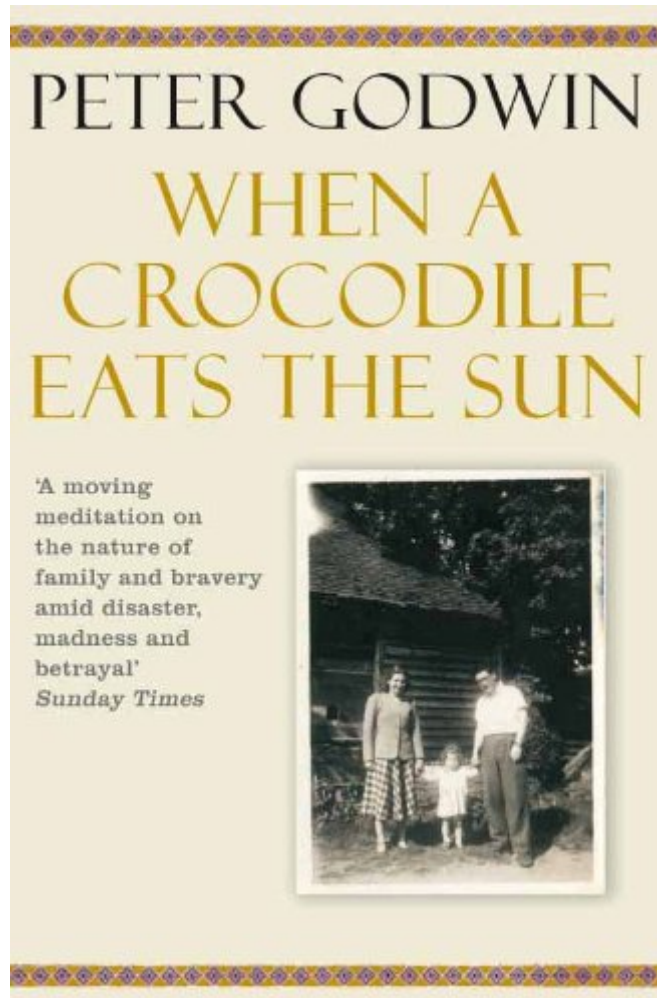




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When A Crocodile Eats The Sun



Synopsis

Peter Godwin, an award-winning writer, is on assignment in Zululand when he is summoned by his mother to Zimbabwe, his birthplace. His father is seriously ill; she fears he is dying. Godwin finds his country, once a post-colonial success story, descending into a vortex of violence and racial hatred. His father recovers, but over the next few years Godwin travels regularly between his family life in Manhattan and the increasing chaos of Zimbabwe, with its rampant inflation and land seizures making famine a very real prospect. It is against this backdrop that Godwin discovers a fifty-year-old family secret, one which changes everything he thought he knew about his father, and his own place in the world. Peter Godwin's book combines vivid reportage, moving personal stories and revealing memoir, and traces his family's quest to belong in hostile lands – a quest that spans three continents and half a century. – Heartbreaking . . . Godwin plainly loves Africa, and he captures the baffling wayward contradictions of its people, their cruelties and unexpected kindnesses, their nobility of spirit in the face of appalling conditions, with humour and grace – Daily Mail – A wonderful book . . . beautifully written, packed with insight and free of rancour – Literary Review – A strong, heroic book . . . too vivid to bear and too central to our concerns to ignore – Edmund White

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Customer Reviews

If anyone wants insight into the plight of white Africans, I would unhesitatingly point them to Peter Godwin's two books (this one and "Mukiwa"). As someone who was raised in Kenya, then spent time in Rhodesia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, but nearly 30 years ago bade farewell to Africa and have watched with sadness but without surprise as the continent has sunk deeper into crisis, his books ring many familiar bells. I long ago cut my last psychological links with Africa, because the Kenya and Rhodesia I knew no longer exists; Godwin's book is a sad reminder. It is easy for armchair critics to point accusing fingers at colonialism, and to say that whites created many of their own problems, and bequeathed to Africa many of the problems it faces today, but it's not as simple as that. Whatever white Rhodesians did, they did not deserve to be treated the way Mugabe has treated them in the last decade. Black Zimbabweans are by far the biggest losers, though, have suffered on a far greater level, and must regret the manner in which their country - once the great hope of Africa - has been driven into the ground by the venal and short-sighted thuggery of Mugabe and his acolytes. But it isn't just Africa or Zimbabwe - this is also a story about how bad leadership can lead to widespread social collapse, and bring out the very worst in human nature. Godwin's story about the way his family's maid Mavis was encouraged to turn against them is symbolic of how easy it is for even the best human souls to be turned by fear and intimidation. The case of Zimbabwe shows that the line between stability and anarchy, between security and insecurity, is often very fine.

This book will break your heart with its sparely narrated stories of individuals of all colors and classes in Zimbabwe. Events of great irony, courage, tragedy and humor are related with understatement that increases our sympathy and our outrage at the injustices being done to both black and white since 1980 under Mugabe's rule. I picked up this book because a branch of my family settled in Southern Rhodesia sometime during the fifties; my cousin and her husband died there, as did my aunt who emigrated there from Virginia after her husband's death in the eighties. Communications from them were brief and free of political comment. I once asked why they did not write more and was told, "The mail is censored and it would be dangerous." I knew that they were moderates politically and were not in favor of the conservative Ian Smith government which determinedly maintained white minority rule from 1965 to 1980. I had no idea why this would be so dangerous, but now I know. The book covers the years between July 1996, when Peter goes back to Zimbabwe because of his father's failing health, and February 2004, when his father dies. Only during this illness does Peter learn that his father was born Kazio Goldfarb, a Polish Jew who met

and married his mother in England after serving in World War II, and who emigrated to Rhodesia in 1949 as George Godwin, "a new man...fleeing racial persecution and war, mayhem and genocide." We come to love Peter's parents George and Helen. They are honest, fair, thoughtful and loving people who show unbelievable courage and inventiveness in dealing with declining health in a society that is sinking into chaos.

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