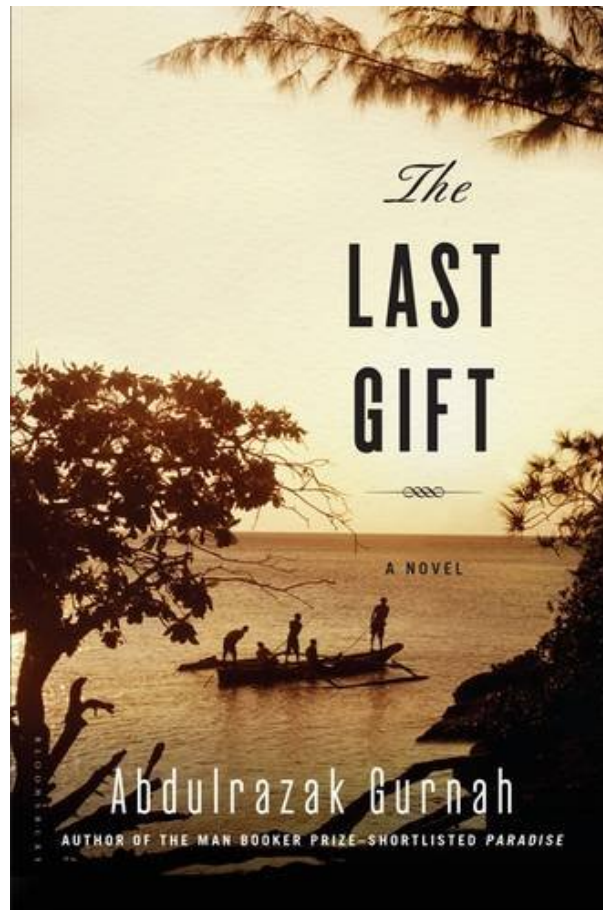
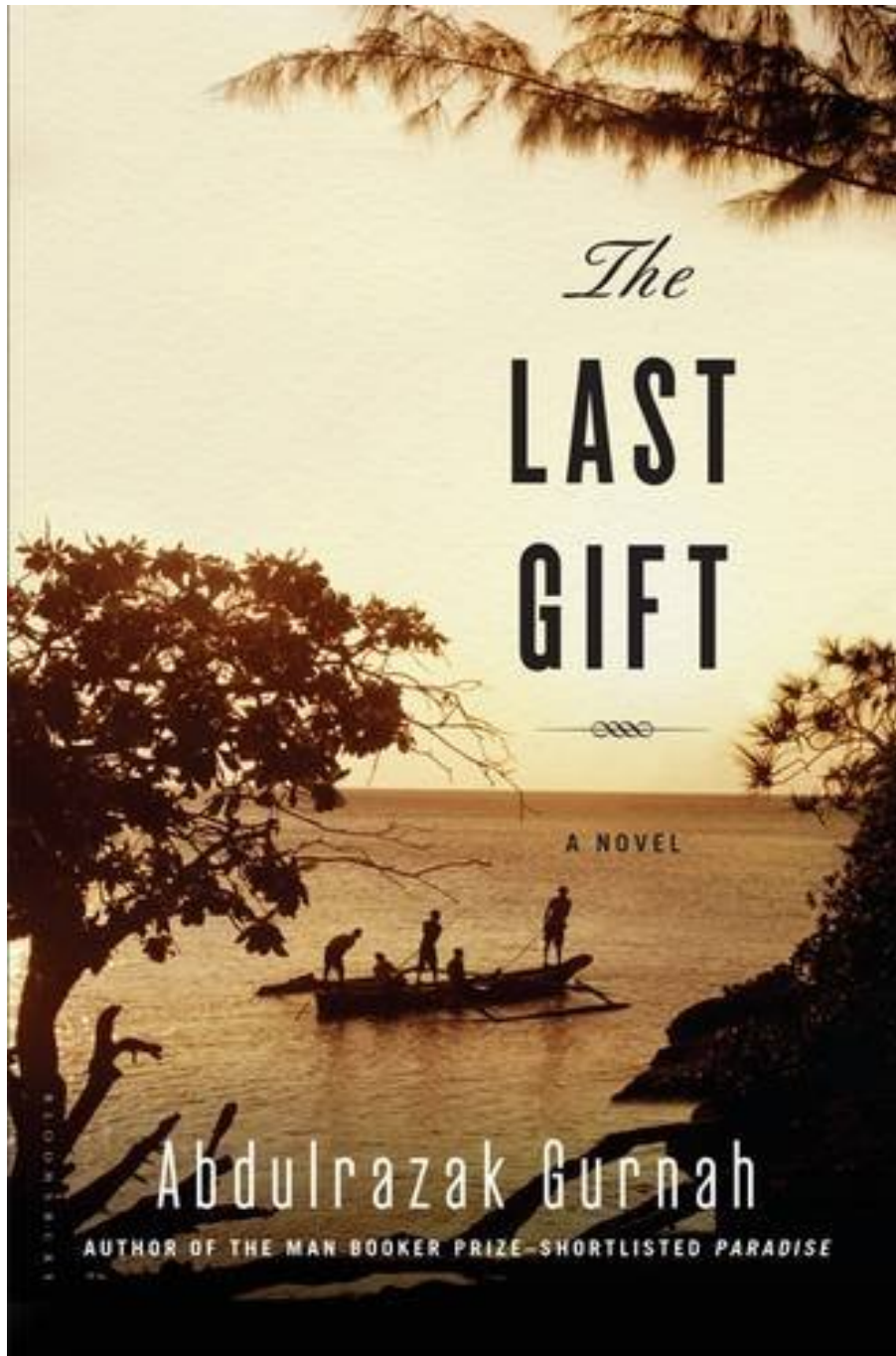


