SCRIBE DIGEST

DIGILIT MAGAZINE



JUL - AUG - SEPT 2023 | 3RD QUARTER

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ORIGINAL FAIRYTALES

there was a time when murder and torture abounded in fairy tales.

RAGS-TO-RICHES

we're bringing you five stories of authors who struck it rich doing something they loved: telling stories.

TRAILBLAZERS

five remarkable African American women trailblazers in history.

A debut novel that explores the discovery of love in an unforeseen location, appealing to admirers of Bolu Babalola and Tia Williams. This heartfelt and alluring story is described as "tender, soulful, and sexy" by Phoebe Robinson.

Kai-Isaiah Jamal's poetry takes center stage in Rosewater, a daring new voice in the world of queer romance. Elsie's journey is a mesmerizing and powerful debut that reminds us that home is not always a place, but the people we choose to surround ourselves with.



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IN THE FOCUS

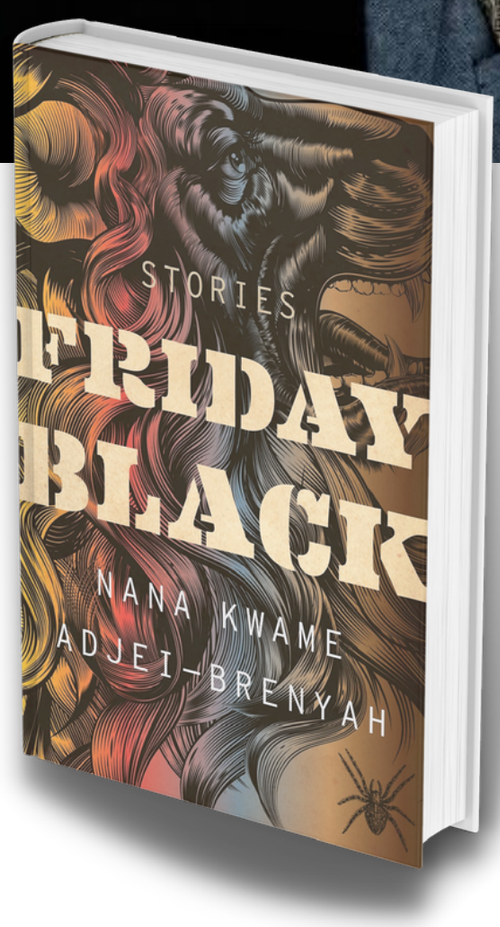
Author Spotlight

Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah



Get to know

Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah is an American speculative fiction author best known for his short story collection Friday Black, which explores themes of race, technology, and the African-American experience in a dystopian future.



Friday Black is a powerful and unsettling collection that will leave a lasting impression on readers long after they finish the final story. Adjei-Brenyah's unique voice and fearless exploration of difficult subjects make this a must-read for anyone interested in contemporary African-American literature.

www.nanakwameadjei-brenyah.com

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RICH LITERARY TAPESTRY OF BLACK AMERICAN WRITERS

Editor's Note



Welcome to the July to September 2023 issue of Scribe Digest, where we delve into the rich literary tapestry of Black American writers, explore the origins of beloved Disney fairytales, and celebrate the remarkable stories of rags-to-riches authors.

Black American Writers: A Legacy of Storytelling

Famous Black Writers in History: Shining Lights of Literature

Black Female Authors: Trailblazers in the Literary World

Unexpected Fairytale Origins: Disney Stories with Hidden Roots

Rags-to-Riches Authors: Tales of Triumph and Transformation

As you delve into the pages of this issue, we invite you to embark on a literary adventure, one that celebrates the rich diversity of voices, the transformative power of storytelling, and the enduring legacy of Black American writers.

Sincerely,

The Editorial Team
Scribe Digest

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Exhibitions

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The Guadalajara International Book Fair is the go-to event for Spanish and English language content. More than 1900 publishers attend with over 20,000 professionals from 44 counties and 700,000 attending from the public. It is the most important publishing gathering in Latin America.



The London Book Fair New Title Showcase is a featured exhibit at the fair and is located in prime location that will attract thousands of fair goers. All title(s) will be shown cover face-out with important details about your book listed in both a printed catalog and an online searchable catalog that will be live for a period of two years.

BLACK CANDLE WOMEN



By Diane Marie Brown

Diane Marie Brown, an esteemed professor at Orange Coast College, holds a prominent position as a public health professional at the Long Beach Health Department. With a Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Public Health from UCLA, she also possesses a degree in fiction from USC's Master of Professional Writing Program.

Originally from Stockton, she currently resides in Long Beach, California, alongside her husband, four daughters, and their beloved dog, Brownie. Notably, her debut novel is titled "Black Candle Women."

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GRAYDON HOUSE

Throughout the years, the Montrose women - Augusta, Victoria, and Willow - have resided harmoniously in their charming two-story bungalow in California. Preferring the comfort of their home, they have formed an unspoken connection through their assortment of potions and enchantments.

However, the tranquility of their lives is disrupted when seventeen-year-old Nickie Montrose introduces a young man into their abode for the first time. Little does Nickie know, the women have been concealing a secret that will shatter her budding relationship: a family curse that has plagued them for generations, causing the death of anyone they fall in love with. Disclosing this truth to Nickie not only forces each member of the household to confront their own past decisions and errors, but also raises new inquiries about long-held family beliefs.

As their journey unfolds, it becomes evident that their path intertwines with a voodoo shop in the French Quarter of 1950s New Orleans. Within the pages of a mysterious book lies a hidden narrative that may hold the key to the answers they seek - both in matters of life and love.

EVERYONE'S THINKING IT



In the prestigious confines of Wodebury Hall, a renowned boarding school nestled in the serene English countryside, one's reputation reigns supreme. However, Iyanu, an aspiring photographer, finds solace in capturing life's moments from the safety of her camera lens.

Meanwhile, Kitan, Iyanu's distant cousin, appears to have it all. She possesses wealth, beauty, and a circle of friends led by the influential Heather. Yet, as a Nigerian girl in a predominantly white and exclusive institution like Wodebury, Kitan grapples with the sacrifices required to maintain her position and the shield of protection provided by the popular clique.

Suddenly, the tranquility of Wodebury is shattered when Iyanu's stolen photographs, each bearing a scandalous secret, are unveiled throughout the school just days before the highly anticipated Valentine's Day Ball. As chaos ensues and accusations point towards Iyanu as the mastermind behind the scandal, a sense of déjà vu washes over her.

Both girls are consumed by the urgent need to uncover the identity of the culprit and the motive behind the theft. However, in their quest for truth, they will discover that the revelations will forever alter the lives of everyone involved.

ALEEMA OMOTONI

"Omotoni's debut is equal parts intriguing and exciting. She does more than create a space for the necessary commentary on racism, sexism, and homophobia. She also takes us on an emotional roller coaster that has us rooting for both Iyanu and Kitan. Readers will relish the ending and both character transformations." — **ALA Booklist**

"Recalling Mean Girls, Omotoni's compulsively entertaining debut adeptly addresses topics surrounding bullying, classism, homophobia, identity, and racism via Iyanu and Kitan's alternating chapters, which piece together their fraught relationship history amid the school's current fallout in biting prose." — **Publishers Weekly**

"A thought-provoking novel about the high cost of fitting in." — **Kirkus Reviews**



Aleema Omotoni, a British-Nigerian writer, was raised in London and focuses on crafting stories about Black teenagers as they experience love, growth, and adventure in both modern and fantastical settings. Her interests include musical theater, astrophysics, and the cozy atmosphere of autumn rain.

https://www.aleemaomotoni.com/





"Brimming with high-stakes drama and a witty cast of both noble and nefarious characters, Everyone's Thinking It is a big-hearted, clever page-turner." — **Ibi Zoboi, New York Times Bestselling Author**

"A Gossip Girl for the new age that's impossible to put down. Omotoni spins an intricate web of relationships among imensional characters, all tangled in relevant questions of identity, oppression, and community. This is an absolute knockout debut, and once reading, everyone will be thinking it." — **Racquel Marie, author of Ophelia After All**

"With its compelling mystery, insightful social commentary, and charming romance, Everyone's Thinking It is a richly layered and remarkable debut." — **Elise Bryant, author of Happily Ever Afters**

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AUTHOR, TRAVELER, PHOTOGRAPHER

TERAH S. HARRIS

Watched the sunrise, trekked through the jungles, and searched for William Clark's grave in St. Louis, and much more.

https://terahsharris.com/

Terah Shelton Harris, a librarian and freelance writer, has transitioned to writing upmarket fiction with poignant endings. Her freelance work has been featured in various consumer and trade magazines such as Catapult, Women's Health, Every Day with Rachael Ray, Backpacker, Minority Nurse, and more. Her debut novel, One Summer in Savannah, showcases her storytelling prowess.

With over 15 years of experience as a librarian, Terah's primary role involves overseeing all aspects of adult collection development, both in print and digital formats. This includes managing acquisitions, withdrawals, circulation, cataloging, and processing. She ensures the smooth operation and functionality of the DHCLS's technology and communications network, which encompasses the hardware and software of their website, ILS, and OverDrive's eBook consortium, SEADL. Terah's grant writing skills have secured over half a million dollars in funding from local, state, and federal sources. Among her notable achievements is the Wifi-in-the-Park project, which provides free Wifi access across 200 acres of Westgate Park.

Originally hailing from Illinois, Terah now resides in Alabama with her husband, Jamel. She embraces life to the fullest and dedicates a significant portion of her time to reading and exploring new destinations. Terah's adventurous spirit has taken her to more than 40 countries spanning six continents. From witnessing the sunrise at America's inception to trekking through the jungles of the Bokeo Nature Reserve and searching for William Clark's grave in St. Louis, her travel experiences have been diverse and enriching.

Long After We Are Gone

Before his death, King Solomon imparts his final words to his son. The four siblings of the Solomon family are compelled to return to North Carolina to rescue their ancestral home and 200 acres of land from a development company. The company intends to transform the valuable waterfront property into a luxury resort. While they fight to save their Kingdom, the siblings must also confront the secrets they have been keeping. The eldest son, Junior, who has been married for eleven years, is secretly in love with another man.

Mance, the second son, has a temper that has landed him in prison multiple times. CeCe, the eldest daughter and a lawyer in New York City, has embezzled thousands of dollars from her firm's clients. The youngest daughter, Tokey, feels like she doesn't belong in the family and tries to fill the void in harmful ways. As the Solomons unite to defend their Kingdom, their facades begin to crumble and collide in unexpected ways.



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One Summer in Savannah

This captivating first novel radiates with a mix of poignant sentiment and heartfelt emotion, delving deeply into themes of family, redemption, and unwavering love amidst the scorching summer atmosphere of Savannah. As two individuals embark on a journey of self-discovery, they unravel the true essence of forgiveness.

Sara Lancaster departed from her residence in Savannah, Georgia, eight years ago. During that time, her daughter Alana was born, a result of a horrifying sexual assault that inflicted profound emotional scars on Sara, memories she desperately wished to erase. However, circumstances compel Sara to confront her haunting past as she is compelled to return home due to her father's illness.



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DAVINA TIJANI



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YOMI is an exhilarating series that draws inspiration from African mythology, offering a delightful blend of excitement and humor.

With its fast-paced narrative, the show is sure to captivate viewers who enjoy BEAST QUEST, Pokémon, HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON, FUTURE HERO, and DRAGON MOUNTAIN.

LILY MEADE

The disappearance of Sutton has brought immense distress to Casey and their entire family. Casey is determined to assist in the search for her sister, although she is filled with anger.

Casey is well aware of Sutton's manipulative nature, while everyone else portrays her as flawless. Unfortunately, society tends to overlook the search for missing Black or half-Black girls, assuming that they are not in need of rescue like angels.

