



Skwiza: A Memoir

Gail Mathabane

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This memoir tells the intimate story of what happens when a white American becomes fully immersed in a world that is totally foreign to her through the most intimate connection imaginable - a marriage that is both interracial and cross-cultural. When Gail, a white preacher's daughter from the Midwest, married Mark Mathabane, a black South African writer battling apartheid, she had no idea what lay in store for her. Boldly crossing both racial and cultural lines to marry the man she loved, she found herself plunged into a confusing world where she was shunned by some whites as a traitor to her race, and where she could not speak the language of her in-laws. From the start of her journey - a honeymoon trip with six African in-laws tagging along - Gail has to confront both racism and her own self doubts as she comes to terms with the changing course of her life. As she overcomes one hurdle after another, gradually gaining confidence and a deeper understanding of the insidious nature of racial injustice, Gail peels back the layers of American society and shines a light on hidden truths. Along the way, she reveals the wisdom of her long-suffering mother-in-law, whom she calls "Mhani" ("Mother" in Tsonga), and provides a rare glimpse inside South Africa in the days leading up to Nelson Mandela's release from prison. Gail takes the reader on an eye-opening journey into the heart of Alexandra Township. Many strong characters emerge in this heartfelt memoir, including the many young women who call Gail "Skwiza" (sister-in-law in Tsonga). Having grown up without sisters, she gains five African sisters through marriage, plus one African brother, and a horde of African in-laws, uncles and aunties. They welcome her into their large, close-knit family with open arms, despite the legacy of apartheid that has nearly torn their homeland apart. This memoir is a testament to what it means to belong to a family, and the courage it takes to be truly human.

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