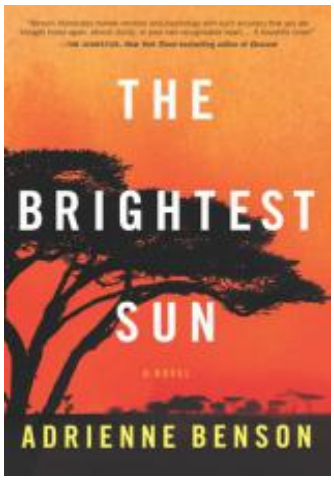
The Brightest Sun

by Adrienne Benson



About the Book

An illuminating debut following three women in sub-Saharan Africa as they search for home and family

Leona, an isolated American anthropologist, gives birth to a baby girl in a remote Maasai village and must decide how she can be a mother, in spite of her own grim childhood. Jane, a lonely expat wife, follows her husband to the tropics and learns just how fragile life is. Simi, a barren Maasai woman, must confront her infertility in a society in which females are valued by their reproductive roles. In this affecting debut novel, these three very different women grapple with motherhood, recalibrate their identities, and confront unforeseen tragedies and triumphs.

In beautiful, evocative prose, Adrienne Benson brings to life the striking Kenyan terrain as these women?s lives intertwine in unexpected ways. As they face their own challenges and heartbreaks, they find strength traversing the arid landscapes of tenuous human connection. With gripping poignancy, THE BRIGHTEST SUN explores the heartbreak of loss, the struggle to find a sense of belonging, and the surprising ways we find our family and home.

Discussion Guide

1. Leona, Jane and Simi all have their own approaches to motherhood. In what ways are they different? Is there a commonality in how they assume the role of mother? Are there aspects of each mothering approach that echo ways in which you mother or were mothered?

2. The book discusses global issues like FMG (female genital mutilation), poaching, climate change and how laws impact traditional lifestyles. How important are these to the development of the characters? Do they enhance or detract from the story?

3. Landscape plays a prominent role in the book. How is sense of place a critical element in the telling of the story? In

what way does landscape or place impact your own life and your personal life story?

4. The book centers on mother/daughter relationships. The mothers are very different to each other, and they judge each other and are judged --- often harshly. Is this a reflection of the reality of motherhood? Do we tend to set a certain standard, or expect certain things from mothers that may not always be reasonable?

5. The parents in the book are all flawed, some dramatically --- there is child neglect, incest and domestic violence. In what ways do these parenting flaws impact the children in the book?

6. Adia is a girl who grew up in an unconventional way, and who had a strange --- and sometimes tragic --- childhood. What do you see her doing as an adult? Would she choose to live in Kenya? Where would someone like her be at 30?

7. Leona struggles with attachment and childhood trauma, and this is observed in her inability to form romantic relationships. But toward the end of the book, we see a shift. Do you think she would ever be comfortable in a partnership or marriage?

8. The main characters in the novel are all outsiders to their communities in some way. Are there benefits to ?outsiderness?? Leona, Jane and Paul are outsiders by choice. Why would someone choose to live outside his or her community, or set up homes in places where they are foreign?

Author Bio

Adrienne Benson was raised in Africa, and has called Kenya, Liberia, Zambia and the Ivory Coast home. A former Peace Corps volunteer, her work has appeared in the *Washington Post*, the Huffington Post and the *Foreign Service Journal*, as well as in a handful of literary journals.

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