PAUL BEATTY





Paul Beatty is the author of the novels, Tuff, Slumberland and The White Boy Shuffle, and the poetry collections Big Bank Take Little Bank and Joker, Joker, Deuce. He was the editor of Hokum: An Anthology of African-American Humor. In 2016, he became the first American to win the Man Booker Prize for his novel The Sellout. In 2017, he was the winner the American Academy of Arts and Letters Literature Award. He lives in New York City.

NICK BROOKS

Nick Brooks, a talented author and filmmaker hailing from Washington, DC, has made a name for himself in the literary world. His first middle grade novel, NOTHING INTERESTING EVER HAPPENS TO ETHAN FAIRMONT, was published in 2022 and has been met with critical acclaim. This book is the first in a three-part series, with the second installment, TOO MANY INTERESTING THINGS ARE HAPPENING TO ETHAN FAIRMONT, set to be released in November 2023.

In addition to his middle grade series, Nick has also written his first young adult novel, PROMISE BOYS, which debuted in January 2023. This book has already garnered significant attention, being named a much-anticipated read of 2023 by Buzzfeed, Seventeen, and Forbes. It was also honored with the 2023 Boston Globe–Horn Book award.

https://www.thenickbrooks.com/





Promise Boys is a captivating dark academia mystery that revolves around three teenagers of color who are compelled to investigate their principal's murder in order to exonerate themselves. This gripping thriller is an ideal choice for readers who enjoy the works of Karen McManus, Jason Reynolds, Angie Thomas, and Holly Jackson.

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Nick Brooks, an acclaimed filmmaker and author, brings together the enchanting world of E.T. and the captivating essence of Stranger Things in this remarkable middle-grade novel series. With its captivating storyline, this series appeals to a wide range of readers, both young and old. Packed with delightful nostalgia references, it offers a delightful reading experience for adults while captivating the imaginations of young readers.

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Nick Brooks, a renowned filmmaker and author, has created a captivating middle-grade series called Promise Boys. The series is a perfect blend of science fiction and modern-day issues such as friendship, community, and social justice. Brooks' unique storytelling style has earned him numerous awards and accolades.

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Chikodili Emelumadu

Chikodili Emelumadu was brought into the world in Worksop, Nottinghamshire, but was raised in Awka, Nigeria. She attended two Nigerian boarding schools before pursuing her higher education at Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Nigeria and later obtaining an MA from the University of Newcastle upon Tyne.

Her literary works have been recognized through various nominations, including the *Shirley Jackson Awards* in 2015, a *Nommo* award in 2020, and the *Caine Prize* for African Literature in 2017 and 2020. In 2019, she won the inaugural *Curtis Brown First Novel Prize* for her debut novel, ***Dazzling***.

Let's start at the very beginning. When was the writing seed planted, and where would you say it all started for you?

I don't know, to be honest. I don't think it was ever not there. In fact, I envy people who had something else that they were going to do with their lives. It was never like that for me. My mum is a big reader of novels and my dad is more of a nonfiction reader, but growing up my dad was always around writers. He was friends with lecturers who had books, and they would have these little get-togethers where they would present their latest work to each other. So we were always sort of involved in the arts. I've been in plays since I was a child so there was no real starting point for me. But there was still a lot of hedging my bets because I knew my parents weren't going to want to pay for me to do something that was purely creative. However, as I became older, they had mellowed somewhat and so it was more like, "okay, you can do this thing, but only if you do something else." It wasn't "be a lawyer" or "be a doctor," it was "do your PhD and become a lecturer and then you can write on the side."

They wanted me to basically end up like their friends who were doctors and professors, but who were all frustrated artists. I didn't want to be a frustrated artist. For me, the whole point was to be an artist first and foremost. So I think I've always worked towards sustaining myself with my art. I understand that it's hard and yes, I've done so many things in order to get to this point, but the writing always had to come first.

We love that idea of writing always needing to come first, but We're interested in how that became a possibility in your mind. How did you feel like it was possible to sustain yourself through writing if the artists you came across were doing it alongside other professions?

I think you need a smidgen of self-delusion, you know. You need a bit of self-delusion to drive you. People will say there's no money in writing and I've never really believed that. If 1% of writers are making money, then why can't that be me? I just don't believe that those things that are set as 'norms' in this industry apply to me. They don't apply to me.

What I knew early on was that if I wanted to make any sort of headway in the arts, I couldn't stay in Nigeria. Now, you definitely can, but back then, I knew I couldn't because I wasn't prepared to just write on the side. I'm saying self-delusion, but I think it's more about self-belief. If you don't want your dream to be destroyed, you have to hold it close to your chest because people will say hurtful things. You also need to know that you're on your own - even when you're surrounded by people doing the same thing, you need to understand that you're not the same. You have your own path, and you have to stick to your own path, because everybody's Chi is different. Your life tends to go the way it should go when you stick by your Chi and that is something that my dad finally agreed on last year. He basically said, "I see you, and I see what you're doing."

What inspired this story? Why Soursop as opposed to some other food?

Well, it was the end of my workday and I was browsing 'the internets' when I decided to check out this blog by a food blogger of the same name, 'Kitchen Butterfly.' This was my second time on the website and I was ornery from writing so slowly all day and being frequently interrupted, I just wanted to 'eat' with my eyes, something that I did not create.

There on the front page was a photo of what she called 'custard apples' but which I knew as 'Sweetsops' from reading another Jamaican blogpost a few years ago. The fruits reminded me of their cousins, 'Sour sops' which we have in Nigeria and which I used to devour with relish. I started to salivate and eureka! The story slammed its way into my taste buds. I think it took about an hour and a half or two hours to write. It was just there.

On a related note, why does the protagonist torture himself in this way? This is obviously something he's done before, and plans to do again.

My protagonist is actually a 'she'. A woman, not a man. (It's interesting that you're the second person to say 'he' to me when I thought I was writing her to resemble me in the way she thinks. [If it is because Obiora, the engineer, says 'Man' to her, he's only using it colloquially, as one would say 'Dude' for both sexes.]) I think she keeps going back, not just because of the food, but because of her ancestor. There is a yearning in her to reconnect to her past, to understand what it was that caused her to end up on the wrong planet, as though by understanding, she can somehow change her fate, I guess. Already the work she does involves what some might consider 'penance.' She is one of the guards on the prison planet, Earth. It just mightn't be enough for her.

And then of course, there is the added layer of the fruit which she would always taste second-hand. That thrill. Human beings are programmed to want what they cannot have and Sarge is no different.

What is your writing process like? Where do your story ideas come from?

My writing process has changed since my kid started going to school. Before September, I worked mostly at night, from around 8pm till 1 or 2 in the morning. Sometimes 3 am. Ideas then mostly used to come to me when I was exhausted beyond my capacity for rational thought. At first I fought them because I wanted to sleep, but when they kept coming, I embraced the added inconvenience. I'd log off my laptop and stumble to bed only to be tortured by an insistent voice going on in my head. My phone was my companion during those moments. Sometimes I'd forget that I had written the story on my mobile until much later, only to realise the work already had a few thousand words when counted.

The way I rationalised that period was, my brain waited until all my defences were down before it started transmitting.

Nowadays, I tend to write in the morning until school's out (with other chores, duties and obligations thrown in for variety.) Depending on how much I do, I might work for an hour or two after the kid's in bed at eight.

The switch in hours was rough for about three weeks but now it's fine. I can't imagine working far into the night anymore, no way. So many times I thought I was alive but I was just going through the motions, like a zombie. Lack of sleep is terrible.

Your short story "Candy Girl" (also published in Apex Magazine), was nominated for a Shirley Jackson Award. Tell us a little about the creation of that story, and how it found its way to Apex Magazine.

Given the period it was written, "Candy Girl" probably happened during one of my graveyard shifts, though I cannot recollect the specifics. There have been too many stories in between — I probably submit about an eighth of what I write. I was doubtless tired and irritable. Periods of creation can be times of personal discomfort for me, one that either breaks through my default procrastination, or else causes me to want to escape my present state, to write my way out of it.

Sleep deprived and sometimes suffering from insomnia, I'd pore through Apex Magazine, shuddering and exclaiming … I loved the uncluttered background, how its clean whiteness lulled you into a false sense of security and then down, down, dooooowwwwn the rabbit hole you went. It was exhilarating. I'd probably been reading Apex for a year before I submitted anything. Something crap, which was rejected and rightly so. I waited a couple of months and tried again. This time not only was it accepted, but the editor at the time, Sigrid Ellis, sent me a delightful email about it, which I still cherish.

Your short story "The Fixer" recently found new life as an interactive story at sub-Q magazine. Did you need to make any changes to the story to make it interactive? What types of stories take best to being "interactive-ized"?

I tend to think of IF [interactive fiction] like watching a film, albeit one with many possible endings. With that in mind, I would say IF lends itself well to cliff hangers, decision stories, you know the 'will she, won't she?' type scenarios, fast-paced or slow burning it doesn't matter but there must be a big pay-off at the end. Colourful stories, creepy stories, stories that rely on a depth of great feeling.

The EiC Tory Hoke is a fellow 'Lunaite,' that is to say, we have Luna Station Quarterly in common. She loved the creepy elements of the story when it was first published and so when she started Sub-Q magazine, she approached me about turning it into an interactive experience. She's fun and thorough, like a journalist, meticulous and double-checking everything. The right sounds, the right atmos, the right music, the cultural tone. I can take no credit for any of the work that was done apart from writing the original piece, really. But I will say that the experience was comfortable for me because of her sensitivity to my culture, to telling the story right. "The Fixer" was written for my blog after all, where there is a huge Nigerian and Igbo community, but Tory did not modify the story to fit a 'western' audience. Instead, she threw open the doors and invited them in. I'm grateful for that.

We read on your blog that you now own some traditional Igbo instruments, including an ubọ and ogene. As a (very) amateur musician, We're fascinated with different types of instruments from all over the world. What can you tell us about these instruments, and about Igbo music?

The ubọ is a thumb piano but it isn't plinky. The metal keys are set into a wooden frame which in turn is fixed over a bowl-like gourd so the sound resonates. The ogene is a metal gong that comes either singly or in joined pairs, that's played with a stick. Because the gong is tapered, it gives varying sounds depending on where you hit it. Google has photos, if anyone is interested and you can even find videos on YouTube of what both instruments sound like.
I'm not sure what I can say about Igbo music that wouldn't sound clichéd.



We want to pick up the point you made about writing speculative fiction before knowing the genre existed – We love how you saw writing as the place where you could get all the weirdness out, but how do you feel about labels like 'speculative fiction' or 'magical realism' when it comes to stories like yours that are set in Nigeria.

We ask because there's something about this story that felt grounded in reality. Nothing about it felt speculative so what's your thoughts on these genres and categorisations?

First of all, I don't think it's the writer's job to decide which genre their writing falls under. It's not my business...

Ooo We love that! Please elaborate.

Well, I'm not a librarian. I am also not a marketer or a publicist, so it's not my business. My business is to write the story, and you get to decide what to call it. My only job is to do each story justice - to tell it to the best of my ability, to make sure that I'm saying what I need to say, and that I'm representing the characters properly. I also need to make sure that there's a universality to the characters' experience; universality that even a strangeness or weirdness or bizarreness does not erase.

But to speak specifically to your point, one thing about the way that we live in Nigeria is that we're still very close to things that people consider magical, you know. The thing that I really like about a lot of African countries is the way technology exists alongside all the so-called supernatural or mythical, folkloric beliefs. Now a lot of people who read Dazzling are recognizing that there is some mythos to the story, but it's also very much a case of 'this is how we live.' In many of our cultures we believe that there is no dichotomy between the living and the dead. We believe that the dead, wherever they go, have influence on the living, which is why when I was growing up, we were always told to treat people with respect. You treat people with reverence because you don't know who you're talking to, you could be greeting an ancestor that you've never met. So it's not really fantasy or fabulist in that it's all part and parcel of life in Nigeria.

That brings us on to Dazzling. I'd love for you to tell us more about the story - if someone asked what Dazzling is about, what would you say?

I'd love to tell them what Dazzling is about, but that's also not my job.

Really?!

