical fiction introduces young readers to the childhood of the famous yet elusive Beryl Markham, the first person to fly solo from England to North America. As in her debut novel, *Prisoners in the Palace*, MacColl propels readers into a multilayered story with an unforgettable heroine and evocative language that brings the backdrop of colonial British East Africa to life. A fascinating read for anyone with a thirst for adventure.

Promise the Night Details

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From Reader Review Promise the Night for online ebook

Sara Latta says

High-flying adventures in Africa

In 1936, aviatrix Beryl Markham flew solo across the Atlantic—from England to North America, a much more difficult feat than Amelia Earhart’s west-to-east 1928 trek—and became one of the most celebrated women in the world.

“Promise the Night,” (Chronicle Books, 2011) Michaela MacColl’s latest historical novel, weaves newspaper and journal accounts from Beryl’s transatlantic flight into the story of her remarkable childhood.

Beryl Clutterbuck was born in 1902 in England, but she moved to British East Africa (now known as Kenya) with her parents and brother when she was two years old. Living conditions there were difficult and primitive by British standards, and Beryl’s mother soon abandoned her husband and daughter to return to England with a British officer she met in Nairobi.

If life in Africa was too demanding for Clara Clutterbuck, it was heaven for the adventuresome Beryl. She explores the forests, adopts the local Nandi tribe as her substitute family, and learns to speak Swahili. She fervently wishes to join her Nandi friend, a boy named Kibii, in becoming a Nandi warrior. Taught by Kibii’s father, Arap Maina, Beryl learns to jump “higher than her head” and even takes part in a hunt for the leopard. On her father’s ranch, she and Kibii learned to break horses. (Before becoming a pilot, Beryl was the first licensed female horse trainer in British East Africa.)

Beryl rebels at every attempt to turn her into a proper young lady, even as she comes to understand the daughter of a British colonialist can never really become African.

I received an advance review copy of “Promise the Night” believing it to be a young adult novel, but it is ideal for younger readers—say, ages 9 to 12. Younger teens would like it as well.

Older teens and adults interested in learning more about Beryl Markham should check out her remarkable memoir, “West With the Night.” I recently listened to the unabridged audio version (Blackstone Audio, 2005), read by actress Julie Harris. It is little wonder that Ernest Hemingway, who was not often in the habit of praising other writers, wrote, “[she] can write rings around all of us who consider ourselves writers.” Her fine prose is especially remarkable given her early dislike of reading and writing, although some have suggested that “West With the Night” was ghostwritten by her husband, a Hollywood screen writer.

No matter. Both “Promise the Night” and “West with the Night” are high-flying adventures.

Sara Latta, Champaign, is the author of 17 books for children, including three books on forensic science just out this fall. She has an M.F.A. in creative writing, and is currently working on a novel for teen readers. You can read more of her reviews at her website, www.saralatta.com.

Kristen says

My review of *Promise the Night* first appeared in the November 2011 issue of *Historical Novels Review*:

Anyone who has ever read the gorgeous *West with the Night* by Beryl Markham may doubt the need for a young adult novel written about the aviatrix’s early life. Within a few pages of Michaela MacColl’s new young adult novel, however, even the most skeptical should be persuaded. *Promise the Night* tells the story

of the pre-teen, horse-loving, lion-hunting Beryl Clutterbuck, who became Beryl Markham, a woman bigger than life who may well deserve as many books as Eleanor of Aquitaine.

Beryl's parents moved from Britain to British East Africa (now Kenya) in 1906. Her mother soon fled back to Britain with Beryl's brother. By 1912, Beryl has become a girl who manages to simultaneously exasperate and charm. Her father, a retired British Army captain, gives her freedom but demands toughness. His influence is checked by her tribal life – she basically runs wild with her African friends, and learns respect and honor from their point of view. Patched in between chapters of this narrative is the story, told via news reports and the older Beryl's diary, of her foolhardy and brave solo flight west across the Atlantic in 1936. The young Beryl makes a lot of embarrassing and even life-threatening mistakes and MacColl does a masterful job of bringing those mistakes and their repercussions to life. She also shows how no blunder, even the stupidest, shook Beryl's supreme confidence in herself. (That by itself was worth the price of admission for this reader.)

