



## Frangipani

*Célestine Hitiura Vaite*

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In Tahiti, it's a well-known fact that women are wisest, mothers know best, and Materena Mahi knows best of all—or so everyone except for her own daughter thinks. Soon enough, mother and daughter are engaged in a tug-of-war that tests the bonds of their love.

## Frangipani Details

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Author : Célestine Hitiura Vaite

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## From Reader Review *Frangipani* for online ebook

### **Erin says**

Vaite is wild, outspoken, vivacious, and colorful. I adored this book about a Tahitian mama and the trials of motherhood in a male-dominated culture. I adored every piece of folk wisdom. Even more, though, I fell in love with the author herself while seeing and hearing her talk at a literary festival. As other authors conducted traditional book talks, she took charge of the stage, constantly tossing her untamable dark hair and speaking with complete humor and candor about Tahiti, womanhood, motherhood and so much more.

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### **Zara says**

Read the whole series, was sad when I finished it because it meant that I had to let go of the story. I love Materena, to me she reminds of so many women around the world, that in their own little way are trying to make the world a better place by making the people around them happy.

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### **Athira (Reading on a Rainy Day) says**

I loved *Frangipani*. It took me weeks to finish it because I haven't exactly been in a reading mood. But books I read during such phases usually end up getting tossed because they don't hold my attention long enough. But *Frangipani* was always a delight to come back to. It felt very authentic and Tahitian, with adorable characters, and a very easy-going narrative style.

*Frangipani* is mostly told from Materena Mahi's perspective. When the book begins, Materena is moaning her partner, Pito's, negligence with money. They already have a little baby boy and Materena just found out that she was pregnant with a second baby. She wants Pito to let her collect his pay but that is out of the question because then he will be made the laughing stock by his friends. He will not see the end of questions like "*Who's the man and who's the woman between you and your woman? Who's the noodle? Who wears the pants? Who wears the dress?*" if he lets Materena collect his pay. But she does anyway and then doesn't see him at all for a long time, he having decided to leave her.

They reunite weeks later under very humorous circumstances but Materena goes on to take a job as a professional cleaner (very different from just a cleaner, as she reminds us often) to get some extra money. However, her hands are soon going to be tied down once her daughter, Leilani, is born. (She knew it was a girl because she did the needle trick). Much of *Frangipani* focuses on this mother-daughter relationship and I like to say that the author, Célestine Vaite, got it right. As a child, Leilani worships her mother, but as she steps into her teen years, there is much animosity directed at her mother. Through the years, their relationship evolves, but the sentiments expressed may as well be universal.

There is a lot of Tahitian delight sprinkled through the book. Did you know that Tahiti is not a country but one among many islands part of French Polynesia, and part of France? The people there speak French and Tahitian. Materena says that a woman and a man should not marry until they have been together for a long long time and have had kids together. She also happens to have a very large family, including immediate family and all the many cousins she has. They all live very close to each other so any time she has to go to

the Chinese store to buy something, she is sure to meet quite a few of her relatives on the way. As you read the book, you get the feeling that you are meeting almost everyone in Tahiti and they all know each other. It takes only about 2 hours to drive around the island; of course, with traffic that can be more. The "public bus" in Tahiti is called a truck and that's what most of the people there use for transport.

*Frangipani* is actually book one in a three-book series, all focusing on Materena. I cannot wait to read books two and three now. The narrative style of *Frangipani* is a little unique - it reads more like a chronological series of essays than a continuous narration of a story. It worked well for this book because of its very quirky narration and humorous tone. The author has definitely drawn the picture of her hometown very well - it is hard not to picture the characters or their circumstances in your head. It has scored all the points in my book - storytelling, story, characters, voice, and culture authenticity.

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### **Judy says**

Another excellent book recommended by my daughter.

Set in Tahiti, the story is as sunny and delightful as the climate and island breezes. The story of a mother and daughter, Materena and Leilani, their discoveries, growth and relationships.

Chock full of island culture, personalities, wisdom and stories. This is a book I hope others will pick up and read. Highly recommend for Around the World readers.