Yeah, I don't think it's my job. I'm always inherently more interested in what people read into it. I know what I wrote, but it's a communion, isn't it? When you write a story that's published, it's a two-way thing. You have me, you have all my stuff on the page, and now it's your turn to feed me with your interpretation. Like, what do you think the book is about?

Another thing I enjoyed about this story was the boarding school element. I've never been to boarding school, but I am obsessed with the idea of boarding school in Nigeria...

It's not too late to go...

Hahaa alright I'm not that obsessed. And, luckily for us, we got the chance to experience boarding school through reading this book. We also had a chance to step into a busy marketplace. You first introduced us to Igbo markets in your Of This Our Country essay, so we're curious to know why markets continue to play such a central role in your stories?

I feel like markets are going to play a role in all my stories. They are tied in with so many memories for me because we lived near a market called Eke Awka market in Awka, which is the capital city of Anambra State. In Igbo culture, there are market days, and there are gods that govern the market days, and so each market is supposed to be dedicated to a particular god. And so on the day that particular god is revered, people from around the surrounding villages and towns will come to the market to trade, to sell and buy goods. The more successful the gods are at drawing people to the market, the bigger and bigger the market gets. Igbo markets are not just places of buying and selling, they are also places of innovation and invention. So much of life happens in the market.

Another thing many people believe about markets is that it's not just human beings doing the trading - spirits buy and sell as well. It ties back to what I was telling you about how we were told to respect everybody, because you never know who could be your ancestor. Markets are a central point for Igbo life and I'll continue to write about it because that's where I grew up.



AVAILABLE AT

Wowww – terrifying and fascinating in equal measure! But We're really looking forward to seeing how markets show up in your future stories. Now here's the final question we like to end on: if you could give one piece of advice to aspiring authors, what would it be?

Just read, man. Just read the thing and write the thing. You need to be shameless, about the way you read. Read all the things, even things that you think that you shouldn't read. Don't be afraid to read things that are controversial. Don't be afraid to read things that will shake you and will shake your faith. If there's a fear of confronting who you are and what you believe, you're never going to be a good writer because you need to be able to see through the eyes of people who are not the same as you.

You can look for help later down the line, but you have to do the toughest bits of this gig yourself, read everything, even if it's niche and nobody else is interested in it, read it anyway. Do what you're supposed to do, and the rest will fall into place.

Beata Umubyeyi Mairesse

Beata Umubyeyi Mairesse, born in Butare, Rwanda in 1979, experienced the Tutsi genocide before immigrating to France in 1994. As a poet and author, she has gained recognition for her exceptional short-story collections. In 2019, Mairesse released her debut novel, titled "***All Your Children, Scattered***," which has garnered critical acclaim.

This book, which recently underwent an English translation, received the prestigious Prix des Cinq Continents de la Francophonie. Through the perspectives of three characters attempting to rebuild a dialogue, Mairesse sheds light on the far-reaching consequences of her homeland's traumatic history, spanning multiple generations.

It starts with the fragment of a story; the first outline of a confession almost immediately interrupted by the rift between a mother and her daughter. After a three-year absence, Blanche, a young French-Rwandan woman, returns home to see her mother Immaculata.

The daughter fled the genocide, went to college, and fell in love with a man. The mother stayed in Butare, watched her son Bosco join the fight, and almost died while trapped in a cockroach-infested cellar for 100 days.

In the shade of the jacarandas, wreathed in the smoke of a shared cigarette, Immaculata tries to describe how the killers would leave their homes each day to do their dirty work, and return in the evening to rest. “How can it be you didn’t know anything about the extermination that was coming?” demands Blanche, burning any hope of a bridge between them.

It takes years, and the birth of Blanche’s son Stokely, for a fragile, intergenerational dialogue to slowly take shape. Between one woman who lived through the Rwandan genocide, and another who carries a heavy burden of guilt for having left.

Shifting between the perspectives of Blanche, Immaculata, and Stokely, as if the characters were separated by impenetrable walls, Beata Umubyeyi Mairesse juxtaposes three narratives and three visions of the world. Blanche struggles to talk to Immaculata, whom she calls “Mama,” as she tries to make up for lost time, asking about her origins and her French father.

Immaculata speaks to Bosco, her son from a previous relationship with a Rwandan man, who returned from the war so traumatized that he put a bullet through his head. Stokely, whose name is a tribute to the Black Panthers activist Stokely Carmichael, stands at a crossroads between several memories and heritages, including that of negritude, passed down from his father.

Through the fate of a family dispersed and divided by political violence, Beata Umubyeyi Mairesse shines a light on Rwandan history: its colonization by Belgium, the Tutsi exile in the wake of the pogroms and ethnic discriminations after the country’s independence in 1962, and France’s responsibility in the genocide that killed almost 800,000 people. Readers will make out the autobiographical inspiration behind each fictional character, which may have been the only way for the author to reconnect with her “severed country.”



Motherhoods

By Beata Umubyeyi Mairesse
Translated from French by Edward Gauvin

Amagara araseseka ntayorwa
Guts spill on the ground but cannot be gathered back up

I stayed kneeling longer than everyone else, pressing all my weight into the wooden slats. My head buried in my hands, I kept whispering, "Don't betray his name, don't betray his name, Lord!"
When I got up, my eyes were moist—sweat or bitter tears—and I didn't notice the little nail that had snagged my pagne, God's only answer. The children stared at me anxiously. They could tell I was troubled just then, but Félicita alone knew why I was worrying myself sick.

Only twelve, Félicita is my timid shadow, always trailing just behind my pagne, quiet and obedient. Her skin is as dark as mine is light, but we have the same heifer eyes with long, curved lashes. It is she who helps me look after her brothers and sisters, sweeps the courtyard of our *rugo* early mornings before school, knows where I hide my savings and saw Harerimana —"it is God who raises children"—raise a hand to me last week.

The *padiri* passes through the congregation, blessing the cut branches we hold out to him. Yohani, my youngest, is wiggling his under his big sister's nose to tickle her. He's young still, and he must think this Palm Sunday Mass is taking forever. A mere wrinkle of Félicita's brow is enough to settle the two children down. I had Yohani and the three other girls between the ages of thirty-one and thirty-seven. My eldest son, Harerimana, and Félicita, the next oldest, are ten years apart. My husband often said, laughing, that he found my way of having children completely incomprehensible.

Harerimana was born a few months after we were married. Then many long years went by before my belly grew round again. Other women on the hill would tease me, implying that my cleaning job at the National Population Office had doubled as birth control. Despite the wicked gossip spread by my mother-in-law, who believed me unable to bear children, I appreciated the years alone with my eldest child. While other mothers my age were drowning in rug rats, I had the luxury of being able to attend Mass without the bitter smell of urine clinging to my clothes.

Kubyara indahekana—that is what we say of a woman who has more babies than she can carry on her back at once. My son had the ingobyi,* that tanned leather carrier, all to himself, and he breastfed till he was two. Less overwhelmed than other mothers, I could devote myself to him, teaching him to speak well, singing him lullabies.

I even planted a few feet of strawberries by the banana plantation where he spent his afternoons squatting while I shelled peas or sorted beans in the courtyard. People said, "That boy clings to his mother too much. He'll never be a real man."

And then came Félicita, when I was least expecting it. If we make it through this life, she'll be the staff of my old age. It's a good thing she's so clumsy; no man will want to take her from me. Her soul has all the qualities that Harerimana's lacks, convinced as he is that his size and strength put him above everyone else. Félicita's birth caused me great pain. I lost my voice from screaming so much during delivery; it was a whole week before I got it back.

The wrinkled little mauve creature immediately fell in tune with my silence: she never cried. We stared at each other for a long time; I was weeping, in pain, afraid. That's why I called her Umuhoza: she who eases tears. Gazing at her, I would often repeat, "You who cause me so much pain, you must be good and obedient, to make me forget the painful way you came into this world." And yet she wasn't the one responsible for my fright, the one who sent me into premature labor.

I'm still convinced there's something odd about that child. A strange power that lets her read people's thoughts, speak with the dead. A bit like the seers of Kibeho who were gifted with seeing and hearing the Virgin Mary.

I've always believed nothing good could come from our lives as women. We are too full of bitterness and stifled sufferings, passed down from generation to generation, an essence mothers unconsciously distill before mixing it in with the butter they smear all over their daughters' bodies. If only every other generation men could take a turn carrying children around in their bellies and raising them, then the vicious circle would be broken and girls freed from their fate.

The only thing women pass on is suffering. Didn't the Mother of God Herself, on the day Félicita was born, tell us through the voices of young middle-school girls that the skies would open and rain hell down on our heads?

It was hot that day of Epiphany, and I most definitely shouldn't have left Butare to visit my sick cousin when my own pregnancy was so advanced. No sooner had I arrived than she asked me to accompany her out on the esplanade of apparitions in Kibeho. There were hundreds of us, clustered together in the sun, spellbound by the singing of the young girl who stood on the platform, eyes bulging and arms outstretched. She sang an ode to Mary, and despite the crackling of static, her voice, borne by the loudspeakers, poured into our ears like a joyous balm. After several canticles, she began to pass on the message of the Lady in White. It was when the Mother of the Word announced that the land would be drowned in a tide of blood that I felt my pagne grow wet, and I lost consciousness.

Men carried me off to the clinic in Kibeho in the *ingobyi* of a disabled woman who'd come to hear the prophecies in secret hopes of a miraculous cure. Shortly thereafter, they used the same means of transport to take my cousin back to her house. She died not long after.

Despite all these deaths, foretold or unexpected, surrounding Félicita's birth, her arrival was like an outbreak of life. When I see her so grown-up, so dark, I tell myself she was a stopper of a baby who stayed inside me for years, refusing to come out and confront a world that was too cruel. A ball of clotted blood that dwelled in my uterus while her brother was raised in the exclusivity of my love. After Félicita, I gave birth to four other children, one every two years.

Félicita's never shown any jealousy over the love I bear Harerimana. She's always been there, in the shadow of our bond, which even my husband complains about, hiding in a corner of the house just as she once did deep inside me, listening to us sing and laugh.
But the day came when bitter reprimands replaced the murmured nursery rhymes, the riddle games children adore: the "ncira umugani, tell me a story" and "sakwe sakwe—soma." My son now despises me. He has joined the other bored and aimless boys, and spends his days in training that is both absurd and unsettling. They look like kids with their wooden rifles, but there is nothing childish about their songs. Harerimana doesn't love me anymore. He is ashamed of me. The only people he cares about are his uncle Arsène, who supervises their training, and his wife, Chantal. Harerimana once told me, "Now she's a real Rwandan!" Arsène and Chantal are Hutus.

Harerimana was fifteen when his father died. My sister-in-law spread the rumor that I'd poisoned him, that nothing good could come of a serpent born of a family of poisoners. Word reached my boy. Distraught at finding himself the man of the house at too young an age, he believed the rumor. I'd catch him looking at me sideways sometimes, eyes dark, hands shaking. He left school, grew ever more distant. When civil war broke out, his uncle began to fill his head with evil thoughts and it was easy for Arsène to recruit him into the local cell of Interahamwe militiamen—not only Hutus, but extremists—last year. There is no greater shame for a widow than to be renounced by her eldest son.

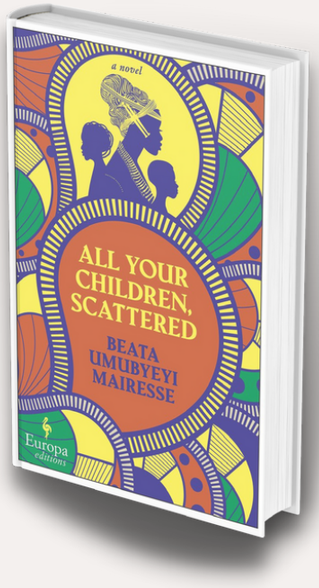
A woman isn't much of anything without a man to tell everyone, "This is my wife," "This is my mother," or "This is my sister." I'm not much of anything. A bent shadow hugging the hedges of rugos, and hoeing, all by herself, the little patch of land that is all she has left.

