



The Arrangements

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

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In an election season widely seen as stranger than fiction, we decided to turn to fiction to see how it might illuminate today's befuddling political climate. For the first time ever, the Book Review has commissioned an original short story. The assignment: Write anything about this election season you like. The result, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "The Arrangements," on our cover this week, updates Virginia Woolf's "Mrs. Dalloway" — with Melania Trump as Clarissa.

In an email interview, Adichie, whose novel "Americanah" was one of the Book Review's 10 Best Books of 2013, said Woolf's novel "both criticizes, and is also complicit in, a certain kind of conservative class-privileged England, and I like to think this story has the same general spirit."

Adichie's interest began with Ivanka Trump, who "seems to me too thoughtful and too intelligent to truly believe that her father's erratic, ungrounded policy positions would genuinely be good for the United States. And so I imagined her as a kind of unknowable character, and I needed a foil of sorts for her, which is how Melania Trump became the center of the story."

"Fiction can remind us — and because of the blood-sport nature of politics, we constantly need reminding — that the players in politics are first human beings," Adichie said.

The Arrangements Details

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Jolene says

I was thrilled to see that it was Chimamanda Adichie commissioned to write about the Trumps. While I don't think it's particularly useful to speculate on Melania's feelings, it is entertaining. That brilliant opening allusion to Mrs. Dalloway ("Melania decided she would order the flowers herself.") makes the piece for me.

Read it here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/03/bo...>

Esmée says

This was both hilarious and terrifying at the same time. Poor Melania... Poor America...

Mary says

<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/03/boo...>

Josh says

A fairly entertaining account of the *Trump* family narrated by Melania. Greed, vanity, selfishness and eye-squinting/lip pursing humor invade this satire that I could see as being slightly true.

As I read this, I envisioned the Trump's getting a reality series à la The Osbournes where the crazies come out to play, yet they take themselves seriously.

Here's a link to the story: <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/03/boo...>

Charlotte Jones says

Another one of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's shorter works, originally written for the New York Times, *The Arrangements* takes a fictional look at the life of Melania Trump. I was confused by this short story. Throughout, the author had some interesting ideas, mostly surrounding the attitude of Melania towards the Trump children, however I feel that it didn't seem to have a clear message or purpose. Written during the heat of the election in 2016, I thought that this would contain a commentary on Trump's political views but I found that it was merely an imagining of Melania's life with very little purpose. At just 16 pages, or 30 minutes on audiobook, the author doesn't have any time to develop her ideas and the result is a short and forgettable read.

Melki says

We've had daily doses of The Donald crammed down our throats for over a year now. What can it possibly be like to be married to such a man?

Once, in the early years, before she fully understood him, she had asked what his favorite flowers were.

"I use the best florists in the city, they're terrific," he replied, and she realized that taste, for him, was something to be determined by somebody else, and then flaunted.

Here is an exceptionally well written, "imaginary" account of a day in the life of Melania Trump. As the only member of this publicity-loving family who seems to prefer to remain out of the spotlight, Melania's world is ripe for speculative fiction.

Adichie does a fine job of delving into this mysterious woman's inner life as Melania prepares for a special dinner party while musing on her life with Don. There is a definite rivalry going on with Ivanka:

Donald admired in his daughter qualities he would not abide in a wife.

And, in between the routines of pampering and primping, she remembers intimate moments with her husband:

"You need to get these fixed soon," he had said a few months back, cupping her breasts, and when he got up from bed, she looked at his pale, slack belly, and the sprinkle of bristly hair on his back.

The author did something I thought impossible; she made me feel, just for a moment, some sympathy for Don:

He would never be a truly content person, she knew this, because of that primal restlessness that thrummed in him, the compulsion to prove something to himself that he feared he never would. It moved her, made her feel protective.

I enjoyed this *fictional* glimpse into the lives of the strange family residing in Trump Tower. This is obviously NOT RECOMMENDED for Trump supporters. They will get their revenge. *The New York Times* is promising another story by a different writer coming later in the fall where, I suspect, Hillary and Bill will get theirs.

Paul Perry says

<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/03/boo...>

A subtle, funny, human story from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie about Donald Trump and his campaign as seen from the eyes of Melania. The voices of each of the characters - Melania, Ivanka and the Donald himself - is pitch perfect. I've heard other people opine that this gives them a certain amount of sympathy for Trump and I certainly wouldn't go that far, but it does humanise the monster somewhat.

Arielle Walker says

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a wordsmith of the highest order.

Here she manages to make the world's most likeable family almost sympathetic - without once condoning a thing. She humanises, allows for empathy, and still doesn't detract from the fact that they are still awful, awful people.

And it's also hilariously funny reading. She's a genius.

Nikki says

"He always agreed with Ivanka. Ivanka who spoke in eloquent streams of words that meant nothing but still impressed everyone, Ivanka whom Donald showed off like a glowing modern toy that he did not know how to operate."

I applaud Adichie's ability to write about these people and instill more than just how fucking *horrible* they are. She went a different route with Melania than many would, not making her a woman feeling trapped and dreading every moment. The quote about Ivanka speaking in streams of words that mean nothing (or not what she intends) is really on point. I'm continually baffled by people who actually think she is intelligent.

