



Anna Hibiscus on Holiday

Anna Hibiscus lives in Africa. Amazing Africa. She lives in an old white house with balconies and secret staircases. A wonderful house in a beautiful garden inside a big compound. The trees are full of sweet ripe fruit and the flowers are full of sweet juicy nectar because this is Africa, and Africa can be like this. Outside the compound is the city. An amazing city of lagoons and bridges and roads, of skyscrapers and shanty towns.

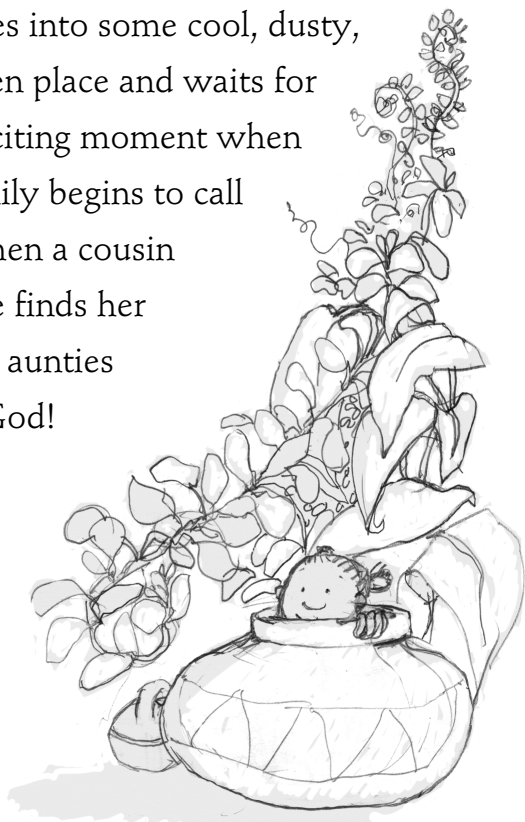
Anna Hibiscus lives with her mother, who is from Canada; her father, who is from Africa; her grandmother and her grandfather; her aunts and her uncles; lots and lots of cousins; and her twin baby brothers, Double and Trouble.

There are so many people in Anna's family that even she cannot count them all.



Anna Hibiscus is never lonely. There are always cousins to play and fight with; uncles and aunts are always laughing and shouting; and her mother or father and grandmother and grandfather are always around.

To be alone in Anna Hibiscus's house you have to hide. Sometimes Anna squeezes into some cool, dusty, forgotten place and waits for that exciting moment when her family begins to call – and then a cousin or uncle finds her and her aunts thank God!



One day, Anna's mother told the family that in Canada she grew up in a house with only her mother and her father.

"What!" cried Auntie Grace. "All alone? Only the three of you?"

"Yes, and I had a room all of my own," Anna's mother said wistfully.

Anna's grandmother looked at her. "Dey made you sleep alone?" she asked.

"It was not a punishment," Anna's mother said. "It was a good thing to have my own room."

Anna Hibiscus and her cousins looked at each other. Imagine! Sleeping alone. Alone in the dark!

"Nobody likes to sleep alone," said Anna's grandmother.

Anna Hibiscus laid her warm brown cheek on her mother's white arm. "Don't worry, Mama," she said. "You have all of us now. You will never be alone again."

But the next week, Anna's father said,
"Anna Hibiscus, we are going on holiday.
Your mother and myself with you and those
brothers of yours. We will stay in a house
on the beach."

"Only us?" asked Anna. This was incredible.

"Only us," said her father. "A quiet
holiday."

Anna Hibiscus's mother smiled.

"But, Papa," said Anna, "who is
going to cook and shop and clean and ...
everything? Who will take care of Double
Trouble? What about me? Who will I
play with?"

"I will help your mother to organize
everything," Anna's father told her. "You,
Anna Hibiscus, will take care of your
brothers. You can play with them."

"But they are babies!" wailed Anna.

"Exactly!" said her father. "Now,
enough problems. Let us pack."

One week later, Anna Hibiscus, her father, her mother, Double and Trouble *and* all their boxes and bags crossed the road to the lagoon and squeezed themselves into a small canoe. The whole family waved them off.

“Don’ stay long!” they shouted. “Come soon!”