Last week, when he came to fetch the last of his father's things and sell them at market, I clung to his arm, begging him. He freed himself, tossing me violently against the door, where my left breast slammed into the padlock and my head hit the jamb. The sight of blood on my forehead failed to move him. He left without a word. If he could've killed me, as he claims I did his father, he'd no doubt have done so. Would he really dare? Of course, by doing so he'd get rid of the Tutsi part of himself he denies among his friends. But I am still his mother. No, he'd never do a thing like that.

I clench my fists till my joints pop and repeat in a whisper, "Keep him from the worst, O Father, do not make his name a lie." When I come out at last, there's no one left in front of the church. Félicita has led the little ones to shade beneath the old avocado tree by the presbytery. She has the girls reciting a canticle. Yohani has fallen asleep.

*"*Ingobyi*" also refers to a kind of stretcher made from a woven mat and two wooden poles, traditionally used to carry sick people, and as the poor man's ambulance for reaching health clinics.

"*Febronie—Maternités*." From Ejo. Published 2015 by La Cheminante. By arrangement with the Astier-Pécher Film & Literary Agency. Translation © 2017 by Edward Gauvin. All rights reserved.



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"A poignant meditation on the violence that ruptured so many lives… Mairesse's lyrical prose, translated by Alison Anderson, is mesmerizing."—***The Observer(UK)***

"This award-winning novel tenderly unfurls the pain of generations without flinching from the complex legacy of colonization and war."—***Booklist***

"As a story that crosses four generations of a family, it looks at how communication breaks down, and how these ties might be repaired..... Beautiful."—***Litro Magazine***





Amber & Danielle Brown

Amber and Danielle Brown completed their studies in Communications/Journalism at Rider University and were actively involved in the editorial team of the renowned On Fire!! literary journal. Subsequently, they ventured into the fashion industry and dedicated five years of their lives in New York City, gradually climbing the ladder of success. Eventually, they established their own highly acclaimed fashion and lifestyle blog.

Additionally, Amber is an accomplished screenwriter, which led them to settle in Los Angeles, a perfect location for Danielle to shower her beloved plants with abundant sunlight.

https://www.amberanddanielle.com/

Someone Had to Do It

A Novel

Brandi Maxwell is living the dream as an intern at prestigious New York fashion house Simon Van Doren. Except "living the dream" looks more like scrubbing puke from couture dresses worn by hard-partying models and putting up with microaggressions from her white colleagues. Still, she can't help but fangirl over Simon's it-girl daughter, Taylor. Until one night, at a glamorous Van Doren party, when Brandi overhears something she shouldn't have, and her fate becomes dangerously intertwined with Taylor's.

Model and influencer Taylor Van Doren has everything... and is this close to losing it all. Her fashion mogul father will donate her inheritance to charity if she fails her next drug test, and he's about to marry someone nearly as young as Taylor, further threatening her stake in the family fortune. But Taylor deserves the money that's rightfully hers. And she'll go to any lengths to get it, even if that means sacrificing her famous father in the process.

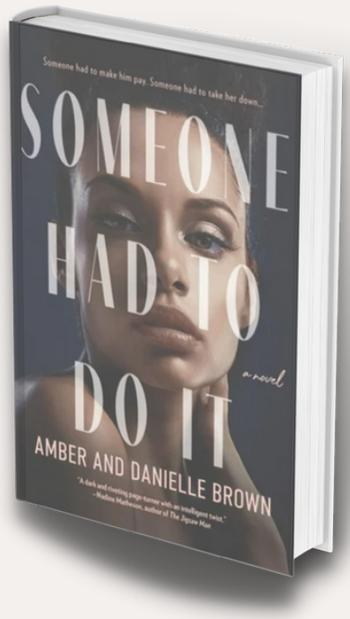
All she needs is the perfect person to take the fall...

Reviews

A disturbing peek into the world of privilege. Someone Had to Do It is a tense page-turner that had me yelling out loud at the characters." ***Lucinda Berry, bestselling author of The Best of Friends and The Perfect Child***

"Amber and Danielle Brown's debut is a juicy, brilliant treat of a thriller that combines sexy fashion-world glamour with salient points about privilege, racism, and the corrosive effects of extreme wealth. Somehow, Someone Had to Do It manages to be both a scathing critique of our late-stage capitalist hellscape, and the perfect mental escape from it. I couldn't put it down!"-***Layne Fargo, author of They Never Learn***

"SOMEONE HAD TO DO IT has everything. A dark and riveting page turner that has the allure of pulling off the perfect crime with an intelligent twist."--***Nadine Matheson, author of THE JIGSAW MAN and THE BINDING ROOM***



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Excerpt

I had a ton of illusions, vivid fantasies of what it would be like to score a coveted internship at Van Doren. Deluded old me thought I would be strutting around the stunning tri-story headquarters in single-soled heels, flitting from design concept meetings to on-location photo shoots, living my best fashion-girl life. Instead, I'm in the back corner of the two-thousand-square-foot ready-to-wear samples closet scrubbing fresh vomit from a slinky gown worth double my rent during my lunch hour.

Italian Vogue's current cover girl borrowed the hand-sewn dress for a red-carpet event last night, and apparently getting it back on a rack without ruining it was too much for one of the other interns to handle. She was so hungover when she came to the office this morning that she vomited all over the dress before making it out of the elevator. But of course this dress needs to be ready for another model to wear to some big extravaganza tonight, and since I'm the designated fuckover intern, I have to clean it by hand because the satin-blend fabric is too delicate to be dry-cleaned.
This is what it takes.

I chant this to remind myself why I'm here as the lactic acid builds up in my biceps. Working for Van Doren has been on my proverbial vision board ever since I reluctantly gave up the idea, in middle school, that I could be Beyoncé. It's a storm of hauling hundreds of pounds of runway samples around the city and sitting in on meetings with the sketch artists. A glorious, next-to-holy experience when I'm on duty at photo shoots and one of the stylists sends me to fetch another blazer, not a specific blazer, which means I get to use my own vestiary inclinations to make the selection. Which has only happened once, but still.

Just as I get the stain faded by at least seventy percent, I hear the sharp staccato of someone in stilettos approaching. I turn around and see Lexi. Lexi with her bimonthly touched-up white-blond hair and generous lip filler that she'll never admit to having injected.

When she steps closer in her head-to-toe Reformation, I am grateful that I remembered to put on a few sprays of my Gypsy Water perfume.

The one that smells like rich people. But the way she's staring at me right now, it's clear that no matter how much I try, I am still not on her level. I do not fit in here. She does not see me as her equal, despite the fact that we are both unpaid, unknown, disposable interns. It's become glaringly obvious that at Van Doren, it's not actually about what you contribute, but more about how blue your blood is. Lexi doesn't even know my name, though I've been here a solid nine weeks and I'm pretty sure I've told her at least a dozen times.

I'm already on edge because of my assignment, so I jump in before she can ask in her monotone voice. "Brandi."

"Right," she says, like she does every time yet still forgets. "Chloé wants the Instagram analytics report for last week. She said she asked you to put it together an hour ago."

Which is true, but completely unfair since Jenna from marketing also asked me to run to Starbucks to buy thirty-one-ounce cups of liquid crack for her and her entire department for a 9:00 a.m. meeting, an effort that took three trips total, and technically I'm still working on the data sheets I promised Eric from product development. Not to mention the obvious: getting rid of the puke from the dress.
"I'm still working on it," I tell her.

Lexi stares at me, her overly filled brows lifted, as if she's waiting for the rest of my excuse. I understand her, but also I'm wondering how she still hasn't realized this is not a case of Resting Bitch Face I have going on, that I am actually intolerant of her nagging.

Normally, I am not this terse. But nothing about today has been normal. Since this week is my period week, I'm retaining water in the most unflattering of places and the pencil dress I'm wearing has been cutting off the circulation in my thighs for the past couple of hours, and being that I've spent most of my break destroying the evidence of someone else's bad decisions, it is not my fault that I'm not handling this particularly well.

"I'll send it over as soon as I'm done," I say to Lexi so she can leave. But she doesn't.

"HR wants to see you," she says with what looks like a smirk.
My mouth opens. I have no idea what HR could want, and although I'm still new to this employee thing, I know this can't be good.

"Like, now," Lexi barks and pivots away in her strappy, open-toe stilts.

I hang the sample next to the door, and before I leave the room I pause to briefly take in the rest of the dresses stuffed on the racks, each one in that chic, elevated aesthetic that is the cornerstone of Van Doren. This is my favorite part of the day, the chaotic nature of this room a little overwhelming but also inspiring, and I can't wait for the day that this is my world, not just one I'm peeking my head into. A world in which I command respect.

I cross through the merchandising department, where everyone has their own private office with aerial views of Hell's Kitchen, Soho and the Garment District, and then move through the maze of the sprawling suite in a mild sort of panic until I remind myself that I have done nothing wrong. Ever since spring semester ended, I've been putting in more hours than the sun. I slip in at six-thirty when the building is dark and vaguely ominous, my eyes still puffy with sleep, and when I finally drag myself into the elevator at the end of the day, it's just as black and quiet outside. I religiously show up in current-season heels despite the blisters, albeit mass-produced renditions of the Fendi, Balenciaga and Bottega Venetas the other summer interns casually strut around in, and mostly stick to myself. I am careful about raising my voice, even if I vehemently disagree with my neurotic supervisor. I keep my tongue as puritanical as a nun's, even when fucking incel or coddled narcissistic bitch are on the tip of it. I'm not rude or combative. I stay away from gossip. I complete all my tasks with time to spare, which is usually when I check Twitter and help out some of the other interns, even though I'd rather FaceTime Nate in the upstairs bathroom with the magical lighting. I even entertain the gang of sartorially inclined Amy Coopers in the making who insist on obnoxiously complaining to me about all of their first-world, one-percenter problems. I've done nothing but consistently given them reasons to think I am a capable, qualified, talented intern who would make an exceptional employee.

I have nothing to worry about.

When I knock on the door to Lauren's office, she looks up from her desk and waves me in through the glass. I have a feeling this will not go my way when I see that my supervisor, Chloé, one of the more amiable assistants, is also here, fiddling with her six-carat engagement ring in the corner and avoiding eye contact.

"Have a seat, Brandi," Lauren says, and I tell myself to ignore that her bright pink lipstick extends above her lip on one side.

There is no small talk. No hello or how's it going? Under alternate circumstances, I would feel slighted, but because I'm growing more anxious by the second, I'm grateful for her smugness.

As I sit down, Chloé shifts in her chair, and I speak before she can. "I'm sorry. The Instagram report is at the top of my task list. I'll definitely have it to you before I leave today. I just—"

"That's not why you're here, Brandi," Lauren interjects.

"Oh." I pause, and as she glances down at her notes, I try to make meaningful eye contact with my supervisor, but she is still actively dodging my eyes.

Lauren begins by throwing out a few compliments. My work ethic is admirable and I have great attention to detail, she says, and the whole time my heart is pounding so loud,

I can barely make out most of her words. Chloé jumps in to effusively agree, then Lauren finally stops beating around the bush and looks me directly in the eyes.

"We just don't feel like you're fitting into the culture here at Van Doren."

Every word feels like a backhanded slap across the face, the kind that twists your neck and makes the world go still and white for a few disconcerting moments, like an orgasm but not like an orgasm. It's obvious what they mean, yet can't quite bring themselves to say.

They just don't like that I'm black.

They don't like the way I wear my braids—long and unapologetic, grazing my hips like a Nubian mermaid.
They don't like that I'm not the smile-and-nod type, willing to assimilate to their idea of what I should be, how I should act.

Culture.