MacColl offers a thoroughly modern and yet believable heroine for young readers, gives great period details that move the plot along, offers telling insights into Beryl's youthful exploits, and provides a thoughtful list for further reading. Recommended.

Meaghan says

I got this book free through LibraryThing's Early Reviewers program.

This is an excellent story, full of all sorts of roaring African adventures that will keep 9-to-12s of both sexes enthralled. But there's more depth to the book than I would have thought: in addition to Beryl's tramping around the African forests like Tarzan, you see more subtle themes of growing up, and trying to get on with others different from you. Beryl would be a delightful heroine even if she didn't later become a famous pilot.

Tara Chevrestt says

I thought this was a decent read though it is def aimed at an even younger crowd than I originally thought. It's not aimed at teenagers, but the 9 to 12 year olds. I don't normally read books aimed at kids that young, but I love women in aviation and wanted to learn more about Beryl Markham, the woman who crossed the Atlantic, East to West.

The novel chronicles Beryl's childhood in Africa, her forays into hunting with the native tribes, her rocky relationship with her father's mistress, her stubbornness not to learn math, lion attacks and lion hunts, her year at boarding school, etc. The author did a superb job balancing Beryl's childhood with journal accounts/interviews with an adult Beryl preparing for and then attempting her Atlantic crossing.

My only quibbles: 1. Though most of the story is true and based on real accounts, sometimes it was a bit unbelievable, such as when Beryl grabs her teacher and throws her down. 2. I would have liked this book to go further into Beryl's life. I respect that the author stuck to an eleven year old Beryl as that's the age group this was intended for, but I wanted more about her getting into aviation, learning to fly, and so on. Except for the journal excerpts, there was no aviation. The book ends before Beryl even lays eye on an airplane.

Ronald Roseborough says

Promise The Night is an excellent blend of facts and story telling. It's one of those books you just enjoy reading. Beryl Markham, the famous aviatrix of the 1930's, is the central character. She shared the headlines of her day with such women pilots as Amelia Earhart. But, it is her formative years in British East Africa that are the main focus of this book. She was raised on a ranch by her British father, Captain Clutterback. When Beryl was very young, her mother left the wilds of Africa taking Beryl's older brother with her back to England. Life in the harsh land of Africa in the early twentieth century was not for the faint of heart. For Beryl, however, it was heaven on earth. She bonded with the land and the people. Her father gave over her up bringing to the leaders of one of the local tribes that worked on his ranch. Beryl, although missing the closeness that should have come from her father, adapted to the life of the wild. She was accepted as a member of the tribe, learning their ways. She even participated in their hunts, which was very unusual for a girl. When she was eventually made to attend English school, she continued to show her spirit and independence, rebelling against authority. The book shows her great love for nature and the land and people of Africa. Girls aged 9-12 will especially enjoy this story of growing up in the wilds of Africa. Provided for review by the well read folks at Library Thing and Chronicle Books.

Margaux Perchard says

this book is about Beryl Markham, she was the first woman to fly alone across the Atlantic Ocean. The book is based on her wild childhood growing up in Kenya. Her father was a racehorse trainer. She goes on crazy adventures with her friend Kibii. Kibii is a Nandi, the Nandis are native Africans who work for Beryl's father, Charles Clutterbuck. She survives a lion attack, boarding school, and a crazy teacher. This is a well-detailed book.

Erica says

This historical fiction novel follows the life of a woman who refused to be limited by what was considered proper for a lady to do. Beryl grew up in Kenya the daughter of a famous English horse breeder. The story of her unusual and spirited upbringing is interspersed with vignettes of her adult exploits as a pilot, the first to cross the Atlantic from east to west. It's a great adventure novel and an inspiring true story.

Melissa says

I was on the edge of my seat throughout this entire story.

"Immediately compelling and action-packed, this carefully researched work of historical fiction introduces young readers to the childhood of the famous yet elusive Beryl Markham, the first person to fly solo from England to North America. MacColl propels readers into a multilayered story with an unforgettable heroine and evocative language that brings the backdrop of colonial British East Africa to life. A fascinating read for anyone with a thirst for adventure."

Erica says

Michaela MacColl has done it again. *Promise the Night* was an absolutely fabulous read that I just adored. I loved every page of this book, and am already beginning my wait for another great read from Michaela MacColl.