The lagoon ran under and alongside busy roads and huge skyscrapers; it ran through markets bigger than towns. For the first time, Anna Hibiscus saw how big the city was. It was gigantic.



Then it was gone.

Suddenly it was not buildings but trees that crowded the banks of the lagoon. Trees so tall and growing so thick together that Anna could not see into the dark rainforest. Only once did she see some people looking tiny on the bank.

Morning turned into afternoon turned into evening as they went slowly-slowly. Then Anna could see the island! A white sandy beach with small trees and, behind them, an open wooden house, painted white.

It was late by the time they got all their boxes and bags off the boat and up to the beach house. Anna Hibiscus's father lit lanterns and her mother warmed up food. They were all so tired from breathing sea breezes and carrying boxes and bags that they went straight to bed. Even Double and Trouble slept right through till morning.

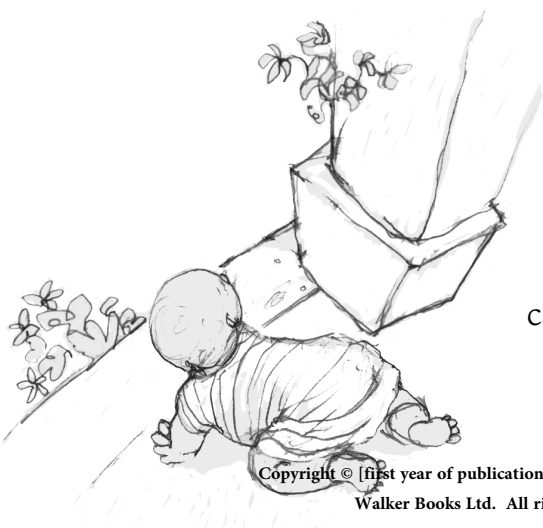
When Anna and her family woke up,
the beach house seemed dusty and dirty.
It was full of cobwebs and dead cockroaches.
Their boxes and bags were still packed. They
were hungry. There was a lot to do.

After breakfast, Anna was put in charge of
Double Trouble. They stayed downstairs on
the veranda where it was cool and shady,
but the boys kept crawling towards the
edge. There were no doors for Anna to shut.
She ran backwards and forwards grabbing
each of her brothers in turn and putting him
back in the middle of the room.

She was hot and sweating when at last
she attached the boys to a table leg

with her
mother's scarf.
They yelled and
screamed.

Anna's father
came running.



"Anna Hibiscus!" he
said. "They are not goats!"

He untied them and
watched them crawl quickly
towards the
edge of
the veranda.

"I see."

He sighed.

"Double Trouble!"

He called to Anna's mother.

"I'm taking Anna Hibiscus and Double
Trouble to the beach. Where they cannot
fall off any edge."



Anna's mother
appeared in the
kitchen doorway.

There was a smudge on
her face and cobwebs in
her hair.

"OK," she sighed.

At the beach the boys wanted to crawl into the sea. The waves shot up their noses and splashed salt water in their eyes. They spluttered and choked and coughed.

Anna's father took them to play under the trees. "You go and splash yourself, Anna Hibiscus," he said. "I will stay here with your brothers."

Anna was not at all sure about splashing in the sea by herself. What if one of those big waves came along and drowned her? There would be no uncle or auntie to save her.





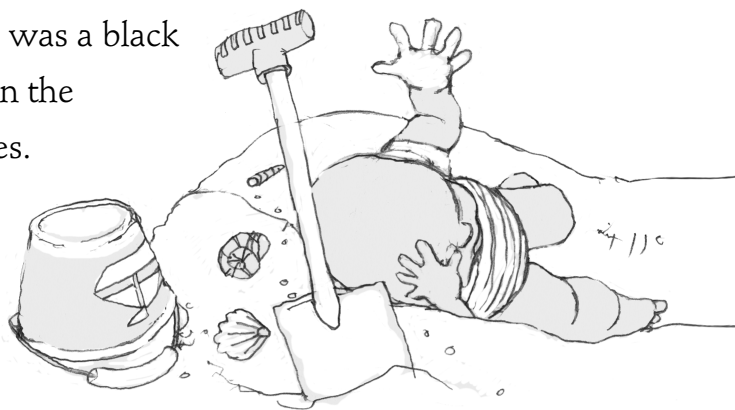
She put
one toe in the
water, but there were
no cousins to be brave with.