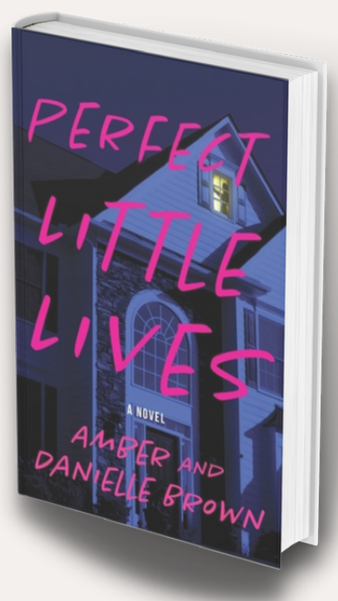
That's their code for we-can't-handle-your-individuality-but-since-we-don't-want-to-seem-racist-we'll-invent-this-little-loophole.

Black plus exceptional equals threat.

"If we don't see any improvement in the coming weeks, we're going to have to let you go," Lauren says with no irony, her mouth easing into a synthetic smile.

I blink. I cannot believe this is happening right now. It wasn't supposed to go like this, my internship at Van Doren, the one fashion company whose ethics align with mine. I wasn't just blowing smoke up Lauren's ass when I interviewed for this job, though I was looking at her sideways, wondering why she had not a stitch of Van Doren on. I'd splurged on a single-shouldered jumpsuit from this year's spring collection that I couldn't really afford just to impress her, while she hadn't even felt the need to represent the brand at all as she shot out all those futile questions interviewers love propelling at candidates, I'm convinced, just to see them squirm. Even minuscule amounts of power can be dangerous.

OTHER BOOK:



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THE
HORRIFYING
ORIGINS OF
TIMELESS
FAIRY TALES

Hansel & Gretel



Photo: Wikipedia

Compared to other diluted fairy tales, the horror experienced by Hansel and Gretel remains largely unchanged. In this chilling tale, a heartless stepmother manipulates her husband into believing that the only solution to their starvation is to abandon their own children. Discovering the wicked scheme, the siblings manage to flee into the depths of the forest. However, their relief is short-lived as they soon fall victim to the clutches of a malevolent old witch, who intends to fatten them up for her own consumption.

Little Red Riding Hood

The Brothers Grimm played a surprising role in softening the dark narrative of "Little Red Riding Hood" in the 19th century. Unlike earlier versions, such as Charles Perrault's 1697 edition, the Grimm Brothers introduced a huntsman who saved the day. In earlier renditions, the tale took a grislier turn, with Little Red unknowingly consuming her own grandmother after a brutal wolf attack. In a disturbing variation, the wolf coerces Little Red to undress, leading to a tragic end where she is devoured alive.



Photo: Creative Commons

The Little Mermaid

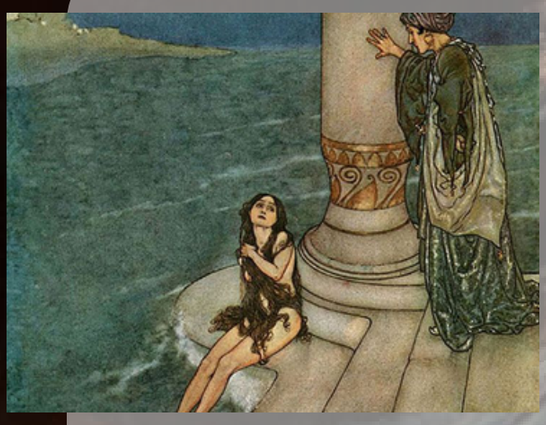


Photo: Wikipedia

In the Disney version of “The Little Mermaid”, Ariel trades her sweet singing voice for legs; in the Hans Christian Andersen original from 1837, she gives up her tongue. What’s worse, each step the mermaid takes is excruciating, as if sharpened knives are cutting into her newly developed stems. She has just one day to marry the prince, lest she be turned to sea foam.

Sleeping Beauty



Photo: Creative Commons

In the original tale inspiring "Sleeping Beauty," titled "Sun, Moon, and Talia," there are no fairy godmothers. Giambattista Basile first published this disturbing folk tale in 1634, featuring Talia as the central character. Instead of a spindle, a sliver of flax under Talia's nail causes her to collapse and appear dead. Her heartbroken father, unwilling to bury her, places her on a bed in his estate. A king, chasing his falcon, discovers the sleeping beauty but, unable to wake her, resorts to a disturbing act. He later returns to his homeland.

The Frog Prince

In the Brothers Grimm's "The Frog Prince," the ending is more violent than a magical kiss. Despite the princess's disinterest, the persistent frog prince continues his courtship, ending with the disgusted princess throwing him against the wall. This aggressive act, not a pitying kiss, transforms the frog into a prince. In another version, the princess goes further, chopping off the frog's head, and even this gruesome act leads to his transformation into a doting prince. Love, it seems, can be painful.

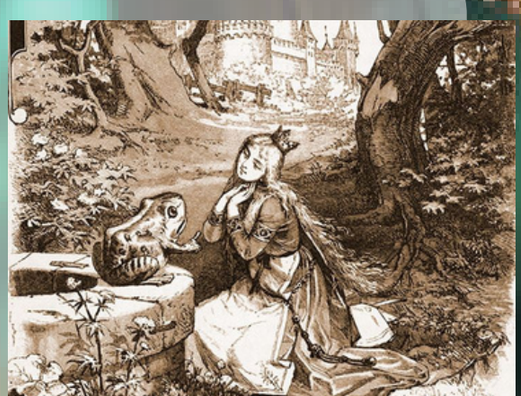


Photo: Bettmann / Getty Images

Cinderella



Photo: Hulton Archive / Getty Images

In the Brothers Grimm version of Cinderella, stepsisters Anastasia and Drizella take their awfulness to a new level. In their desperate attempt to fit into Cinderella's slipper, they go from irritating to psychotic by slicing off parts of their own feet. The prince, seeing through their ruse when the slipper fills with blood, rejects them in favor of the real Cinderella. As a final punishment, a flock of birds pecks out the sisters' eyes for their wickedness.



Rags-to-Riches Journey

01

John R. Erickson

"I didn't need the approval of editors or agents in New York ... I needed readers."

02

Harper Lee

"You have one year off from your job to write whatever you please. Merry Christmas."

03

Nicholas Sparks

Get published within three more books, or move on.

04

Laura Ingalls Wilder

An author who debuted at age 64.

05

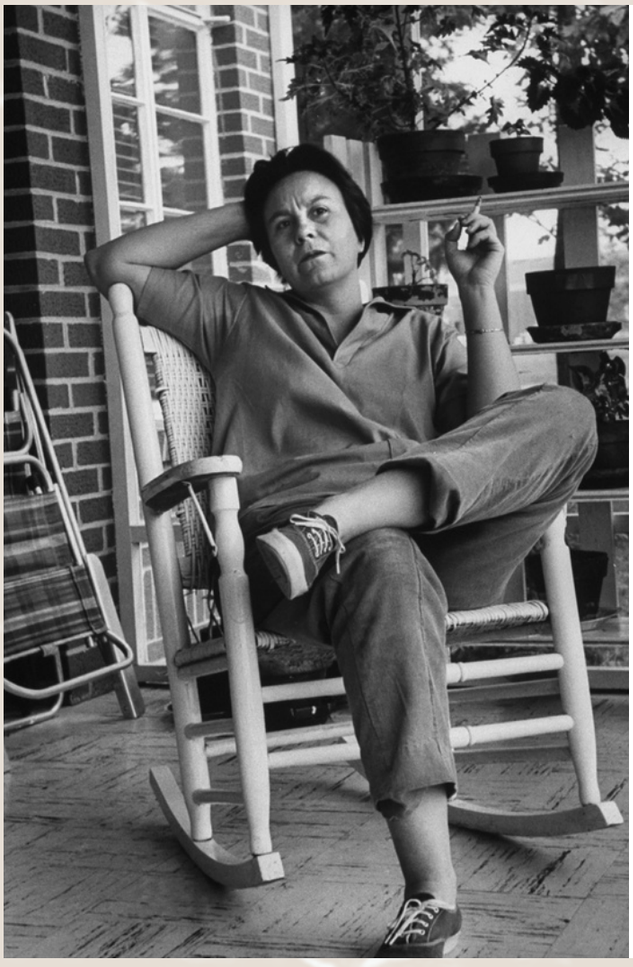
Stephen King

He borrowed her typewriter from college to write short stories.

John R. Erickson

A former cowboy, turned author, faced numerous rejections before self-publishing his successful children's book series, Hank the Cowdog, in 1982 from his garage. Faced with financial struggles and a failed cowboy career, he took a $2,000 bank loan to start Maverick Books. Despite initial challenges, his first print run of The Devil in Texas and Other Cowboy Tales sold out quickly, leading to over 9.5 million copies sold since then. Erickson's journey from rejection to self-publishing success is truly inspiring.





Harper Lee

Harper Lee, despite modest beginnings and financial struggles in her childhood, left law school to pursue her dream of becoming a writer. After years of working at an airline, her friends gifted her a year's worth of money to focus on writing. This Christmas surprise allowed her to dedicate herself to writing full-time. The result was the iconic "To Kill a Mockingbird," a cultural phenomenon that sold over 40 million copies and earned her over $3 million annually, proving the transformative power of one book.

Nicholas Sparks

Nicholas Sparks, renowned for his romance novel The Notebook, achieved remarkable success with all sixteen of his books becoming #1 New York Times bestsellers. Despite early struggles, including two unpublished novels and various odd jobs, Sparks faced a turning point: get published within three more books or change paths. Fortunately, The Notebook emerged as his next manuscript, securing him an agent, a book deal, and a $1 million advance for the film rights—all within half a year, marking the start of his illustrious career.





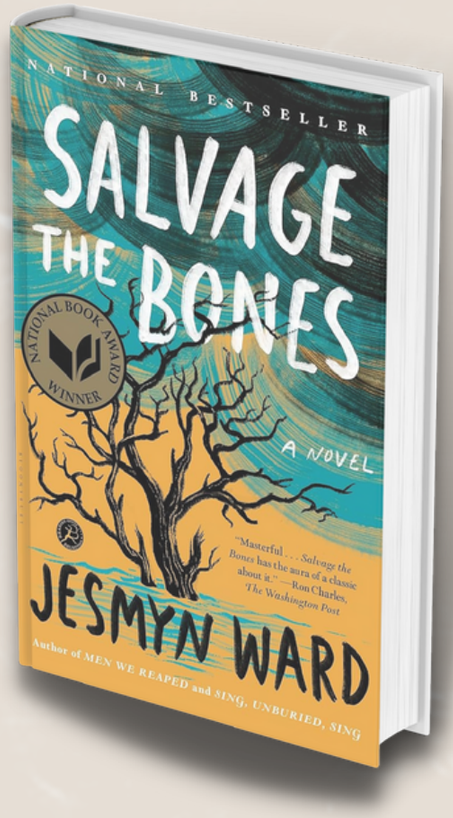
Laura Ingalls Wilder

Laura Ingalls Wilder, the author of the beloved Little House series, drew inspiration from her challenging pioneer upbringing. The depicted poverty, including her father sacrificing his own meals, reflected the family's real struggles. Natural disasters and financial setbacks persisted into adulthood, with fires, crop losses, and personal tragedies. However, Wilder's life took a remarkable turn when she began publishing the Little House series. By the end of it, she became a national celebrity and secured financial stability, achieving this remarkable success at the age of 64.

Stephen King

The mastermind behind iconic works like The Shining and The Stand, Stephen King, once struggled financially. In 1971, he relied on earnings from industrial laundry work and his wife's savings, borrowing her typewriter to write stories for men's magazines. His breakthrough came with the novel Carrie, rescued from the trash by his wife. The book secured a $2,500 advance from Doubleday Publishing and later earned him $200,000 from Signet Books for the paperback rights, propelling him to become one of the world's wealthiest authors.