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## From Booklist

Abbas has always lived a quiet life, believing that his own personal history was nobody's business but his own. When a stroke nearly paralyzes him at 63, however, he suddenly becomes eager to share everything from the tiniest details of his childhood in Zanzibar to the sweeping tales of his travels around the world. Abbas' wife, Maryam, decides to call their children, Jamal and Hannah, home to bear witness to their father's tales and aid in his recovery. Maryam, Jamal, and Hannah, all somewhat preoccupied with their own lives and memories, absorb Abbas' stories with a mixture of curiosity, disgust, and wonderment. Gurnah alternates Abbas' recollections and stories from his wife and children, blending themes of reconciliation, identity, belonging, and alienation. Gurnah's fluid, poetic prose contains striking turns of phrase that allow the reader to appreciate the beauty in even the most mundane memories. Fans of *Half the Sky* (2009) and *The Kite Runner* (2011) will appreciate the mixing of narratives in *The Last Gift* as the various perspectives blend to create a truly powerful novel. --Stephanie Turza

## Review

"[A] haunting novel ... Gurnah [matches] a strong plot with powerful musings on mortality, the weight of memory, and the struggle to establish a postcolonial identity." ?Publishers Weekly

## About the Author

Abdulrazak Gurnah was born in 1948 in Zanzibar and lives in England, where he teaches at the University of Kent. He is the author of seven novels, which include *Paradise*, shortlisted for both the Booker and the Whitbread Prizes; *By the Sea*, longlisted for the Booker Prize and shortlisted for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize; and *Desertion*, shortlisted for the Commonwealth Prize.

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One day, long before the troubles, he slipped away without saying a word to anyone and never went back. And then another day, forty-three years later, he collapsed just inside the front door of his house in a small English town. It was late in the day when it happened, on his way home after work, but it was also late in the day altogether. He had left things for too long and there was no one to blame for it but himself.

Abbas has never told anyone about his past-before he was a sailor on the high seas, before he met his wife Maryam outside a drugstore in Exeter, before they settled into a quiet life with their children, Jamal and Hanna. Now, at the age of sixty-three, he suffers a collapse that renders him unable to speak about things he thought he would one day have to.