Anna Hibiscus could hear Double
and Trouble shouting and struggling.
They wanted to crawl back into the water.
They were not afraid.

Anna's father dug a big hole in the sand.
Big enough for Double and Trouble to sit in
and play. Too deep for the boys to climb out.

"You stay with them now, Anna,"
said her father. "I am going to swim."

Double and Trouble cried and screamed.
They rubbed sand into their eyes and
screamed louder. Anna sat with them
in the hole. Her father's
head was a black
ball in the
waves.



A black ball
getting smaller and smaller.
Just before it disappeared, it began to
grow big again. Anna's father swam
back with an idea.

He and Anna Hibiscus lifted the boys
out of the hole and pointed them in the
direction of the sea. Anna and her father
ran down to the waves with Double
Trouble crawling eagerly behind them.

They had time to splash and swim
a little before the boys reached
the water. Then Anna
and her father

helped them
paddle before
carrying
them back
up to the
trees to start
again. Double
Trouble loved it!



Anna Hibiscus and
her father did this many,
many, many times – until they
were too tired to do it any more.

Back at the beach house, Anna Hibiscus's mother was tired too. She had swept up all the cockroaches. She had dusted away all the cobwebs. She had unpacked all the boxes and bags. She had walked all the way to the market to buy food, and walked all the way back. She had cooked the food.

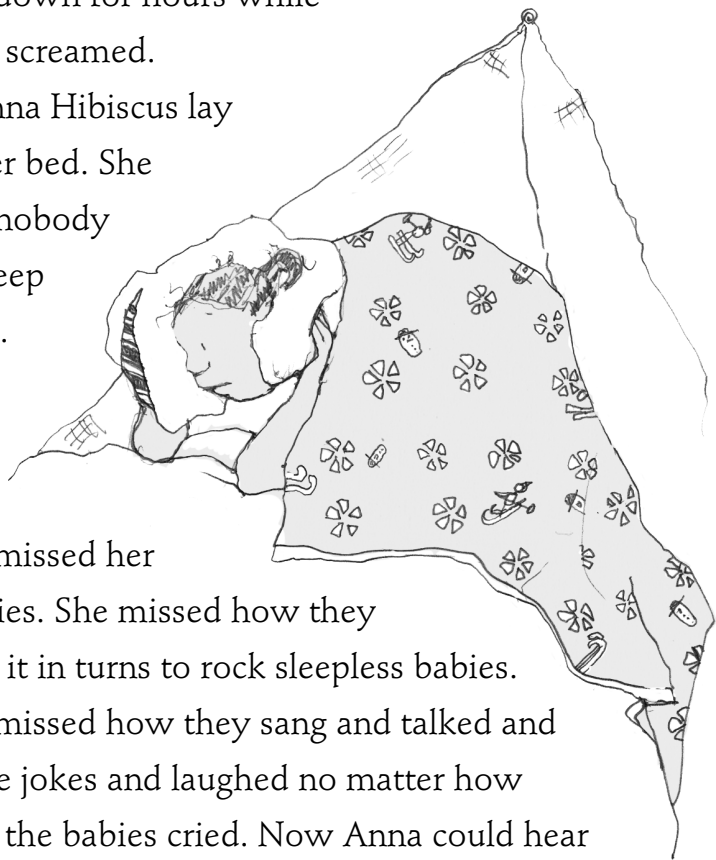
Everybody was cross and tired. Everybody was hot and sticky. Everybody had a shower, ate food, and went to bed early. Everybody was asleep in one second.

Half an hour later, Double and Trouble woke up.



They were again hot and sticky. Their teeth were paining them. They were Awake and Angry. Anna Hibiscus's mother and father walked the baby boys up and down for hours while they screamed.