AVAILABLE AT

by Jesmyn Ward

A powerful storm is forming above the Gulf of Mexico, posing a threat to the coastal town of Bois Sauvage, Mississippi. Esch's father, who is often absent and known for his heavy drinking, is starting to worry. He rarely shows concern for anything else. Esch and her three brothers are gathering supplies, although there isn't much to save. Recently, Esch has been struggling to keep down the little food she manages to eat; she is only fourteen years old and pregnant. Her brother Skeetah is secretly providing food scraps for his beloved pitbull's new litter, which is sadly dying one by one in the dirt. Meanwhile, brothers Randall and Junior are attempting to establish their place in a family that lacks proper parental guidance and is filled with childish behavior.

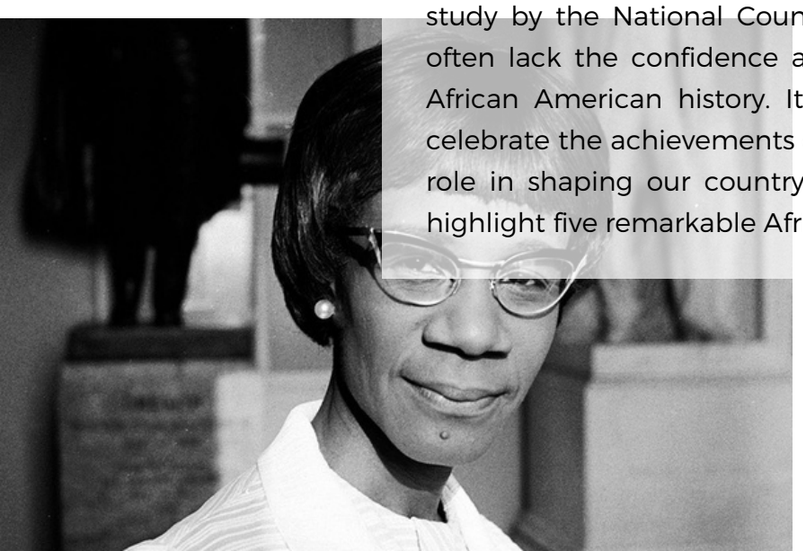


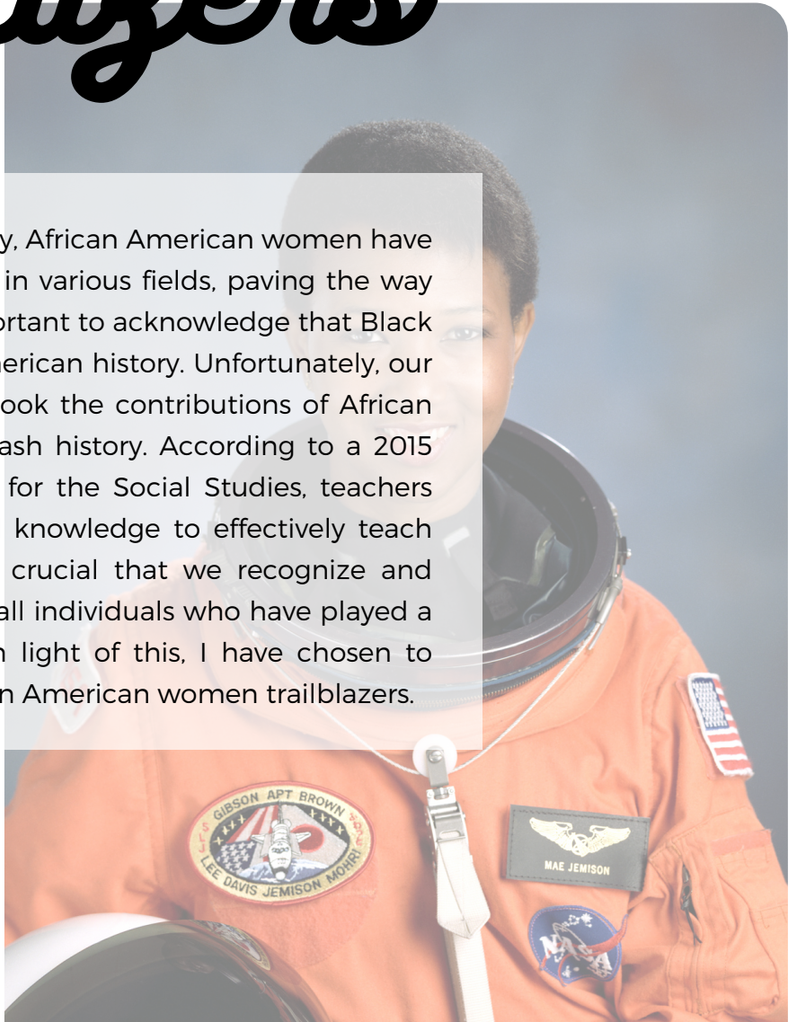




Five African American Women Trailblazers

Throughout the course of history, African American women have made significant contributions in various fields, paving the way for future generations. It is important to acknowledge that Black history is an integral part of American history. Unfortunately, our nation has a tendency to overlook the contributions of African American women and whitewash history. According to a 2015 study by the National Council for the Social Studies, teachers often lack the confidence and knowledge to effectively teach African American history. It is crucial that we recognize and celebrate the achievements of all individuals who have played a role in shaping our country. In light of this, I have chosen to highlight five remarkable African American women trailblazers.





At the age of 15, ***Claudette Colvin*** made history by refusing to give up her seat to a white person on a Montgomery bus, almost a year before Rosa Parks did the same. She was the first person to challenge the law in this way, despite knowing the violence that African Americans faced due to Jim Crow laws. Colvin was one of four women plaintiffs in the Browder v. Gayle case, which ultimately led to the overturning of bus segregation laws in Montgomery and Alabama. Her bravery and determination in igniting the Montgomery Bus Boycott have earned her admiration and respect.





Andrea Jenkins, the first openly African American trans woman elected to U.S. office, has been a Minneapolis City Council member since January 2018. While serving as Elizabeth Glidden's aide in 2005, she earned a fellowship dedicated to transgender issues and helped establish the Transgender Issues Work Group in 2014. Jenkins organized a City Council summit on transgender equity, addressing challenges in Minnesota. Featured on the January 29, 2018, Time cover, she was among women who ran for office in 2017-2018, with five being lesbian and transgender candidates supported by the LGBTQ Victory Fund.

Shirley Chisholm, the first African American woman in Congress and the initial woman and African American to pursue a major-party presidential nomination, co-founded the National Women's Political Caucus in 1971. In 1977, she became the first black woman on the House Rules Committee. Despite being excluded from televised primary debates during the 1972 Democratic Party presidential nomination, she delivered a notable speech, inspiring students, women, and minorities to follow the "Chisholm Trail." Retiring from Congress in 1983, Chisholm aimed to be remembered as a catalyst for change.

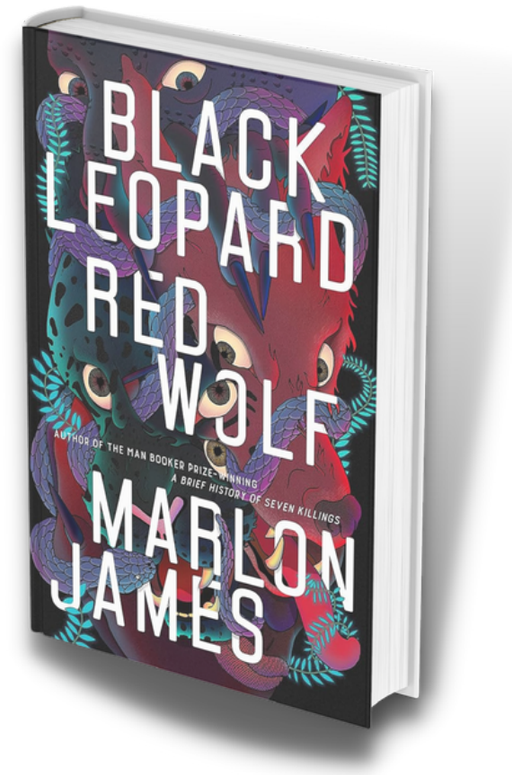




Mary Jane Patterson was the first African American woman to receive a B.A. degree from an established American college. In 1869, Patterson accepted a teaching position in Washington, DC, at the Preparatory High School for Colored Youth, later known as Dunbar High School. She served as the school's first African American principal from 1871 to 1874. Patterson's deep commitment to education and intellectual standards allowed her to devote time and money to other African American institutions in Washington, DC.



Mae Jemison, the first African American woman in space, is honored in the National Women's Hall of Fame and the International Space Hall of Fame. She holds degrees in Chemical Engineering and African-American Studies from Stanford University and attended Cornell Medical School. After her 1992 space mission, Jemison founded The Jemison Group, advocating for science, technology, and social change. In 1994, she established the international space camp "The Earth We Share" for students aged 12-16. Currently, Jemison leads the 100 Year Starship project for the United States Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA).



AVAILABLE AT

by Marlon James

Tracker is renowned for his exceptional hunting abilities, often praised for his acute sense of smell. However, when he is assigned the task of locating a mysterious boy who vanished three years ago, Tracker deviates from his usual solitary approach and joins a diverse group of individuals who have united in the search for the missing child. This band is an eclectic mix, comprising peculiar characters harboring their own enigmatic pasts, including a shape-shifting creature referred to as Leopard.

As Tracker diligently traces the boy's scent, traversing ancient cities, dense forests, and treacherous rivers, the group finds themselves relentlessly pursued by malevolent beings determined to annihilate them.

N.K. JEMISIN

N(Nora) K. Jemisin, a resident and writer based in Brooklyn, NY, is a renowned author of speculative fiction novels and short stories. With her exceptional talent, she achieved a remarkable feat in 2018 by becoming the first author to win three consecutive Best Novel Hugos. In addition to this prestigious recognition, she has also been honored with a Nebula Award, two Locus Awards, and the esteemed MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship.

Her short stories have been featured in prestigious publications like Clarkesworld, Tor.com, WIRED, and Popular Science. Additionally, her work has been published in semipro markets such as Ideomancer and Abyss & Apex, as well as in podcast markets and print anthologies. Currently, she has released novels, a novella, and two collections of short stories through Orbit Books. The representation of her novels is handled by Lucienne Diver from the Knight Agency.

https://www.thenickbrooks.com/





In a day, three catastrophic events unfold. Essun discovers her husband killed their son and abducted their daughter. Simultaneously, the Sanze empire crumbles as a deranged individual slaughters many. The most devastating blow is a colossal crimson chasm rupturing the Stillness continent, unleashing ash that casts a shadow over the sky for years or even centuries.

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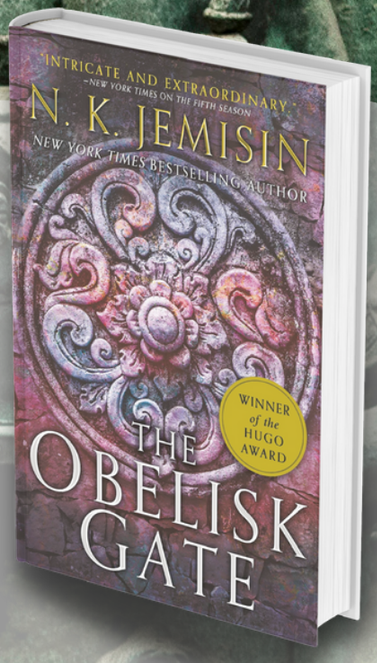

In a darkening era, Essun, once Damaya and Syenite, seeks refuge, her daughter still missing. Alabaster Tenring, the world's destroyer, has a request that could seal the Stillness' fate. Meanwhile, far away, Nassun, Essun's daughter, gains power, and her choices hold the potential to break the world.

