



The Last Gift

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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.

The Last Gift Details

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Author : Abdulrazak Gurnah

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From Reader Review The Last Gift for online ebook

Michael Forester says

I discovered Mr Gurnah first as a Mann Booker judge for 2016, only discovering later he had himself been short listed for the Booker twice previously. Intrigued I chose this book to read first almost randomly.

As to subject matter, a lot has been said already on Goodreads about the way the book deals with the lingering sense of immigration decades after arriving in a country, the loosening of family ties in a second generation, loneliness and so on. I will not add to the many good reviews on the books content.

I was, however, somewhat taken aback, and then intrigued with the book structurally and in particular with the sense of 'floating protagonist' it delivered. At first a little irritating, I came quickly to realise that this was a deliberate device, utilised to underpin the exploration of the difficulty in establishing a sense of identity in an alien culture whilst at the same time honouring your roots. Similarly, there is a clear shift of voice when the book's spotlight moves to the second generation of the family, their greater identification with the new country's culture and their remoteness from the original. This generational culture gap and the alienation of the older generation from the younger that results is something dealt with profoundly and sensitively.

The Last Gift is not a book to be read for light relief. It demands much of a reader but giving it what it calls for is rewarding, particularly for the educational and experiential gifts it returns.

Abdulrazak Gurnah is now a fixture on my reading list and will remain for some considerable time to come.

Baljit says

Poignant tale of people who are displaced due to circumstance and never share their past. Sadly their children feel rootless and the revelation reveals much about the parents.

Ming says

a plainspoken, well-written story. the tone was measured but tense and sad. and the predominant third person perspective left me with a continued arm's length approach that didn't soften and added to the gloom of the book.

having read 3 of his other books, I found several recurring elements:

- 1) boy has a difficult childhood, was abandoned or mistreated or both
- 2) young man leaves Zanzibar
- 3) young man struggles to journey to UK
- 4) young man faces difficult and sometimes needlessly cruel conditions as an immigrant.
- 5) a conversation with British person who lived in a colony and continues to possess racist, colonial attitudes and unapologetically so.
- 6) young man becomes an old man, and somewhere in between meets a British woman (social worker, girlfriend, wife, neighbor)
- 7) old man gets sick or injured

Damien Travel says

Abdulrazak Gurnah is a writer born in Zanzibar but living in the UK. I liked very much this book which mainly takes place in England, in Norwich and Exeter, but has its origin and founding event in Zanzibar. Through the prism of an immigrant family in Great-Britain, the author evokes very subtly the sacrifices but also the secrets that are linking two generations.

To read more:

<http://www.travelreadings.org/2015/09...>

Neil McCrea says

If Booker prize nominees were a genre unto themselves, the Last Gift would hit every single one of the genre's defining tropes. An elderly immigrant suffers a stroke one night when returning home from work. This brush with mortality opens up old wounds from his past in Zanzibar. He had never told his wife or children much about his past, and now they're forced to reconcile themselves with the ghosts of his homeland. That summary is practically the essence of post-colonial identity literature, and that's okay, it not only is what I was expecting I was even looking forward to it. The problem is simply that it feels as if I've read it all before, repeatedly.

The prose is uniformly solid, with moments of great beauty. The characters are believable, understandable, and as real to me as anyone born of ink and paper could be. At another time in my life this would easily be a four star work, but at this point it sinks under the weight of works that came before it. I suspect that even the author is aware of this. At the end of the novel, the son writes a novel based on the life of his father and when asked about it he shrugs it off as just another immigrant novel.

Jamie says

I received my copy through Goodreads First Reads.

"Meditation" is the best word to describe this book. While I wanted the book to go more in depth with certain scenes and characters, I appreciated its detached tone, which helped its emphasis on the relationships of the family rather than the characters themselves.

I did feel like the beginning dragged on a bit with the description of Abbas's diabetic attack, and seemed too full of metaphors. Other parts of the book carried on in a similar way, that some statements repeated certain emotions and ideas that were already stated in previous sentences.

Overall, it was a very good book and enjoyable to read. The characters were all highly developed and I loved how the author brought that across while maintaining that detachment.

