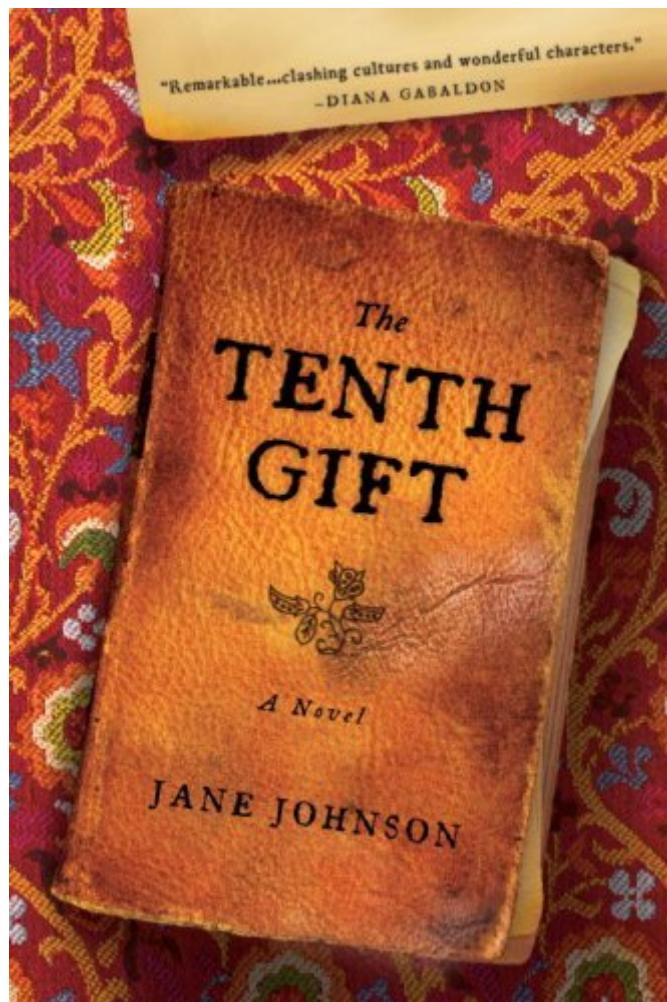


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The Tenth Gift: A Novel



Synopsis

The art of embroidery uncannily links two fascinating women of different eras and their equally passionate love stories. In an expensive London restaurant, Julia Lovat receives a gift that will change her life. At first glance it is a book of exquisite seventeenth-century embroidery patterns belonging to a woman named Catherine Ann Tregenna. Yet in its margins are the faintest diary entries; they reveal that "Cat" and others were stolen from their Cornish church in 1625 by Muslim pirates and taken on a brutal voyage to Morocco to be auctioned off as slaves. Captivated by this dramatic discovery, Julia sets off to North Africa to determine the authenticity of the book and to uncover more of Cat's mesmerizing story. There, in the company of a charismatic Moroccan guide, amid the sultry heat, the spice markets, and exotic ruins, Julia will discover buried secrets. And in Morocco "just as Cat did before her" "she will lose her heart. Set almost 400 years apart, the stories of these two women converge in an extraordinary and haunting manner that will make readers wonder "is history fated to repeat itself? A literary mystery, historical adventure, and dual love story, *The Tenth Gift* literally crosses genres with narrative ease and prose that is as captivating as the characters who people this unforgettable tale. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

There are a couple of subjects that I consistently seek out and read whatever I can find out about them. Seeing as I mostly read fiction this means I end up reading a lot of novels on the same subject- the settling of Australia, Elizabeth I and Robert Dudley, rebellions against the Roman empire and white women in harems. It was that last obsession that lead me to this book, "The Tenth Gift." "The Tenth Gift" is the story of two women in very different times, connected by birthplace and a love of embroidery. Julia Lovat is a modern woman with a secret-she's been seeing her best friend Anne's husband Michel for seven years and is racked by guilt but unable to give up the relationship. Luckily Michael makes the decision to end it for her and gives her a parting gift of a seventeenth century embroidery book. Cat is a 17th century housemaid in the richest manor in her neck of Cornwall but she wants more for her life. She wants to be a master embroiderer, something only men can aspire to, and travel far beyond her home. But just when it looks like she will stay forever in Cornwall married to her cousin fate intervenes. It is the book Michael gives Julia "The Needle Woman's Glorie" which tells Cat's tail. It contains, written by her own hand, a diary account of Cat's days in Cornwall and the fateful day which made Cat one of the sixty or so men, women and children who were taken in a church raid by Turkish pirates and transported to Morocco for sale. Julia is soon caught up in Cat's captivating story (to the extent of dreaming the events that occurred) but she had no idea of the book's true value. And when Michael realizes he has given her a gift worth a great deal of money he begins to try and get it back.

"Innocent maid captured by pirates, falls in love with handsome captain" has been a staple of romance novels for decades. Johnson tries to give her version of this story lit fic cred by framing it within a contemporary storyline. Unfortunately, the modern characters are all so terminally self-involved that they detract from, rather than add to, the novel. When the novel opens, Julia is being dumped by her lover of 7 years, a guy she met when she was maid of honor at his marriage to her "best friend." As a parting gift, he gives her an antique book on needlework, because she likes needlework and now she's got all those Wednesday afternoons free ... Between bouts of nausea at the thought of her lover sleeping with his wife (I guess this never came up over the previous 7 years) she begins reading the book and discovers it has been used as a diary by her 17th century counterpart, Catherine Anne Tregenna ("Cat"). It's indicative of Julia's character that when Cat's story shifts because she's abducted along with a group of other villagers in a daring

pirate raid on a church, Julia is annoyed because she wanted to know more about 17th century life in Cornwall. Cat's story follows a fairly predictable trajectory. First she's chained in the ship's hold with the other villagers, barely fed, forced to wallow in her own and others' filth as people die of disease. Then the captain is wounded, so she's taken to his cabin to tend his injuries. Seems he's not such a bad guy after all - he only kills and kidnaps English Protestants to get revenge for the deaths of his family during the Spanish Inquisition, so it's okay, see? Julia's segments are told in first person (of course!)

Pirates off the coast of Cornwall in 1625? The abduction of a flame-haired beauty and others from a Sunday service, the captives swept into the hold of a ship sailing to Morocco? Such a scenario would seem the stuff of nightmares and fairy tales, were it not grounded in historical fact. Using this obscure information, Johnson fashions an adventure that begins in Cornwall and ends in the slave markets of Morocco, two women centuries apart caught in the mystery of an exotic place, yet sharing a common bond. Catherine Anne Treganno is the unlikely captive of corsair raiders, Julia Lovat pursuing the young woman's journey as written in a precious 17th century book on embroidery, "The Needle Woman's Glorie". It is on these pages, in tiny script, that Cat pens her diary, few expectations in life, a planned marriage to a man she does not love and the day her life changes forever as she and other villagers are snatched from their church, destination Morocco, to be sold as slaves. When first the book comes into her possession, Julia Lovat has no idea of its value. Neither does soon-to-be-ex-lover, Michael, the husband of Julia's best friend. Michael offers the book as a parting gift; only later does he realize his mistake, desperate to recover the valuable tome. Retreating from London to Cornwall, Julia at first has no idea of the book's secrets. When she discovers Cat's fascinating diary, she reads the young woman's entries obsessively, fascinated and appalled by the sudden turn in Cat's fortunes. She reads of the hardships on the slave ship, the fearsome attacks on the high seas, Cat attending the wounded after one battle. Two cultures collide as Cat refuses to be cowed by circumstances, even though her actions may bring certain death at the hands of her oppressors.

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