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### **James says**

Frangipani is Viate's second offering in her Tahitian trilogy. Although the first-person narrative seems to float along on the surface quite innocently, Vaite uses her main character Matarena's seeming simplicity as a guileless mirror with which to reflect the effect of colonization on the native Tahitian psyche. The various Tahitians populating the novel suffer a loss of identity in which they are neither really Tahitian nor assimilated to French ways.

Understanding Woman is Matarena's endearing way of saying The Virgin Mary. When Matarena has really got the blues, she sits in the church and pours out her troubles to that omni-compassionate being. The Virgin was also one of the most powerful weapons Europeans used to conquer and "civilize" the Tahitians, as well as most of the South Pacific, which they then turned around and used as testing grounds for their atomic weapons. However, by all accounts, the Tahitians at first European contact were a healthier, happier and prouder lot than they have become under European domination.

In Frangipani Matarena transcends her identity crisis by finding her voice and becoming transformed into a form of Understanding Woman. She becomes a being who wisely comes to an understanding of the French and of the Tahitians.

The citizens of the Pacific atolls have lived in relative harmony with their very fragile and resources-limited natural environment for 2,000 years. They were aware of the dangers of over-population and that the meagre resources they owned needed to be preserved, for their very survival. Thus, they have thrived for two millenia in a situation in which the entire human population now finds itself. It is we--the "civilized ones"

who should learn from the South Seas Islanders while we can. After all, some island nations are slated, under current projections, to soon disappear under the waves.

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## ?MICHELLE? says

Devo dire che questo libro non mi ha particolarmente intrigato all'inizio. Lo vedeo lì, davanti a me, e pensavo: "Non ho voglia di leggere un libro per ragazzini, non ne ho più l'età". E invece, anche se penso che la copertina indichi più un libro per ragazzi dai 10 ai 14 anni, questo libro merita davvero tanto. Quello che colpisce di più non è tanto la scrittura dell'autrice o come è scritto o così via, ma la storia in sé perché questa è una di quelle storie che fanno capire tanto.

Il rapporto tra madre e figlia è quasi sempre incrinato durante l'adolescenza, ma è normale, e questo libro fa proprio capire che si può essere uguali o diverse, che ci si può sopportare in alcuni momenti e in altri no, che anche se non si vede l'ora di scappare via, madre e figlia sono sempre e comunque unite. Devo ammettere che dopo averlo finito ho chiamato mia mamma perché mi mancava la sua voce, e ancora adesso mi sento abbastanza malinconica perché lei non è qui con me.

Quasi tutti i personaggi di questa storia affascinano il lettore. Tra questi, Materena è di sicuro quella che non si può non amare e Leilani la si impara a capire e conoscere pagina dopo pagina, anno dopo anno.

Anche se la storia non finisce propriamente come ce la si può aspettare, non penso che questo sia uno dei classici libri educativi che bisognerebbe fare leggere ai bambini a 12 anni, però penso che ogni ragazzina tra i 13 e i 15 anni dovrebbe leggere questo libro per capire meglio la propria madre e anche le madri dovrebbero leggere questo libro per capire un po' meglio le proprie figlie.

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## Camille says

Quand un enfant naît, on doit planter un arbre dans le jardin. Toute leur vie durant, l'arbre et l'enfant seront liés : si l'arbre est en bonne santé, c'est signe que l'enfant va bien ; si l'arbre est malade, l'enfant va mal également. C'est pourquoi il est très important de faire attention à l'arbre qu'on a planté lorsque l'enfant est né. Si jamais il est sec, si ses feuilles tombent, il faut réunir la famille de toute urgence pour prier pour la bonne santé de l'enfant.

Ou alors, il faut que la cousine Georgette, DJ transexuelle de son état, ait la présence d'esprit de balancer un seau d'engrais sur les racines, pendant que tout le monde a le dos tourné, histoire de calmer les esprits.

Le frangipanier, c'est l'arbre que Materena a planté à la naissance de sa fille, Leilani. Ce deuxième tome, après l'Arbre à pain, s'axe plus sur les relations entre Materena et sa fille, que sur les histoires des habitants en général - et, a contrario d'une bonne partie de lecteurs sur Goodreads, ce côté moins décousu, plus linéaire, ne m'a pas aidé à apprécier davantage les aventures de Materena. L'aspect contes me manquait, finalement.