Julia says

Ah, families. This book captures the sense of constant awkwardness that seems to follow the children of immigrants, no matter how well they fit into their current home. This little family has an additional complication, in that they have no roots to give them cultural context. A combination of bad luck and secrecy has left them adrift with no past to anchor them. A good read, though I couldn't really love any member of this family except the one written with no flaws, which sort of seems like cheating.

Susan says

Second book I've read by this author as I prepare for a trip to Africa. An older man (early '60's) living in England with his wife has a stroke. While recovering he feels the need to tell his wife about his life in Zanzibar, a country he left abruptly in his youth. His wife, son and daughter know only that he was from Tanzania but nothing about where exactly or why he left. Meanwhile his wife, a "foundling" also has secrets she has never told. The book refers back to his early life in Zanzibar and that of his wife but also about his well-educated children's quite, submerged struggles as the children of immigrants, with all the subtle and not so subtle discrimination they experience.

Shirley Revill says

A really good story when I got into it but I must admit I got lost with some of the family members at times. Really glad I finished reading because I really enjoyed the book in the end.

Renad says

This was a new world to me because I usually read fiction or fantasy but this story was so deep, meaningful, and real. I liked the story because it has true feelings. It makes you feel as if you are one of the characters and you are finding out new things and going through all the problems with the characters. I learned how foreigners of a country feel and their struggle to fit in. In this story a old man can not contain his secrets forever. Abbas is an old man and his family still do not know the truth. Abbas becomes very ill and can barely walk. One day when he was on his medication he told his wife little parts of his past and slowly he tells her the full truth of how and why he came to the UK. He is not the only one with a tough past.

ElenaSquareEyes says

Abbas has never told anyone about his childhood and his life before he was a sailor, before he met his wife Maryam outside a Boots in Exeter and they made a quiet life for themselves in Norwich with their children, Jamal and Hanna. At the age of sixty-three, Abbas collapses and is left bedbound and unable to do speak about the secrets of his past. Abbas's illness forces his children home, Hanna who calls herself Anna now

and is moving to a new city with her boyfriend, and Jamal, a quiet university student who is captivated by a young woman in his shared student house. There they have to deal with their father's silences and their fretful mother as their parents' pasts are revealed.

I listened to the audiobook narrated by Lyndam Gregory and it took me a while into the story because of his narration, I just didn't really take to it straight away.

The Last Gift is told from the perspectives of each family member with each chapter having a section of the story from each character. The exposition at the beginning of the novel is blended almost seamlessly with the action. Abbas collapses at the very beginning of the story and as he does so, it's like his life flashes before his eyes, allowing the reader to get a sense of who he is. It's not until he is recuperating that he begins to think about his childhood and adolescence, and the reasons why he left Zanzibar, for the first time in decades after keeping the guilt and memories buried for so long. His revelations shock his wife and children and they each deal with it differently.

The Last Gift is a story about immigrants, their children, and the struggle to find an identity. Maryam doesn't know who her parents were and grew up with different foster families. She has dark skin and as a child was bullied and didn't feel like she fit in. She's not confident in herself and has relied on Abbas to deal with money and bills, so when he falls ill she has a whole new world of responsibilities to navigate.

As Abbas had previously only told his family he was from East Africa when they asked, and Maryam has no idea of her heritage, Hanna and Jamal have never really known what their family heritage is. When they are faced with some unexpected knowledge of it, Hanna doesn't want to be a part of a "vile immigrant tragedy" while Jamal is keen to find out more.

The Last Gift is about stories and memories, and how not everyone wants to hear them and face up to the truth of them. Most of the characters are nuanced, Hanna especially is equal parts unlikable and sympathetic, and while some of them get some closure, others are left as uncertain of their place in the world as when the book began.

Jayne Bauling says

... dying in a strange land that did not want him. That was years ago, and the country still felt strange. It felt like somewhere he would one day leave.

The feeling of strangeness, of not belonging, of being different, that afflicts immigrants (in this case to the UK) and even their British-born offspring is beautifully portrayed.

Abbas's wife Maryam and his adult children are accustomed to his dark silences. When he suffers a diabetic collapse, the secret of his past starts to emerge.

It is an exquisitely wrought story, thoughtful, tender and honest. The style is simple and subtle, and the author's respect for his characters is evident in this in this insightful book.

In some ways, it reminded me of Nadifa Mohamed's *Black Mamba Boy* and *Maps for Lost Lovers* by Aslam Nadeem.