Promise the Night was such an interesting story. The story is told from Beryl's childhood, but in between each chapter is a short diary entry, interview, something like that from her adult life when she is a pilot. Both of these played off the other and it was just a lot of fun to read. I loved the story line - it honestly was just a ton of fun to read. Something else I really liked about *Promise the Night* is that it was a very fast read - I didn't want to put it down for one moment.

Beryl is by no means your typical girl. I loved her spunk she brought with everything she did. Every character brought something a little different to this book, and I loved that. You really see all the characters grow throughout the course of the book. Emma was a character who really grew on me as the book went on. I wasn't too crazy about her, but by the end, she was definitely one of my favorite characters.

Michaela MacColl is just a master with historical fiction. I loved this one even more than her debut, and cannot wait for another book from her. *Promise the Night* is a book I would recommend to every one, especially those who have always dreamed about something. Beryl is not afraid to go out and do what she needs to to achieve her dreams, and that makes her story so much fun to read.

Alison says

This is a wonderful book. It is the story of aviator Beryl Markham's Kenyan childhood in the early 20th century interspersed with fictionalised interviews and diary extracts of her record breaking solo flight east to west across the Atlantic. The details of her friendship with Kibii, a Nandi boy, and her education into his tribe's customs, is cleverly used to demonstrate how these experiences helped her (along with her strong will and energy) to become firstly a successful racehorse trainer and then a pioneering aviator. Highly recommended for readers aged 9+.

Susanna says

Beryl Markham was one of the famous pilots of the golden age of aviation, even becoming the first pilot - male or female - to fly the East-to-West route across the Atlantic Ocean solo. Yet even before this amazing feat, Beryl led a remarkable life. Raised on a remote Kenyan ranch by her father, Beryl Markham grew up racing horses and living a life atypical for daughters of European settlers. She became best friends with a Nandi boy, Kibii, and grew up alongside him and his tribe, breaking both ethnic and gender barriers. This historical novel tells the story of Beryl's childhood.

Beryl Markham's early life makes for interesting reading, whatever your age. English colonialism, African tribal practices, horse racing, early aviation, boarding school drama, and more are all covered. My main

complaint with this book, though, is that the only one of these that's really discussed in-depth is Nandi lifeways. I don't have a problem with lifeways forming the basis of the novel - the anthropologist in me absolutely loves it - but I think the author could have delved more deeply into the other aspects of Markham's childhood rather than just mentioning them more topically. MacColl based the majority of the book's details on Markham's own memoirs and in many ways what's covered in the novel is probably there because it is what's covered in Markham's writings, but part of historical fiction is taking a little creative license with the details that aren't all there. Otherwise, you end up with parts of a book that are fantastic in the history they tell and parts that seem like they're not fleshed-out enough. Even with this complaint, though, MacColl succeeds in keeping the history parts of the book exciting, and in this way *Promise the Night* is a good read for Middle Grade audiences who get very little African and colonial history in school. When I was that age, I would have devoured this book and never noticed everything I just said I didn't like.

I received my copy of this book through LibraryThing Early Reviewers in return for an honest review.

Jasmine says

Promise the night is the story of Beryl Markham the first woman to get her commercial pilot license. Follow the plucky Beryl as she trains with the Nandi tribe to become a warrior and then to a boarding school where she discovers being a proper English girl is not for her. This book is peppered with real events but is mostly Michaela MacColl imagination. I really liked this book it was funny and creative and moving. My one complaint with this book is that the author did not accurately represent the native tribe in this book because she could not find much information on the tribe so she used a tribe that had similar customs.

Genetta says

What a remarkable life Beryl Markham lived! Before reading this, I only knew of her aviation accolades. *PROMISE THE NIGHT* breathes life into Beryl's amazing childhood in British East Africa and the experiences that shaped the woman Beryl would become.

After her mother left young Beryl and her father in the rugged wilderness of African highlands, a neighboring tribe cared for Beryl, teaching her Swahili as well as skills in hunting wild game. Her father taught Beryl and her friend Kibii, a boy from the tribe, how to train thoroughbred racehorses. Readers will find this novel fascinating in its vivid descriptions and sensory details. I highly recommend this fictionalized account of the childhood of Beryl Markham.