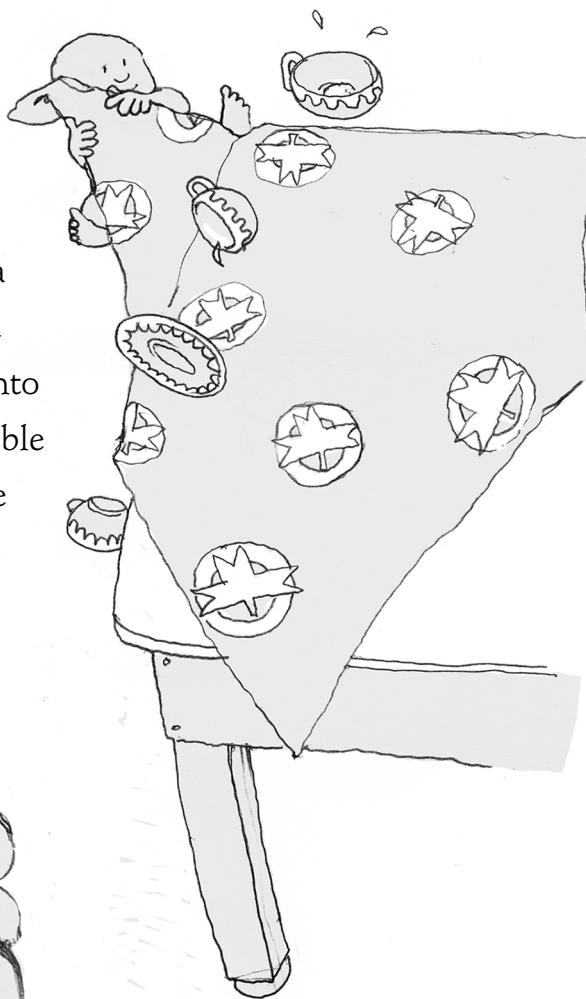
Anna Hibiscus lay in her bed. She had nobody to sleep with.



She missed her aunties. She missed how they took it in turns to rock sleepless babies. She missed how they sang and talked and made jokes and laughed no matter how loud the babies cried. Now Anna could hear only the waves and her brothers, screaming.

The next morning, Anna Hibiscus's father
was so tired he could hardly speak. Anna
Hibiscus's mother was so tired she cried.
The boys were Full of Life!

They crawled
everywhere,
fast. Double
pulled the
tablecloth,
and cups of tea
spilt and rolled
off the table onto
the floor. Trouble
crawled off the
veranda and
landed with
a big bump
on his head.



Anna's mother said,
"I can't face it."

"You don't have
to face it," Anna's
father said. And
he sent her
back to bed.

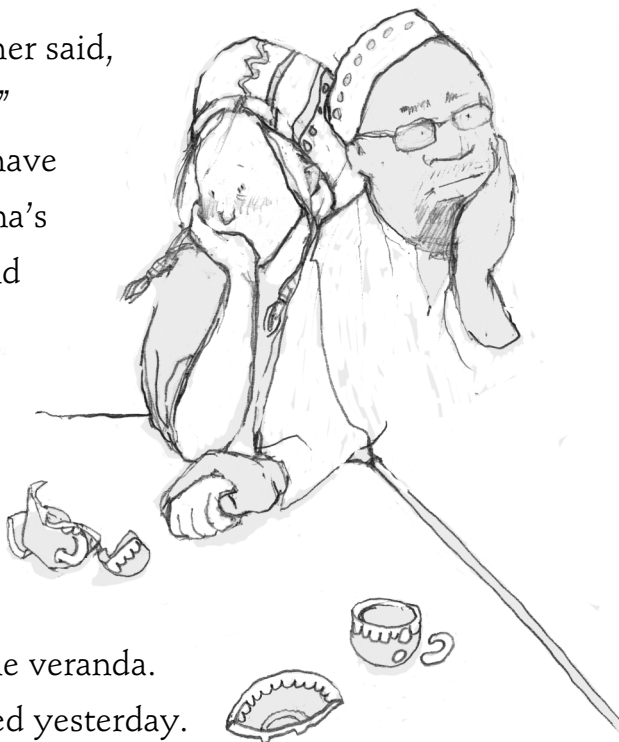
He watched
Anna trying
to stop her
brothers from
crawling off the veranda.
He remembered yesterday.
He could not face it either.

Anna Hibiscus's father found the
scarf and attached Double Trouble to
the table leg. He set Anna to watch them.

"I go come," he said.

"Where?" asked Anna.

"I go to fetch aunties quick-quick," he said.
Anna Hibiscus smiled a big smile.



