

The CABAL

PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS

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PRAISE FOR THE CABAL

“Atogun’s simple, direct prose is the perfect vehicle for the complex questions he poses.”

— Library Journal

“Odafe Atogun’s *The Cabal* is an intrigue-laden, searing exploration of the often dark, often blood-soaked corridors of power. Set in a nameless country that painfully resembles Nigeria, *The Cabal* elevates Atogun’s fable-like, novelized political commentaries that began with *Taduno’s Song*, but this is his best work yet. This book has so much nuance and huggermuggery to keep the pages turning. Spellbinding.”

Abubakar Adam Ibrahim,

author of *Dreams* and *Assorted Nightmares*

“A must-read. . . . [Atogun’s] writing is reminiscent of Coetzee’s South African dystopian novels like *Waiting for the Barbarians*, with more than a touch of magical realism.”

— LitHub

“In the *The Cabal*, Odafe Atogun proves again why he is regarded as one of Nigeria’s finest writers. His ability to delve deep into the human mind and human motivation and take his readers with him on this remarkable journey remains unparalleled. This is Odafe at his finest.”

— Helon Habila,

author of *Travellers* and *Waiting for an Angel*

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A novel by
PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS
ODAFE ATOGUN



MASOBE

Published in 2023 by Masobe
An imprint of Masobe Books and Logistics Limited
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Surulere, Lagos, Nigeria
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A CIP catalogue record for this book is
available from the National Library of Nigeria

ISBN: 978-978-998-786-3

This is a work of fiction. All names, characters,
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author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons
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Cover Design Oriahi Ofuzim Anderson
Author photo by Adebayo Adekunle

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For Trevor Dolby,
For showing me the way

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OTHER BOOKS BY ODAFE ATOGUN

Taduno's Song

Wake Me When I'm Gone

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'What sort of night has the bat not seen?'

– Abubakar Adam Ibrahim

Season of Crimson Blossoms

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*One day soon, we'd see, that the paths we've
chosen will all be worth it*

– Othuke Ominiabohs

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ONE

Bako awoke one morning to find his neighbour lying naked next to him. For a moment, he lay still, disoriented. Slowly, he disentangled his legs from the sheets and sat up looking down at her sleeping form, struck by her serenity as her chest gently rose and fell. He rubbed his temple. He remembered that his girlfriend would be visiting that morning. Muttering a curse, he hurried out of bed and got into the clothes he had left on the floor.

‘Wake up, wake up!’ he whispered, shaking the girl by the shoulder. He shook harder when she would not respond. ‘Mimi, Mimi!’

She stirred and sighed, rubbing her eyes with the back of her hands.

It was too late. He could hear footsteps in the house already. Avé had her own keys. She called out a greeting from the corridor, and then she stopped abruptly in the open doorway of the bedroom, her

lips parting in shock and disbelief. Mimi sat up in bed hurriedly, holding the duvet tightly about her, a look of terror on her face stripped plain by sleep, her hair tousled from a night of reckless sex. Bako stood gazing at his feet, his chin on his chest. The room was humid—made more so by the absence of electricity which left the ceiling fan static—and, like a graveyard, it was still. He shuffled his feet, rustling the silence, then he turned to Avé, his eyes meeting hers fleetingly.

‘What is she doing here?’ she asked, pointing to the bed. His lips moved without words.

Mimi scrambled off the bed, almost knocking her head against the wall, and, finding her gown on the floor, threw it on before struggling into her underwear.

‘Bako, what is this?’ Avé’s voice sliced the air. She did not expect a response or wait for one. She charged across the bed and took Mimi by the hair, raining punches on her. Mimi fought back, and in an attempt to escape made it only as far as the living room. He struggled to separate them, but in vain; until they created such a racket that it attracted his other neighbours, The Law and Gebu who, seeing that the door was unlocked, barged in to help him

pull the girls apart. Mimi was led out bleeding, her slender frame seemingly broken.

Avé lay sprawled on the living room floor. Her quiet sobs filled the empty spaces of the room. Her makeup was streaked with tears and sweat; the hair she had spent several hours making the previous day Friday looked a whole mess. Bako sat beside her begging for forgiveness. She spoke no words to him, and sobbed even louder when he tried to explain. Desperate, Bako called his friend AY, asking him to come over urgently.

Sensing that Bako had done something silly again, AY arrived soon after, his bald pate covered with sweat, his faded T-shirt food-stained. He walked into the living room tentatively, with his characteristic stoop, as if afraid that his head would brush the ceiling. In happier times Bako would tease him that he walked like an old man; now, he pulled him aside and gave a stilted account of what had happened.

‘You brought your neighbour into your bedroom, into your bed?’ AY spoke out loud.

‘No, no, man, I didn’t bring her,’ Bako said in a harsh whisper, twisting round to glance at Avé. ‘She came—’

‘Liar!’ Avé cried.

‘Bakoo!’ AY growled under his breath and stalked away from him. Lost for words, he stood hesitantly before Avé, who had sat up on the floor. He bent down and touched her arm and for several minutes tried to appease her, but she would not listen to anything he had to say. When she rose to leave, Bako begged her not to go, begged her forgiveness.

‘Stay away from me!’ She shrugged him off holding up her palm before his face. AY went after her. But when he returned moments later, it was clear that his effort had been futile.

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He told AY that it had happened only because they had too much to drink. He had just finished cooking his dinner the previous night when Mimi knocked on his door to ask if he had a candle to spare. He invited her to join him for dinner. After they had eaten, they had some wine. The mood grew intimate as they chatted into the night by candlelight. They had more wine. And then one thing led to the other. He shook his head in regret.

AY paced the living room, taking in the upturned table and chairs, the items littering the floor, the TV about to tip over on its stand, the curtains that had been pulled down with the rails. His eyes grew