

A story that will keep you hooked and stay with you for a long time



THINGS I THOUGHT
I KNEW

Kathryn White
Umuzi

REVIEW:
Shirley de Kock Gueller

NOTHING really prepares you for tragedy, not even a book with a subject as complex as this one: the SA of today. Redolent with angst and insight, with images and prescience,

with the history of good and bad times gone by, this has one hooked from the start.

White's unusual take on things; her way of narrating the story and passing the authorial voice from first to third – and even once from sister to sister – in the most unobtrusive and natural way; and her way of revealing the intensity of emotions in bits and pieces that pertain to the very nature of our rainbow nation, is compelling.

In so many ways, it is unconventional, and unexpected.

Is Lily black or white, and is it ridiculous to wonder? "Yes" is the simple answer, but "No" is the better one. Race is central to everything and yet it's not.

What impact do our roots have on our lives? Could people finally be free? Why does the family split up long after mixed marriages were allowed?

Where is their world, the one that is real to each of them?

Houghton or the Eastern Cape, at a rite in Soweto or under the grey skies of London? What were the things she learned?

Was the gift of foresight a gift or a curse, especially when traditional African elements were an addition?

Why was love so important to people so young, though wise beyond their years? "They wanted to be loved simply, in their broken pieces."

Knowing that she would or

would not sleep with someone, made university relationships easier to navigate, but having ghosts around – even Boer War soldiers – at her wedding added a dimension that may startle most of us.

She knew Adam was the one for her, in spite of his beautiful girlfriend, her friend who sensed the competition, but she knew little beyond. Then, the breakdown that was to affect her greatly; a breakdown that

medication keeps under control. One thinks of tragedy like this as belonging to the times when apartheid took its toll, not now when young people with education and love at their fingertips can make life happen, and White expertly leads us to it.

Don't skim-read. Every word counts. When the widowed cooking teacher from a different era says to the girl of parents who fought the odds in a

race-driven world, "Well, imagine how much love made you. The rest of us didn't have the luck of being so sure", we see how White's mind works.

Most of the questions get answered. First the name, finally the surname and then you find it doesn't matter.

You don't need the details to understand all the dimensions and layers.

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