Later that morning, the aunties arrived. Six of them. They came with baskets of food. They came with little cousins who still needed them but no big cousins. They came with cuddles for Anna Hibiscus and many, many questions. When they saw Double and Trouble attached to the table leg they shouted and ran to loose them. Each boy was tied onto an auntie's back to keep him out of mischief. They went into the kitchen and started to cook. Good smells spread all around, along with laughing and singing.



Anna's mother woke up. She stood blinking at the top of the stairs. She looked as if she did not know whether to laugh or to cry.

"Sister!" one of the aunties called. "Our brother confused your babies with the goats and tied them to the table!"

Anna's mother started to laugh *and* to cry. She came to greet the aunties. They embraced her.

"It is not good to be alone," Anna heard them whisper. "We have to help each other. A husband and three children is too much for one woman alone."

That night, everybody was happy.



The next day, the aunties and Anna Hibiscus's mother cooked and cleaned and washed clothes because they needed to. They splashed in the sea and sat talking on the beach because they were on holiday. They sang and joked because they were together.

And all the time, the little cousins were under their feet. Anna Hibiscus tried to play with them but they were babies and she could not look after them all. There were no big cousins to distract them, and no one else for them to follow around. The little cousins whined and howled. They grizzled and growled. Because that's what little children do. Anna Hibiscus was fed up with them.

By the end of the day, the aunties and Anna Hibiscus's mother had had enough.

Back at the beach house they looked at Anna's father. "Today you sit down," they said. "Tomorrow you supervise this rabble!"

Anna Hibiscus's father looked at the rabble. He'd had a lovely quiet day eating the delicious food that the women had prepared and reading his newspapers. The rabble were snotty and sticky and cross. They scratched one another and pulled each other's hair.

"Tomorrow I will be here," he said. Then he quickly walked out of the house and disappeared down towards the beach.



Tomorrow he *was* there. He was there and all the big cousins that had been left behind were there to help him.

Anna's father supervised the big cousins supervising the little cousins over the top of his newspaper. The aunties and Anna's mother laughed and sighed and shook their heads.

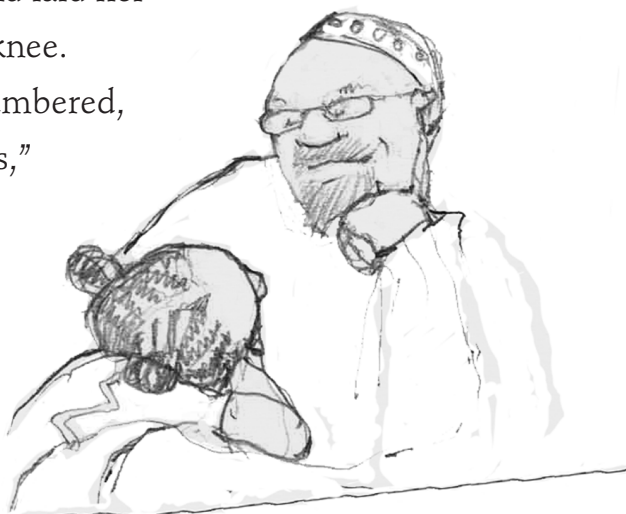


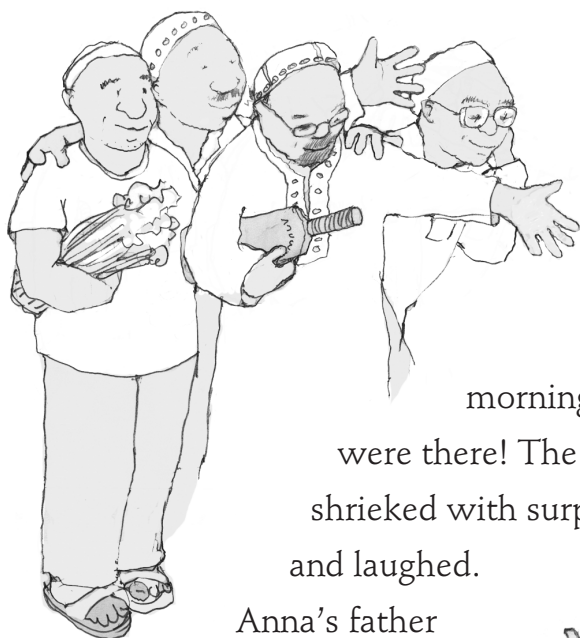
Anna Hibiscus splashed and swam and ran and played with all her cousins. It was the best day so far.