One note: do not eat before or during reading this if you find the idea of Cheetolini without clothes on vomit-inducing.

Kristin-Leigh says

A short story told from the perspective of Melania Trump, about her adversarial relationship with Ivanka, who is secretly sabotaging Donald's presidential campaign.

It's a fun read with surprisingly multi-dimensional characters (aside from Donald really, who is as flat as his typical caricatures), but not so good that I would recommend it to anyone in the year 2017 - the NYT compared it to Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* but I don't see it retaining its relevance in the way that Woolf's political work has.

tortoise dreams says

Virginia Woolf and Donald Trump, the perfect couple? Say what now? A belated mention of this recent brief work, *The Arrangements*, by the author of *Americanah*, in the 3 July issue of the New York Times Book Review. In her new short story, Adichie has rewritten Virginia Woolf, with Melania Trump (Mrs. Donald Trump) in the role of Mrs. Dalloway in *Mrs. Dalloway*. The Book Review states that for the first time ever, it

had commissioned an original short story, addressing "anything about this election season." Adichie chose Mrs. Trump and, in reality, Mr. Trump. Adichie's *The Arrangements* consists of the thoughts of, and conversations with, Melania Trump, combining Virginia Woolf with the headlines and news stories of today. She thus introduces us to the imagined inner life of the mostly silent wife of the much praised and much attacked presumptive Republican American presidential nominee. The thoughts described seem eerily probable, more credit to Adichie, as non-fiction credibility rings through the fictional feel of the writing, the Woolfian echoes coming through clear and bright. I won't make any editorial comments here about *The Arrangements*, merely wanting to make more people aware of this interesting new short story. So, here is a new work by, and the point of view of, the well-known Nigerian novelist who is also a graduate of Johns Hopkins and Yale universities in the States. Which begs the question, what would Virginia Woolf have made of Trumpism? Seek it out (it's an ebook), enjoy, ponder. [3.5 Stars]

Trish says

For months now nearly every piece of fiction I've read has a character in it that reminds me of America's presidential candidate, the infamous Donald Trump, perhaps because he is larger than life. Earlier this year, the *New York Times* commissioned short stories about the election, and then published this one by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in their newspaper available to read anytime by subscribers. I have just learned that Penguin Random House is publishing an audio version that will be available for download October 25th.

Adichie mentioned in an interview that she patterned the story on Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, but my sense of Adichie's story is far more Shakespearean, or Greek tragedy-ish. (Not having read *Mrs. Dalloway* recently, perhaps I am missing an obvious parallel.) Adichie makes the Trump women "clever as foxes," which was my impression as well. Not only do they work hard at their beauty, which anyone with any sense will realize is an obvious advantage they are by now well-skilled at controlling, but they are astonishingly resilient and forgiving, which only comes from understanding, which comes with a certain amount of knowing. Clever as foxes.

I recommend this read or listen for the opportunity to imagine the whole big familial tragedy of Trump's run for president. Thanks to Adichie to making the effort to add her imagination and skill (and the twist).

The PRH audio version is quite good, getting Melania's accent down almost perfectly, though the reader, January Savoy, hammers the American accent pretty hard when it comes time for Janelle or Ivanka to speak. Anyway, the whole thing is amusing. You will be surprised at the twist in the story, and it all takes less than a half hour.

Emer says

This short story was commissioned as a piece to be reflective of or inspired by the current race for The White House in the U.S. This story is a fictional imagining of Melania Trump's life and features her husband Donald and his daughter Ivanka among others. And I honestly don't really know how I feel about it. On one hand I feel almost voyeuristic in how this short story talks about intimate details regarding the Trumps and I don't particularly like that but are they fair game as public figures??? The short is clearly labelled as fiction! And so then on the other hand I like the writing style but the story didn't ever capture my imagination... I think I am going to rate it two stars for the time being and possibly mull this one over a little longer.

Read it [HERE](#) and make up your own mind.

Niamh says

We've spent this year being bombarded every few hours by Trump and his mishandling of being leader of the free world (I think I just threw up a little in my mouth saying that sentence) and his need to do everything via Twitter. And what makes this fictional account of a standard day in the Trump presidency so terrifying is all of it seems to be so realistic. It's almost as though Adichie was sat in the corner of the room, taking notes on everything that ran through Melania's mind.

It's a very short story, but it packs a real mighty punch, exploring how Melania views those around her, particularly the children of the man himself. Moreover, it runs a long, dark undertone beneath this supposedly ordinary text, particularly when concerning Ivanka, who has never struck me as a good person.

I really hope that Adichie may lend her skills to perhaps writing an entire full length novel on this point of view. Mostly because it'll make Trump angry and that makes me very happy. This is an incredibly well written, starkly realistic look at inside of the Trump presidency through the person who rarely has a chance to say much- and when she does, it's through stolen quotes from Michelle Obama. The sooner we learn to ridicule him, the sooner his power becomes obsolete.

Marija (Inside My Library Mind) says

I quite enjoyed this. Adichie is a very talented writer and she writes women perfectly, so I quite liked her portrayal of Melania. I would love to see this as a full length novel, but it was an interesting short story
