



The Whale Caller: A Novel

Zakes Mda

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"A voice for which one should feel not only affection but admiration." --The New York Times

The Whale Caller, Zakes Mda's fifth novel, is his most enchanting and accessible book yet—a romantic comedy of sorts in which the changing face of post-apartheid South Africa is revealed through prodigious, lyrical storytelling.

As the novel opens, the seaside village of Hermanus, on the country's west coast, is overrun with whale watchers—foreign tourists wearing floral shirts and toting expensive binoculars, determined to see whales in their natural habitat. But when the tourists have gone home, the Whale Caller lingers at the shoreline, wooing a whale he calls Sharisha with cries from a kelp horn. When Sharisha fails to appear for weeks on end, the Whale Caller frets like a jealous lover—oblivious to the fact that the town drunk, Saluni, a woman who wears a silk dress and red stiletto heels, is infatuated with him.

After much ado—which Mda relates with great relish—the two misfits fall in love. But each of them is ill equipped for romance, and their on-again, off-again relationship suggests something of the fitful nature of change in post-apartheid South Africa, where just living from one day to the next can be challenge enough.

Mda has spoken of the end of apartheid as a lifting of the South African novelist's burden to write on political subjects. With *The Whale Caller*, he has written a tender, charming novel—the work of a virtuoso among international writers.

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