That night, the women talked and joked together. The babies slept. The big cousins played their big-cousin games. Anna's father sat alone. He had no one to discuss the newspapers with, no one to smoke his pipe with. Anna came and laid her cheek on his knee.

"I am outnumbered, Anna Hibiscus," he said.

"You need the uncles," she said.

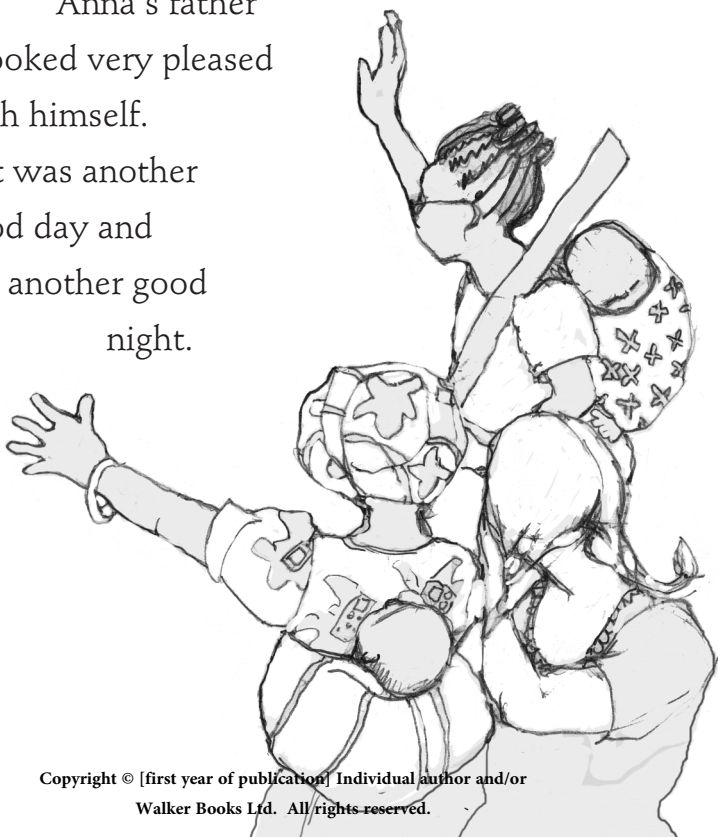




The next
morning, the uncles
were there! The women
shrieked with surprise
and laughed.

Anna's father
looked very pleased
with himself.

It was another
good day and
another good
night.



But there came a day when everybody was annoyed and irritated. Nobody could agree. Anna's mother looked at Anna's father. He disappeared down towards the beach.

When he returned, Grandmother and Grandfather were with him.

Grandmother and Grandfather had lived so long, they had

become so wise and so

calm that anybody

who was with

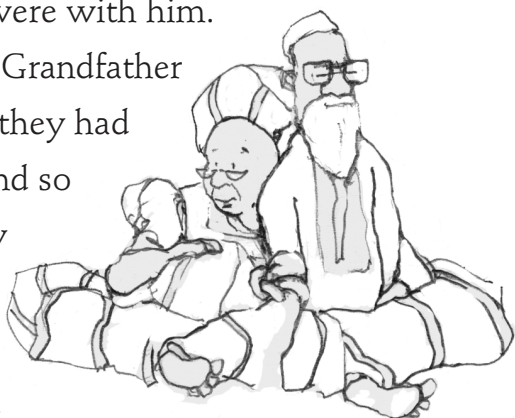
them was happy

to accept their last

word on everything. There was

no need to quarrel. Harmony was restored.

Anna Hibiscus splashed in the sea with her big cousins; she chased her little cousins along the beach; she sang with her aunts and ate their good food; she laughed with her uncles and her father. She listened to Grandmother and Grandfather tell stories.



All together again, Anna Hibiscus's family
had the happiest holiday they had ever had.

And Anna's mother?
She had a very happy
holiday too.