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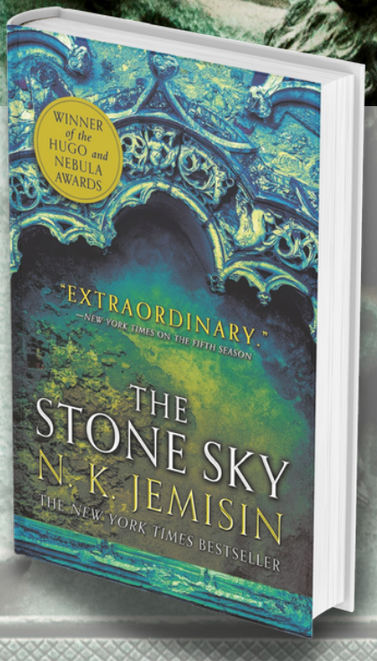


As the Moon threatens to return, Essun inherits Alabaster Tenring's power. Hoping to find her daughter Nassun, she seeks to create a safe world for all orogene children. However, Nassun, having witnessed the world's evil, realizes her mother's mastery of the Obelisk Gate comes too late. She accepts the harsh truth that some corruption can only be destroyed, not cleansed.

AVAILABLE AT

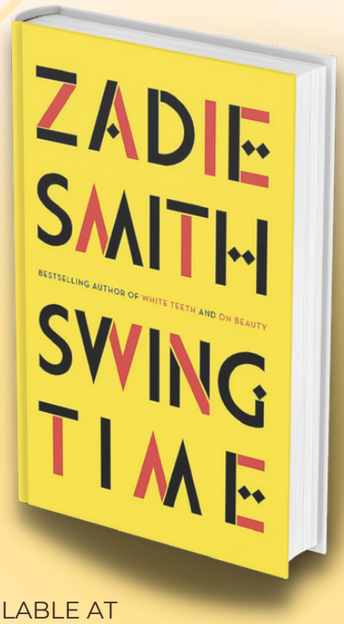
SWING TIME



By Zadie Smith

Zadie Smith, a renowned novelist, was born in 1975 in North London to a Jamaican mother and an English father. After completing her studies in English at Cambridge University in 1997, she went on to become a tenured professor of fiction at New York University in 2010.

Currently, she divides her time between New York City and London. Among her notable works are NW (2012), which takes place in north west London, and Swing Time (2016), which is set in London, New York, and West Africa.



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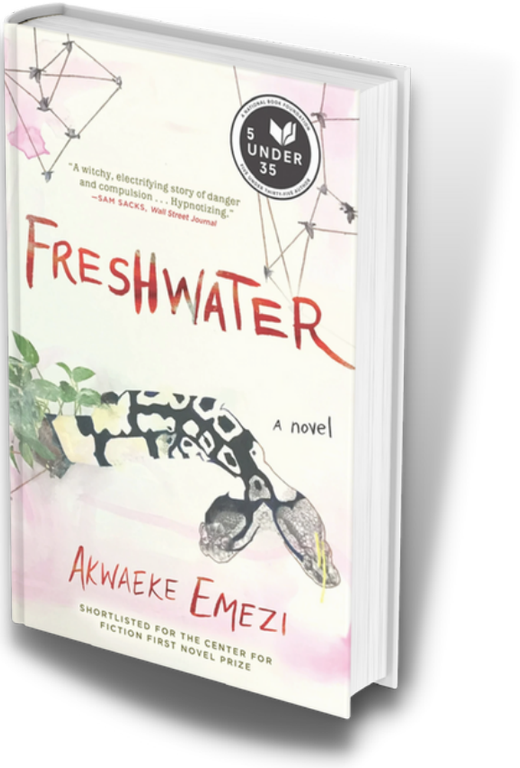
Moving from the vibrant streets of North West London to the captivating landscapes of West Africa, this ambitious and exhilarating new novel takes readers on a captivating journey. Penned by the acclaimed author of White Teeth and On Beauty, it tells the tale of two young brown girls with dreams of becoming dancers. While Tracey possesses undeniable talent, her friend is driven by ideas about rhythm, time, black bodies, and black music, as well as the true essence of freedom and the concept of a tribe. Their childhood friendship, both close and complex, abruptly ends in their early twenties, leaving an indelible mark that is never fully forgotten.

However, as Aimee's philanthropic aspirations take center stage, the narrative shifts from London to West Africa. Here, diaspora tourists embark on a quest to rediscover their roots, young men risk everything to forge a different future, and women dance with the same passion and energy as Tracey. In this setting, the origins of profound inequality are not confined to distant history but rather an ongoing dance to the rhythm of time.

FRESHWATER



Ada has always been an anomaly, causing great distress to her family since her infancy in southern Nigeria. Despite her parents' successful prayers for her existence, Ada's troubled nature emerges, marked by violent outbursts of anger and sorrow. However, Ada's uniqueness goes beyond mere volatility. With one foot in another realm, she begins to develop distinct personalities.

When she goes to college in America, a traumatic event solidifies these alter egos into something more formidable. As Ada recedes into the recesses of her own mind, these alters, sometimes protective and other times indulgent, take control, leading her life down a treacherous path. This remarkable debut, written with captivating artistry and rooted in the author's own experiences, delves into the metaphysical aspects of identity and existence, immersing readers in the enigmatic depths of the self. Unsettling, heartrending, and imbued with a potent darkness, Freshwater astounds with its fierce vitality and sinuous elegance, announcing the emergence of a bold and compelling literary voice.

“Akwaeke Emezi is a name you will want to remember, because surely it is one you will be hearing again and again . . . A stunning and disorienting story about a broken woman trying to overcome the pain of her human life while straddling ‘the other side’ . . . Freshwater is unlike any novel I have ever read. Its shape-shifting perspective is radical and innovative, twisting the narrative voices like the bones of a python . . . Emezi has not only made a rich contribution to Igbo mythology, she has crafted a novel so unique and fresh, it feels as if the medium has been reinvented.” —***Safa Jinje, Toronto Star***

AKWAEKE EMEZI

"Remarkable and daring . . . Poetic and disturbing . . . Rooting Ada's story in Igbo cosmology forces us to further question our paradigm for what causes mental illness and how it manifests. It causes us to question science and reason." —***Tariro Mzezewa, New York Times***

"Akwaeke Emezi's bewitching and heart-rending Freshwater is a coming-of-age novel like no other . . . For anyone who has experienced life as a misfit or outcast, this is a resonant rendition . . . For all its sheer invention, Freshwater feels more like an interpretive journey through uncharted territory with an experienced guide. Potent and moving, knowing and strange, this is a powerful and irresistibly unsettling debut." —***David Wright, Seattle Times***

"This debut novel by an Igbo and Tamil writer is an intricately plotted story of fractured identity that signals the arrival of a major talent." —***San Francisco Chronicle***

A National Book Foundation "5 Under 35" Honoree
Finalist for the PEN/Hemingway Award for a Debut Novel
Shortlisted for the Center for Fiction First Novel Prize
A New York Times Notable Book



Akwaeke Emezi, a writer and artist of Igbo and Tamil descent, resides in liminal spaces. They were born and raised in Nigeria and obtained their MPA from New York University. In 2015, they were granted a Miles Morland Writing Scholarship. Their literary works have been featured in several publications, including Granta, and they were the recipient of the 2017 Commonwealth Short Story Prize for Africa. Freshwater marks their first published novel.

www.aleemaomotoni.com



"In her mind-blowing debut, Emezi weaves traditional Igbo myth that turns the well-worn narrative of mental illness on its head, and in doing so she has ensured a place on the literary-fiction landscape as a writer to watch . . . Emezi's brilliance lies not just in her expert handling of the conflicting voices in Ada's head but in delivering an entirely different perspective on just what it means to go slowly mad. Complex and dark, this novel will simultaneously challenge and reward lovers of literary fiction. A must-read." —***Booklist (starred review)***

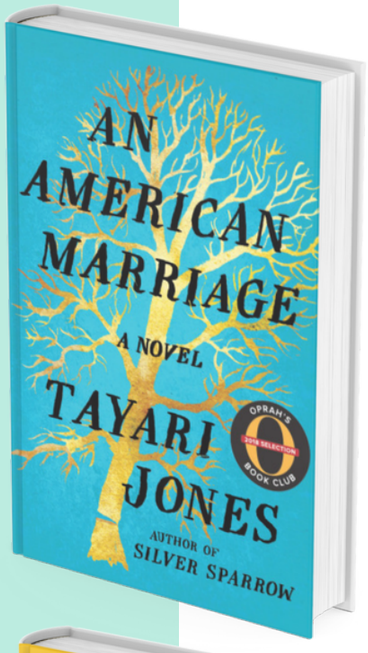
"[A] haunting yet stunning exploration of mental illness grounded in traditional Nigerian spirituality . . . Employing precise and poetic yet accessible prose, Emezi brilliantly crafts distinct voices for each of Ada's selves and puts them in conversation with each other . . . She balances multiple lands, ethnicities, perspectives and belief systems with the ease of a writer far beyond her age and experience. Freshwater is a brutally beautiful rumination on consciousnesses and belief and a refreshing contribution to our literary landscape." —***BookPage***

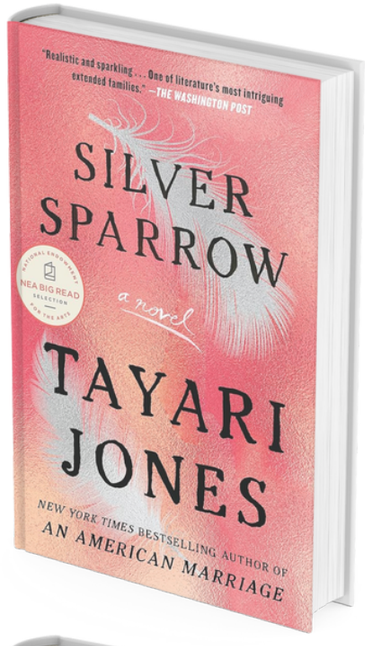
AVAILABLE AT

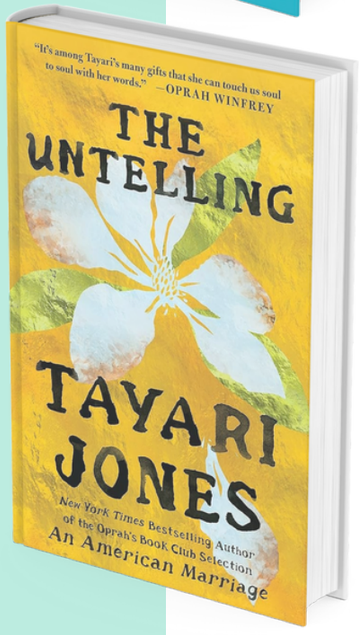
TAYARI JONES

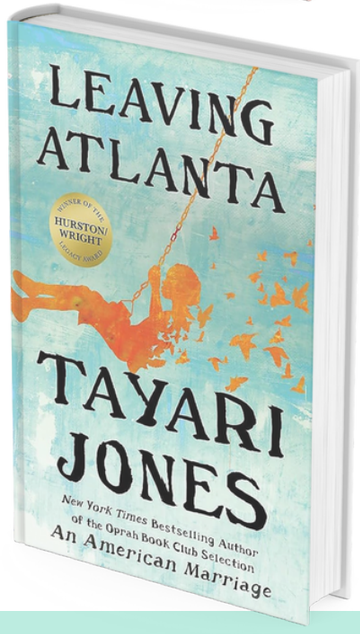
www.tayarijones.com











Tayari Jones, a renowned author, has written several novels including Leaving Atlanta, The Untelling, Silver Sparrow, and An American Marriage (published by Algonquin Books in February 2018). Her exceptional writing skills have been showcased in various publications such as Tin House, The Believer, The New York Times, and Callaloo. Jones is a member of the Fellowship of Southern Writers and has been honored with several awards including the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award, Lifetime Achievement Award in Fine Arts from the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, United States Artist Fellowship, NEA Fellowship, and Radcliffe Institute Bunting Fellowship.

