ReadingGroupGuides
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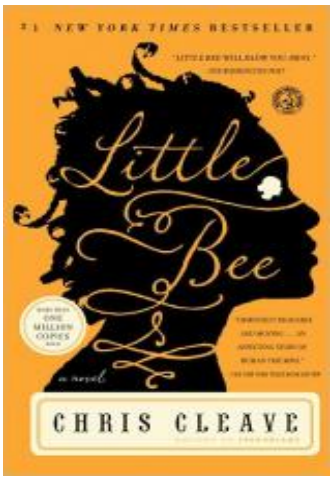
Little Bee

by Chris Cleave



About the Book

Little Bee, a young Nigerian refugee, has just been released from the British immigration detention center where she has been held under horrific conditions for the past two years, after narrowly escaping a traumatic fate in her homeland of Nigeria. Alone in a foreign country, without a family member, friend, or pound to call her own, she seeks out the only English person she knows. Sarah is a posh young mother and magazine editor with whom Little Bee shares a dark and tumultuous past.

They first met on a beach in Nigeria, where Sarah was vacationing with her husband, Andrew, in an effort to save their marriage after an affair, and their brief encounter has haunted each woman for two years. Now together, they face a disturbing past and an uncertain future with the help of Sarah?s four-year-old son, Charlie, who refuses to take off his Batman costume. A sense of humor and an unflinching moral compass allow each woman, and the reader, to believe that even in the face of unspeakable odds, humanity can prevail.

For more about **Little Bee**, visit www.simonandschuster.com/littlebee.

Discussion Guide

1. ?Sad words are just another beauty. A sad story means, this storyteller is alive? (p. 9). For Little Bee and other asylum seekers, the story of their life thus far is often all they have. What happens to the characters that carry their stories with them, both physically and mentally? What happens when we try to forget our past? How much control over their own stories do the characters in the book seem to have?

2. Little Bee tells the reader, ?We must see all scars as beauty. Okay? This will be our secret. Because take it from me, a scar does not form on the dying. A scar means, I survived? (p. 9). Which characters in the story are left with physical scars? Emotional scars? Do they embrace them as beautiful? Do you have any scars you?ve come to embrace? Did you

feel more connected to Little Bee as a narrator after this pact?

3. Little Bee strives to learn the Queen?s English in order to survive in the detention center. How does her grasp of the language compare with Charlie?s? How does the way each of these two characters handle the English language help to characterize them?

4. How did it affect your reading experience to have two narrators? Did you trust one woman more than the other? Did you prefer the voice of one above the other?

5. Little Bee credits a small bottle of nail polish for ?saving her life? while she was in the detention center (p. 7). Is there any object or act that helps you feel alive and beautiful, even when everything else seems to be falling apart?

6. Of the English language Little Bee says, ?Every word can defend itself. Just when you go to grab it, it can split into two separate meanings so the understanding closes on empty air? (p. 12). What do you think she means by this? Can you think of any examples of English words that defend themselves? Why is language so important to Little Bee?

7. Little Bee says of horror films, ?Horror in your country is something you take a dose of to remind yourself that you are not suffering from it? (p. 45). Do you agree? Was reading this novel in any way a dose of horror for you? How did it help you reflect on the presence or lack of horror in your own life?

8. Little Bee figures out the best way to kill herself in any given situation, just in case ?the men come suddenly.? How do these plans help Little Bee reclaim some power? Were you disturbed by this, or were you able to find the humor in some of the scenarios she imagines?

9. What does Udo changing her name to Little Bee symbolize for you? How does her new name offer her protection? Do you think the name suits her?

10. ?To have an affair, I began to realize, was a relatively minor transgression. But to really escape from Andrew, to really become myself, I had to go the whole way and fall in love? (p. 161-162). Do you agree with Sarah that an affair is a minor transgression? How did falling in love with someone else help Sarah become herself? What role did Andrew play in perpetuating Sarah?s extramarital affair?

11. When Little Bee finds that Andrew has hanged himself she thinks, ?Of course I must save him, whatever it costs me, because he is a human being.? And then she thinks, ?Of course I must save myself, because I am a human being too? (p. 194). How do the characters in the story decide when to put themselves first and when to offer charity? Is one human life ever more valuable than another? What if one of the lives in question is your own?

Author Bio

Chris Cleave is the author of EVERYONE BRAVE IS FORGIVEN, GOLD and the #1 *New York Times* bestseller LITTLE BEE. He lives with his wife and three children in Kingston-upon-Thames, England.

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