A Spell of Good Things

by Ay??bámi Adébáy??



About the Book

A dazzling story of modern Nigeria and two families caught in the riptides of wealth, power, romantic obsession and political corruption from the celebrated author of STAY WITH ME, "in the lineage of great works by Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie" (*The New York Times*).

Eniola is tall for his age, a boy who looks like a man. Because his father has lost his job, Eniola spends his days running errands for the local tailor, collecting newspapers, begging when he must and dreaming of a big future.

Wuraola is a golden girl, the perfect child of a wealthy family. Now an exhausted young doctor in her first year of practice, she is beloved by Kunle, the volatile son of an ascendant politician.

When a local politician takes an interest in Eniola and sudden violence shatters a family party, Wuraola's and Eniola?s lives become intertwined.

In her breathtaking second novel, Ay??bámi Adébáy?? shines her light on Nigeria, the gaping divide between the haves and the have-nots, and the shared humanity that lives in between.

Discussion Guide

1. Revisit the epigraphs that mark the novel?s four parts. How do they amplify the themes of the story and set the tone for each section? Consider exploring the works of T. M. Aluko, Chika Unigwe, Helon Habila and Teju Cole. How do they speak in conversation with Ay??bámi Adébáy???s novel? Why do you think she selected them as structural elements of the text?

2. Adébáy?? investigates topics such as class, education, family, gender, marriage and domestic violence in her fiction,

and this novel touches on them all with complexity and nuance. What is one passage that stuck with you in particular, and why?

3. A SPELL OF GOOD THINGS tells the tale of two families whose lives become intertwined without relying on extended physical encounters between them. Revisit the moments when their paths do cross. How would you describe the exchanges? Why do you think Adébáy?? chose to keep them brief yet impactful? What do these encounters reveal about the relationship between political elites and the working class in modern Nigeria?

4. Despite their different socioeconomic backgrounds, ?ni?lá and Wúrà?lá?s families both instilled in their children a high regard for education. Why do you think education was an important asset in this society? Do you think its emphasis harmed or hindered the different characters and relationships in the story?

5. ?ni?lá?s mother is faced with the difficult decision to further the education of one of her children and not the other. What factors influenced her decision? Do you think she made the right choice?

6. Who is Aunty Caro? What is the significance of her connection to ?ni?lá and Wúrà?lá?s families? Why do you think Adébáy?? chose to open and close the novel with her?

7. How would you characterize Yèyé?s 50th birthday party? Joyful and celebratory? Tense? What was your reaction to the party?s ending?

8. On page 163, Wúrà?lá describes the feeling of being engaged to that of being a celebrity: beloved and valued. What do the reactions to Wúrà?lá?s engagement reveal about the importance of marriage in this society? How do love, cultural customs and social class shape partnerships? Do all of the novel?s characters share the same views on marriage?

9. In the novel, M??tárá repeatedly calls her sister ?Saint Wúrà?lá the Impeccable? (page 226). What are the expectations placed on Wúrà?lá and M??tárá as the young women of their family? How do they respond to these pressures? What do their reactions reveal about their own values?

10. A SPELL OF GOOD THINGS touches on the circumstances that keep women in both abusive and unsatisfying relationships in great depth. What forces keep Wúrà?lá from coming forward with her experience of Kúnlé?s abuse? How would you characterize the reactions of her sister, M??tárá, and the assumed reactions of her friends? Were they beneficial, or did they fail to fully comprehend the difficulty of her situation? How do the factors keeping Wúrà?lá in her relationship compare to the reasoning provided by Yèyé and Ìyá ?ni?lá for staying in their unhappy marriages? Are there any examples of admirable partnerships in the text?

11. The novel also sheds light on the experiences of men trying to live up to patriarchal standards of masculinity in a world where women are finding empowerment through greater levels of education and financial independence. What differences did you notice between the generation of the novel?s parents and their children related to gender roles and the place of women in society? How do the male characters --- including ?ni?lá and his father, Láyí, and Kúnlé --- react to this shift?

12. Describe Kingsley. Why do you think he becomes a significant figure in Wúrà?lá?s life as she reaches the turning point in her relationship with Kúnlé?

13. Central to the novel are the language, traditions and values of the Yoruba people in Nigeria. What did this add to the story and your experience of reading it? Why do you think it was important for Adébáy?? to tell the story in this way?

14. Adébáy?? writes that Yèyé ?had never been able to shake the sense that life was war, a series of battles with the occasional spell of good things? (page 157). Reflect on the novel?s title. How does each character cope with this feeling of instability?

Author Bio

Ay??bámi Adébáy?? was born in Lagos, Nigeria. Her debut novel, STAY WITH ME, won the 9mobile Prize for Literature, was shortlisted for the Baileys Prize for Women?s Fiction, the Wellcome Book Prize, and the Kwani? Manuscript Prize. It has been translated into 20 languages and the French translation was awarded the Prix Les Afriques. Longlisted for the International Dylan Thomas Prize and the International Dublin Literary Award, STAY WITH ME was a *New York Times*, *Guardian*, *Chicago Tribune* and NPR Best Book of the Year.

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