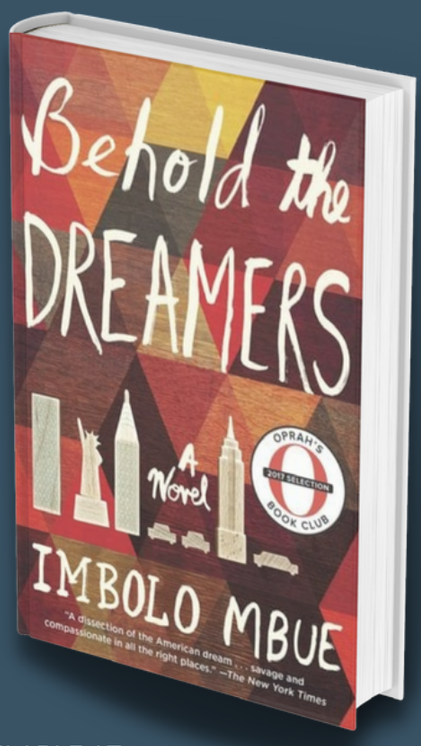


AVAILABLE AT

Remembered, a 2019 Women's Prize in Fiction, explores 1910 Philadelphia, focusing on the life of Ella, a slave who fought for emancipation from slavery. The story also explores the complex narrative of the narrator Spring's own life, highlighting the importance of freedom and motherhood in the era of slavery.

YVONNE BATTLE-FELTON

IMBOLO MBUE



AVAILABLE AT

Behold the Dreamers, set during the 2008 financial crisis in New York, follows the lives of a Cameroonian family and a wealthy American family. Jende Jonga, from the former family, becomes chauffeured by Edward Clark, from the latter.

The book expertly balances sadness and hope, capturing the tension between privilege and need, as Mbue expertly breathes new life into the American Dream.



AVAILABLE AT

dialogue books

IRENOSEN OKOJIE

Dive into Irenosen Okojie's Nudibranch, a striking collection of surreal short stories set in real places like London and Berlin. From bizarre occurrences to beautiful oddities, Okojie's vividly imagined tales weave a poetic exploration of the fantastic. This original and unpredictable collection promises a memorable journey into the peculiar.

MICHAEL DONKOR



AVAILABLE AT

Hold is a novel by Michael Donkor about three young girls: Belinda, Amma, and Mary. Belinda, a Ghanaian housegirl, is moved to London with Amma, hoping to influence her rebellious daughter.

The girls, who are vastly different, grapple with shared identities, sexualities, and growing up pressures. Hold is a touching tribute to queer adolescence, with sensitive observations about the two girls.



BREATHE, EYES, MEMORY

Edwidge Danticat

Her moving and insightful works across many genres enrich our understanding of Haiti and the complexities of the immigrant experience.

Edwidge Danticat, a highly acclaimed author, has written a wide range of books that have garnered significant recognition. Her works include The Art of Death, which was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle award, and Claire of the Sea Light, which was recognized as a New York Times Notable Book. Brother, I'm Dying, another one of her books, not only won the National Book Critics Circle Award but also became a finalist for the National Book Award.

The Dew Breaker, yet another remarkable piece of literature by Danticat, was a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award and won the inaugural Story Prize. Additionally, The Farming of Bones earned her an American Book Award, while Breath, Eyes, Memory was selected for Oprah's Book Club. Krik? Krak! also received acclaim as a National Book Award finalist.

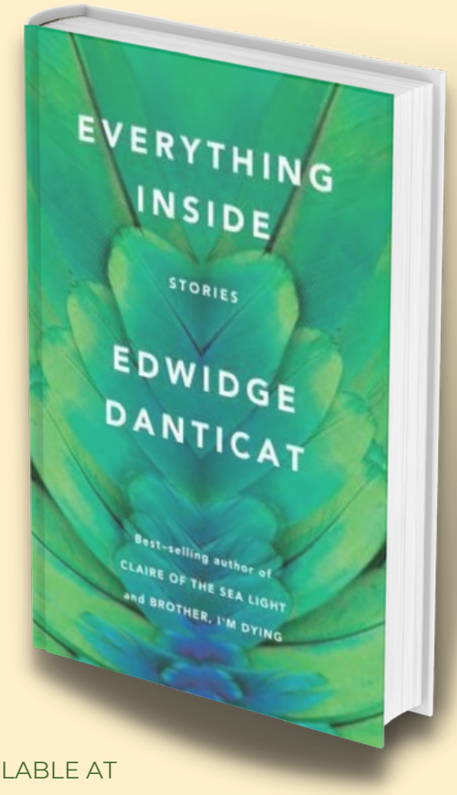
Danticat's achievements extend beyond her literary works, as she was honored with the 2018 Neustadt International Prize for Literature and received a prestigious MacArthur "Genius" Grant. Her writing has been featured in esteemed publications such as The New Yorker, The New York Times, Harper's Magazine, and various others.

Everything inside

In a captivating tapestry of eight interconnected stories, Edwidge Danticat masterfully weaves tales of love, loss, and resilience, set against the vibrant backdrop of the Caribbean. Amidst the sun-kissed shores and rich cultural tapestry, we encounter characters grappling with the enduring bonds of family, the transformative power of love, and the indelible imprint of tragedy.

Unexpected romances blossom amidst the wreckage of heartbreak, while marriages crumble under the weight of unspoken truths. Amidst dreams deferred and lives upended, the indomitable spirit of survival shines through. Through it all, Danticat's prose pulsates with raw emotion, capturing the profound depths of human experience with exquisite sensitivity.

Spanning from the bustling streets of Miami to the serene landscapes of Haiti, Everything Inside is a poignant exploration of the universal human experience, where love, loss, and resilience intertwine in a dance of life and death.



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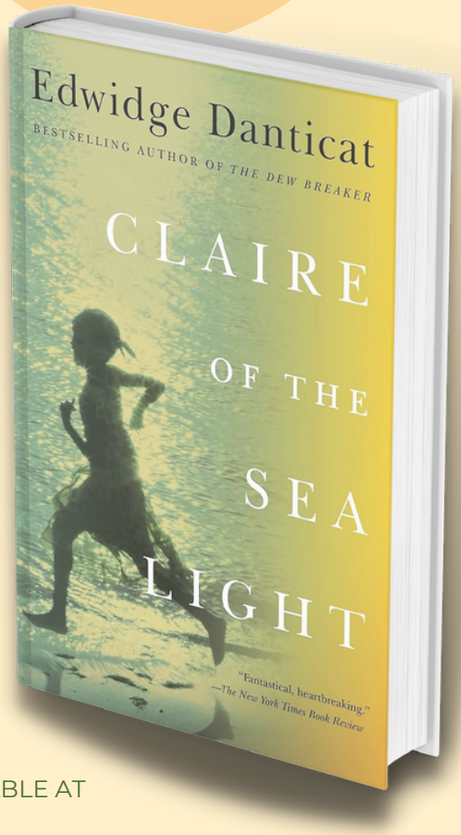


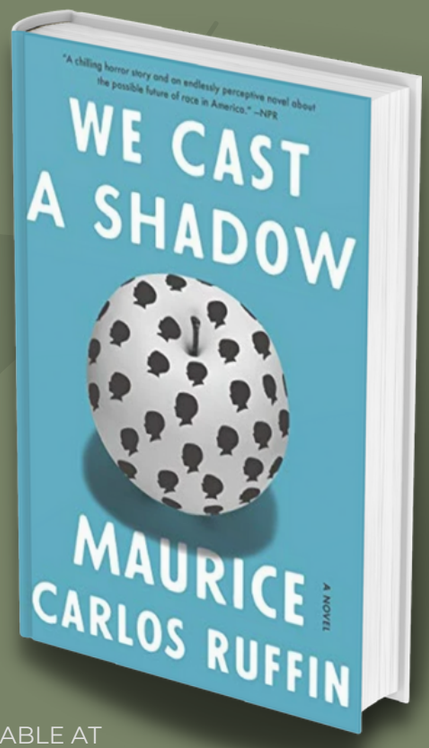
AVAILABLE AT

Claire of the Sea Light

In Edwidge Danticat's captivating novel, "Claire of the Sea Light," the sudden disappearance of a young woman named Claire Limyè Lanmè sends shockwaves through the close-knit Haitian community of Ville Rose. As the townspeople desperately search for Claire, long-buried secrets and painful memories resurface, weaving a complex tapestry of interconnected lives.

Danticat's evocative prose delves into the profound connections that bind us to one another and the natural world. Claire's disappearance serves as a catalyst, unearthing the unspoken truths that have shaped the lives of those around her. The novel explores themes of family, identity, and the enduring power of love amidst the backdrop of a vibrant Haitian community.

With its rich character development and captivating narrative, "Claire of the Sea Light" is an unforgettable tale of resilience, hope, and the enduring bonds that shape our lives.



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ONEWORLD

We Cast a Shadow is a dystopian novel by Maurice Carlos Ruffin that satirizes racism in America.

The narrator must pass tests to help his biracial son access a new medical procedure, turning him white. The novel is surreal, clever, and tinged with horror, making it a must-read.

MAURICE CARLOS RUFFIN

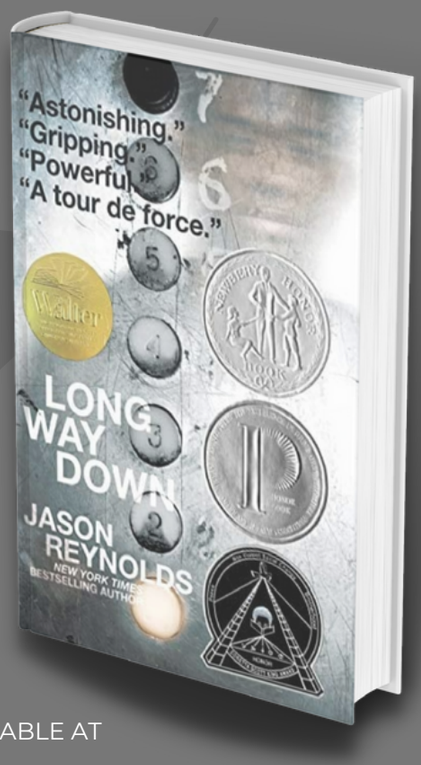
HELEN OYEYEMI



AVAILABLE AT

Boy Novak, a protagonist in Helen Oyeyemi's novel Boy, Snow, Bird, moves to Massachusetts in the 1950s. She forms a bond with Arturo, a local, and is introduced to his daughter, Snow.

Unlike Arturo and his African-American family, Snow cannot pass for white, prompting a radical reevaluation of their lives. Oyeyemi's unique and compelling story is a literary gem.



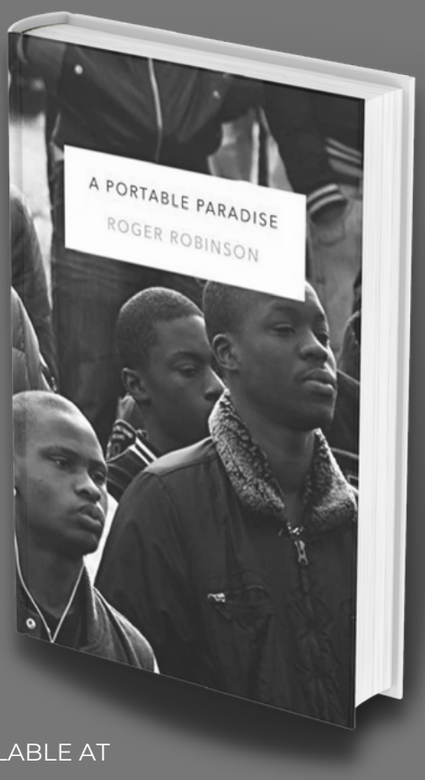
AVAILABLE AT

Teenage violence is a complex issue in YA, with a sparse narrative that explores the complexities of this issue.

The novel, Long Way Down, is a heartbreaking and quick-paced exploration of teenage violence, highlighting the complexities of teenage behavior and the need for change.

JASON REYNOLDS

ROGER ROBINSON



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Roger Robinson's T.S. Eliot Prize-winning collection, 'A Portable Paradise', explores themes such as family, the Windrush generation, slavery, racism, and heritage.

The poem, which begins with 'A Portable Paradise,' evokes a sense of nostalgia and lyricism, making it a poignant and powerful read. Robinson's lyricism and emotional clarity make it a heartfelt read.

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