Alyse Erickson says

This story is about a young girl named Beryl who has spent her life growing up between two complete opposite homes; the harsh savannas of Africa with her strict father, and the big bustling country of England. Beryl's only true friend through out her life has been her mother's dog who is named Buller, who was also unfortunately one night dragged out from her tent by an African leopard in the middle of the night and never returned. That was a fairly drastic part of the book and was very sad to me. With determination to rescue her only friend in her heart and mind, Beryl sets out on an adventure and becomes the first person to fly alone from England all the way to North America; across her journey, this and many other crazy stories and events

like learning how to tame and ride horses, take place during her crazy rescue attempt. The level of cultural detail is high in this book because she gives descriptions of what it is like to live in two completely different living situations from both points of view too. For example, when Beryl describes a night in Africa she says she can hear “ the rustling of insects burrowing in the thatch roof, the snorting of the horses, and sometimes even the roar of a lion in the valley... the night was cold and clear... the cold sliced through fine linen” (MacColl, 6). Most of the authentic dialogue took place in the beginning with Beryl and her dog, then with all of the characters she met on her journey, most of which were exciting and heartfelt. The in depth treatment of cultural issues was not as relevant as I assumed it would be, the only time it seemed to appear in the novel was by comparing the differences in Africa, versus the more modernized North America and England. One of the minorities in the novel was a tribal that Beryl ran into during her adventure. Over all this novel was adventure packed, exciting, thought provoking, and extremely well written. This book would not be a very good book for myself to include in my classroom. This book would be too mature for my class. The authors voice throughout the story also came off to me as a little aggressive and scary. This is something that I would not want to introduce to third graders. This book overall, was a great book to read. I believe this book is to be targeted to young adults versus children. This book could be considered a juvenile book versus a child’s book. The feeling that I got from this book was sorrow. I sincerely felt bad for Beryl throughout most of this book, she was always trying to pave her own way and do what her heart desired but she never seemed to have any support. This book I feel could be a very strong life lesson for a young adult mainly because of the independence that Beryl shows throughout the novel.

Danielle says

Galloping into the air much like the horses she later trained, Beryl Clutterbuck Markham was a young women coming of age in a time not prepared for her vivaciousness. Growing up the only daughter of a successful farmer and horse trainer, Beryl turned to the native Nandi people in her East African home to teach her discipline and survival. Every day was an adventure filled with lions, leopards, a “step-mother”, a governess and eventually school in the city. Beryl grew from each of her experiences to become a woman revered by many, but her youth was filled with not only skepticism but danger at every turn.

Generally speaking I’m not a huge reader of historical fiction, particularly fictional stories based in reality. What I’ve loved about book reviewing has been the opportunity to stretch myself and discover something I never knew existed or that I would not normally have given a second glance. *Promise the Night* by Michaela MacColl was one of those such books. Initially, the thought of a middle grade novel about a young girl growing up in Africa based on the true events of Beryl Clutterbuck Markham’s life simply didn’t grab me. What I’ve discovered though is that not only was I wrong, but that I would have missed out greatly on Michaela MacColl’s writing had I passed this novel by.

Beryl was a young wild girl and were it not for her father’s concern for her future well-being as well as that of the reputation of their family she may have grown up as one of the Nandi she so loved. Her adventures of lion hunting and leaping in the air above her own head were the things most young children only dream & read about. What was fascinating was Beryl’s headstrong behavior with nearly everyone she came in contact with. It was this determination and no-nonsense sincerity that finally landed her in the cockpit of an airplane ride across the Atlantic in 1936. The story is actually told in alternating parts between her youth (around age eleven) and her adulthood centering around her actual trip. As I read both the pieces of her life slowly fell into place and it became an incredible adventure I thoroughly enjoyed.

Promise the Night by Michaela MacColl isn’t only a story about a young girl with a strong personality, but

it's a coming of age adventure most middle grade readers will thoroughly enjoy. Beryl Clutterbuck Markham's life was an adventure a minute. She ran to the African tribe of the Nandi, had a terrible governess who beat her so much that she had to escape, she chased down and hunted wild animals, trained gorgeous horses and eventually landed in the pilot seat of a small plane. Her life inspired many and will continue to through the wonderful words of Michaela MacColl. As I said, historical fiction is not normally my cup of tea, but in the case of *Pomise the Night* I'm grateful I made an exception because I truly would have missed out on so much.

Originally reviewed and copyrighted at my site [There's A Book](#).
