



Becoming Abigail

By Chris Abani

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"Compelling and gorgeously written, this is a coming-of-age novella like no other. Chris Abani explores the depths of loss and exploitation with what can only be described as a knowing tenderness. An extraordinary, necessary book."—Cristina Garcia, author of *Dreaming in Cuban*

"Abani's voice brings perspective to every moment, turning pain into a beautiful painterly meditation on loss and aloneness."—Aimee Bender, author of *The Girl in the Flammable Skirt*

"Abani's empathy for Abigail's torn life is matched only by his honesty in portraying it. Nothing at all is held back. A harrowing piece of work."—Peter Orner, author of *The Esther Stories*

Tough, spirited, and fiercely independent Abigail is brought as a teenager to London from Nigeria by relatives who attempt to force her into prostitution. She flees, struggling to find herself in the shadow of a strong but dead mother. In spare yet haunting and lyrical prose reminiscent of Marguerite Duras, Abani brings to life a young woman who lives with a strength and inner light that will enlighten and uplift the reader.

Chris Abani is a poet and novelist and the author, most recently, of *GraceLand*, which won the 2005 PEN/Hemingway Prize, a Silver Medal in the California Book Awards, and was a finalist for several other prizes including the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize. His other prizes include a PEN Freedom-to-Write Award, a Prince Claus Award, and a Lannan Literary Fellowship. He lives and teaches in California.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Abani follows up *GraceLand*, his PEN/Faulkner Award–winning boy's coming-of-age novel, with a searing girl's coming-of-age novella in which a troubled Nigerian teen is threatened with becoming human trade. Abigail's mother died giving birth to her, leaving her, as she grows, with a crippling guilt that drives her to bizarre childhood mourning rituals and, later, with the responsibility of caring for her chronically depressed father. Repeated sexual violations by male relatives and the self-imposed expectation that she live up to her idealized image of her mother create unbearable pain and contradiction. When, at the halfway point of the book, Abigail's father sends her, at age 15, to live with her cousin-by-marriage, Peter, in London, it's as much to free her from him as to give her more opportunities. But once she arrives, her "cousin" proves malevolent, and her dehumanization begins. Recalling Lucas Moodyson's crushing *Lilya4Ever*, this portrait of a brutalized girl given no control over her life or body, features Abani's lyrical prose (Abigail's father's armchair "smelled of the dreams of everyone who had sat in it") and deft moves between short chapters titled "Then" and "Now"—with the latter offering little promise. (*Apr.*)

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From [Booklist](#)

Spare, haunting vignettes of exquisite delicacy tell of horrifying sexual brutality suffered by a young Nigerian girl and of her heartfelt anguish, alternating between "Now" in London, where her relatives try to force her into prostitution, and "Then" back in Ibadan, where her mother dies while giving birth to her. Abigail keeps trying to live up to the brave, independent activist mother, who was a judge at 35, and to make it up to her heartbroken dad for the loss of his wife. Raped by her cousin at age 10, she burns and cuts herself; then things get much worse. She fights back, and her punishment is appalling. Never sensationalized, the continual revelations are more shocking for being quietly told, compressed into taut moments that reveal secrets of cruelty--and of love--up to the last page. A prize-winning writer for *Graceland* (2003), Abani tells a strong young woman's story with graphic empathy. *Hazel Rochman*
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About the Author

Chris Abani, curator of Akashic's Black Goat poetry imprint, is a Nigerian poet and novelist and the author of *Song for Night*, *The Virgin of Flames*, *Becoming Abigail*, and *GraceLand* (a selection of the Today Show Book Club; winner of the 2005 PEN/Hemingway Prize and the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award).

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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