Si on parle d'une mère et de sa fille, on parle forcément de la féminité aujourd'hui, et de la féminité à Tahiti. Comment vivre le machisme au quotidien ? Le racisme social ? Comment trouver un mari, qu'est-ce qu'un bon mari ? Comment élever sa fille, quand on n'a soi-même pas eu une vie satisfaisante ?

C'est autour de ces questions que Célestine Hitiura Vaite brode, une fois encore, un récit léger, coloré, tendre et drôle. Les chapitres se suivent et ne se ressemblent pas ; se suivent mais ne se répondent pas forcément. La vie de tous s'entrelace pour former un monde d'histoires.

Je ne sais pas si je vous l'ai déjà dit (non, en fait je sais, je ne vous l'ai jamais dit), mais mon grand-père faisait partie de la marine, dans l'armée. Toute sa jeunesse, il a parcouru les pays, et quand j'étais petite, je feuilletais les albums de famille pour le voir devant l'Alhambra, le Sphinx, à Hollywood, à Madagascar, à Singapour, et - oui - sur les plages tahitiennes, débarquant torse nu, les jambes dans l'eau, alors que de magnifiques vahine avec des fleurs dans les cheveux lui passaient des colliers de coquillages au cou. Ces français, qui ont pris l'île, qui l'ont dépouillée, qui sont partis en y laissant leurs enfants, puis leurs petits enfants, laissent les traces de leur passage, dans Frangipanier. Et ces petits enfants à l'air un peu plus "farani" que les autres tahitiens, ce sont peut-être mes cousins, qui sait ?

La couverture de Frangipanier, édité dans une petite maison en France, précise : "best seller international". C'est tout de même étonnant, que les lecteurs venant d'un pays ayant autant marqué la culture d'une île, soient les premiers à bouder la littérature et la culture de Tahiti.

Poétique, drôle, rafraîchissant. C'était ce que j'avais besoin de lire en ce début d'année. Lisez-le.

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### **Tea Jovanovi? says**

Jedna od knjiga koja me je ludo zabavila... Ovo je druga knjiga trilogije... Slu?ajno sam naletela na nju pre mnogo godina u jednoj knjižari u Torontu, pronašla vlasnika prava i tu knjigu trebalo je da objavi Laguna... ?ekali smo australijskog izdava?a da nam pošalje ugovor gotovo godinu dana... A onda sam ja otišla iz Laguna pre nego što je ugovor stigao, i Laguna je otkazala celu pri?u... Ja još ne gubim nadu da ?u za ove tri sjajne, zabavne i duhovite knjige na?i izdava?a... Otka?ene knjige koje ?e vas nasmejati do suza... :)

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### **Cortney says**

Frangipani by Célestine Vaite is a delightful and entertaining book about the relationship between mother and daughter. Set in Tahiti, the culture and language of the people is woven into the story, making it a quite enjoyable book to read. From the book, I assume that the Tahitian people are very laid-back and happy. They have some customs that are just wacky, but don't all cultures? I loved the relationship between the mother, Matarena and her daughter, Leilani. When Leilani got her period, Matarena gave her the Welcome to Womanhood talk. She started off by giving her daughter compliments- telling her why she's a great girl. I loved that she did that for her daughter. Can you imagine how empowering that would be to a young woman for her mother to tell her why she's great?! She then bestows to her daughter all the wisdom that a Tahitian woman needs. Some of this wisdom includes, "Don't get married before you have at least one child with your man. Children are the hardest part in a couple's life. When there are no children, everything is easy, everybody wants to get married. Once there are children, everything changes." Interesting! True, everything changes. But don't get married? She also tells her daughter not to fall for a foreigner because he will either leave her to go back to his country or make her leave Tahiti to go with him to his country. But then immediately after telling her to avoid foreigners, she tells her all the things that are wrong with typical Tahitian men. One of the things she says about a typical Tahitian man is, "A typical Tahitian man believes that it is beneath his dignity to show his woman affection. You ask a typical Tahitian man, "Am I beautiful, chéri?" he answers, "You're not ugly." Her advice about men was amusing! One piece of advice that she gave was simply beautiful- "When we die it doesn't mean that we don't exist anymore. True, we are buried, we become skeleton, then we become soil, but all that we have left behind is still there. Whenever people talk about us, well, we come alive again." And the last piece of advice in the Welcome to Womanhood talk is

priceless- "Don't start thinking you know more than I do." There were parts of the book that might make some people blush, such as referring to sex as "sexy loving." But it just made me smile. Another blushable moment is when Materena saw her daughter and her daughter's boyfriend having sex. But it was also set in a funny moment. So I just laughed at the moment and thought of how awkward that would be to have my mom walk in on that.