Jamal and Hanna have grown up and gone out into the world. They were both born in England but cannot shake a sense of apartness. Hanna calls herself Anna now, and has just moved to a new city to be near her boyfriend. She feels the relationship is headed somewhere serious, but the words have not yet been spoken out loud. Jamal, the listener of the family, moves into a student house and is captivated by a young woman with dark blue eyes and her own complex story to tell. Abbas's illness forces both children home, to the dark silences of their father and the fretful capability of their mother, Maryam, who has never thought to find herself-until now.

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## Most helpful customer reviews

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

In the glass come see your face

By B. Goddard

This is a novel of discovery, revelation, and guilt. I recommend it in the way that I recommend *Season of Migration to the North* by Tayeb Salih: the novels are profound but elusive. They reveal the pain of dislocation; in the guise of immigrant stories they demonstrate how difficult it is to explain self, to be loyal to memory, and to discern what elements of shared existence really matter. Abbas is from a small village on Zanzibar who flees an awkward situation, but we do not know that until half way into the novel. Maryam is a foundling, fostered by an Indian couple who start to treat her as a servant. They meet and start a life with daughter Hannah and son Jamal. But who are these people, and does the past really define them?

You can search previous pages to find my comments on other of Gurnah's novels, and I am now starting to think that he writes them to explain himself, to his readers and to himself. Many TEAAs taught on the coast, and I think that you especially will enjoy Gurnah's novels and perhaps deliberate on some level what will be your last gift (cf, the ending to Ellison's *Invisible Man*).

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

"There was so much he should have said, but he had allowed the silence to set until it became immovable."

By Mary Whipple

Abdulrazak Gurnah, a writer born in Zanzibar and now teaching writing in England, has often focused on the many issues of immigration - the difficulties of immigrants in adjusting to a new culture, the guilt sometimes felt about the family and culture left behind, and, ultimately, the confusion about what "home" means and the sometimes painful, almost physical, yearning for it. This novel, his most detailed and complex analysis of immigration and its personal effects yet, is a multigenerational novel which opens with Abbas, a sixty-three-year-old man whose origins are, at first, unknown. On his way home from work, one extremely cold day, he becomes so ill that this proud man "wishes for someone to pick him up and carry him home," and when he finally arrives at home, he collapses. When he is taken to the hospital, unable to speak, he is full of regrets for all that he has never told his family.

Hanna, the daughter of Abbas and his wife Maryam, works as a teacher, while their son Jamal is working on a doctorate tracing migration patterns from Africa and Asia into England. Both children have failed to put down roots, though they are British citizens. Jamal believes, regarding his father, that there was something to be ashamed of, something that had been with him most of his life." Anna declares that "They are lost...Ba deliberately lost himself a long time ago, and Ma found herself lost from the beginning." It is not until well into the novel that Abbas's story emerges.

In the meantime, the stories of his wife Maryam, his children Hanna (Anna) and Jamal, and their relationships with each other unfold in detail, the points of view shifting among these four characters as

Abbas relearns how to speak and work himself up to telling, finally, the secrets he has hidden for thirty years. The love affairs of the children, Anna and Jamal, and their changes of cities, apartments, and houses (possibly looking for the symbolic "perfect home") dominate much of the middle of the novel, while the childhood memories of Abbas and Maryam, as they unfold, add to the understanding of their sense of isolation.

Occasionally, the novel becomes melodramatic, and in a few cases, even predictable, as the author attempts to illustrate every conceivable aspect of the immigrant experience, a goal which sometimes leads to too much detail about the many peripheral characters, some of whom might have been eliminated without losing focus. Still, the novel fascinates, in part because it is so much more complex in its goals and structure than Gurnah's previous novels have been. As I read, I could not help but think that the author himself was deliberately summing up the threads and themes of all many of his previous novels, writing this one as his grand statement.

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Fantastic!

By Tianna G.

For full disclosure I received the book for free through Goodreads First Reads.

I liked this story. It pulled me in from the beginning. The storyline gave me a few surprises, and I loved the ending! I would definitely recommend this to a friend! :D

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