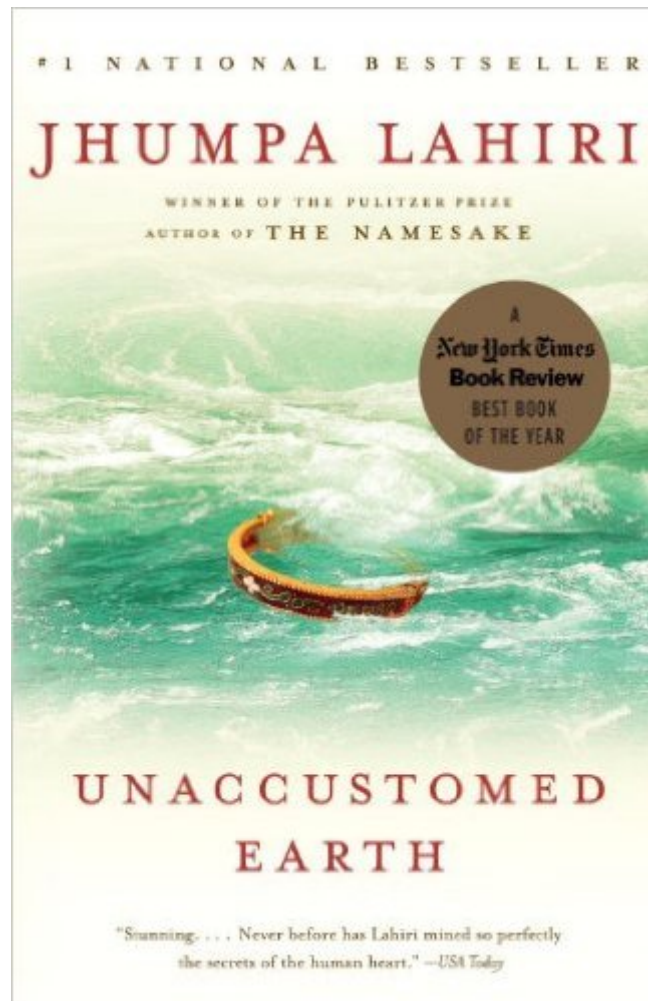


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# Unaccustomed Earth (Vintage Contemporaries)



## Synopsis

These eight stories by beloved and bestselling author Jhumpa Lahiri take us from Cambridge and Seattle to India and Thailand, as they explore the secrets at the heart of family life. Here they enter the worlds of sisters and brothers, fathers and mothers, daughters and sons, friends and lovers. Rich with the signature gifts that have established Jhumpa Lahiri as one of our most essential writers, *Unaccustomed Earth* exquisitely renders the most intricate workings of the heart and mind.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote, "Human nature will not flourish, any more than a potato, if it be planted and replanted, for too long a series of generations, in the same worn out soil. My children ... shall strike their roots into unaccustomed earth." This quote, which was a revelation to me, so much so that I redid my work e-mail "inspiration quote" signature to put it in, is the inspiration of Jhumpa Lahiri's new collection of short stories called "Unaccustomed Earth". This is the first book I have read of hers, and it simply does not disappoint. Eight stories are so intricately woven with their words and themes that each in itself is a beautiful work of art, and yet together, form the basis of a masterpiece. Former author of *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake* (movie tie-in edition), Lahiri's carrying on her success with this new bunch. The book starts with the story named after the book, a story about a Bengali woman named Ruma and her father who comes to visit her from Pennsylvania. Cultures and expectations collide as these two virtual strangers learn to exist with

each other without the familiar glue of her mother, who passed away only months before. A garden, her mixed race son, and a secret love, permeate the layers of this opening story that literally leave you breathless by stories end. Similar themes are woven through the other seven stories, some which I liked more than others, but all of them written with such scope and craft.

With UNACCUSTOMED EARTH, Jhumpa Lahiri can lay claim with good reason to being the finest short story writer in America today. This book, her second collection of short stories with the full-length novel THE NAMESAKE sandwiched between, is a masterful collection of affecting tales about family life and individual self-discovery. While Lahiri's focus is relentlessly drawn toward what might be termed the "Bengali-American experience," her stories express rich underlying elements of universality, allowing them to transcend the mere "new American immigrant" genre. She shows yet again that she is a marvelous craftswoman of the short story art form and its language (words, imagery, and symbolism). UNACCUSTOMED EARTH is eight stories, divided into two sections. The first section contains five distinct short stories, beginning with the near-novella length title story that is certainly the collection's finest. In that piece, a daughter of Indian descent, Ruma, welcomes her unexpectedly widowed father with trepidation to her new home in Seattle. Ruma is married to a Caucasian named Adam, and they have a young son named Akash. In every respect the young family is a model of mixed marriage and, in Ruma's case, full cultural assimilation. Nevertheless, her father's visit promises to force Ruma to confront the inevitable fissures that appear between first and second generation immigrant families. Travel to new countries or settling into new lands, postcards of foreign places, the soil in gardening, and measurement of distances all serve in symbolic support to the story's title, but it is a simple misplaced and unmailed postcard that pulls everything together into a poignant ending. Lahiri's other four stories in the first section have similar themes.

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