I loved the tone of the writing. I could hear the Tahitian accent throughout the book. I don't know if I've ever even heard a Tahitian accent. But the writing was such that I could imagine how it would sound. Frangipani was a fun, easy read. My V author (Mario Vargas Llosa) still hasn't come in from the library, so I looked on the V shelf and found Frangipani. I would say that it was a good find.

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### **Donna says**

This book was a "wild card" I found at the library book sale. It's bright cover and setting in Tahiti intrigued me. A universal story of girlfriends, wives, mothers, unfulfilling men set in Paradise. HILARIOUS! Easy to see why it is an international bestseller. Mostly a story of moms and daughters, mainly one loving mom and one strong willed daughter, it hits very close to home. I will look for another from this author. I loved Materena, the story's Tahitian Mama, and the news on the Coconut Radio. :-)

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### **Maia says**

this is great fun and very engaging/involving, for anybody going to, been to, related to or interested in Polynesia, pacifica islands around there or the Ma'ohi/maori (ethnic-cultural group extending from Samoa or is it Tonga? to New Zealand and Hawa'i (the ' is a glottal stop and one of their only nine consonants), i would make this a solid five out of five. I loved it. I started thinking it was much better than you'd expect for a quite-talented daughter of the islands and it's fun and it really captures life there, but i got more and more impressed. It's not a "great" novel but it's as good as can be. It's virtues are just really capturing the island and the people and the life. If you're going on holiday or honeymoon there and want to see a little behind the curtains of a very shy and retiring people, pack this for your reading. (Your other option is The Moon and Sixpence, which i haven't read.)

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### **Emma Deplores Goodreads Censorship says**

3.5 stars

Frangipani is a pleasant read. It focuses on the relationship between Materena, a hardworking, family-oriented Tahitian woman, and her brilliant, headstrong daughter Leilani. The book begins before Leilani's birth and follows the family until she's an adult. It is not a plot-driven sort of novel; short chapters explore various incidents in the family's life, as well as that of the community.

As I said, I enjoyed this. It is a sweet book, Materena and Leilani are strong characters, the story stays interesting even without a single driving plotline, and it provides a fun way to learn about Tahiti and its culture. Distinctive word usage and speech patterns make their way into the text, giving the novel a feeling of authenticity (which makes sense, since the author is Tahitian). I have to admit that while other readers have found the supportive relationships amongst the women of the extended family heartwarming, my

enjoyment was somewhat counterbalanced by irritation with the men. Materena's husband, Pito, is presented as a typical Tahitian man, and has almost nothing going for him – he's unsupportive, lazy, self-absorbed, and drunk half the time. There are a couple better examples of men in the story, though.

Overall, this book is nothing earth-shattering, but it is certainly pleasant. Though this was apparently the first of Vaite's books to be published in the U.S., it has both a prequel (Breadfruit) and a sequel (Tiare in Bloom). While I can't claim much interest in the prequel, about Materena and Pito's romance, the sequel sounds sweet and I may check it out one day.

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### **Gretchen says**

These are wonderful books in a series about South Pacific culture and modern issues. Great, lovable characters and a truly South Pacific setting. Really recommended.

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### **Jenny (Reading Envy) says**

An enjoyable story of Tahitian culture and the conflict between mothers and daughters. I have the sense it won't stick with me for long, which is why I only gave it three stars, but I didn't have to struggle to get through it.

Longer review with quotes on my blog (also music recommendation and link to dessert!)

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### **Liz says**

This book by a Tahitian woman radiates warmth & light--an excellent winter read! The main character is a strong, wise, generous mother. The story is set in a small island community where people know and (mostly) care about each other. The relationships between women in the story are inspirational.

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