

**DREAMS
AND ASSORTED
NIGHTMARES**

PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS

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PRAISE FOR DREAMS & ASSORTED NIGHTMARES

“With *Dreams and Assorted Nightmares*, there can be no doubt that Abubakar Adam Ibrahim is a keeper of the Marquezian flame. Set in mysterious Zango, a town in the mould of Macondo or Maguldi, these are stories of rapturous shimmer and power. Suffused with love in all its mysteries, riven with portents, they work their quiet magic on the reader, with unexpected echoes and recognitions on every page. Ibrahim is a master of the short story form.”

– **Molara Wood**, author of *Indigo*

“Ibrahim’s Zango is a strange, living, throbbing city with characters that breathe, words made flesh and blood. Its people are flawed, there are no saints, but they love passionately and live ferociously. Ibrahim’s voice is confident and pulsing with wit. The stories cover a lot of ground and each story is a gem: daring and original. This is a wonderful, wonderful collection.”

– **Chika Unigwe**, author of *On Black Sister’s Street*

“It’s a murders row of stories that [Abubakar] Adam Ibrahim serves in *Dreams and Assorted Nightmares*. Hauntingly otherworldly, yet gloriously human.”

– **Abdulkareem Baba Aminu**

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**Abubakar
Adam
Ibrahim**



MASOBE

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To the scented ones who left before sunrise:
my father Ndamed Adam and his brother, *my* brother,
Ibrahim Gambo (IBB)—a particular kind of uncle
In our hearts, you live, in memories inscribed in light.

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Also By Abubakar Adam Ibrahim

The Whispering Trees
Season of Crimson Blossoms

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DREAMS AND ASSORTED NIGHTMARES

No one knew what to call the place that was halfway between dreams—a patch of earth, hugged on one side by a murky river and hedged on the other by a series of mournful hills and a dark forest, a place where travellers rested before moving on—so they just called it Zango. The layover. At least, that was what Laminde’s grandmother, Kaka, had told her when they were shelling groundnuts for soup. Kaka’s earnest face like crumpled, dusty khaki was set in a perpetual brood and her biddy eyes stared down at little Laminde, as if to burn off any doubts the child might have regarding this account. But Laminde’s seven-year-old mind believed that Kaka was as old as the world itself and had been sitting on a tree bough snacking on gurjiya, watching God’s magic split heaven and earth.

“For years, it was just a sleepy in-between place until some itinerants got drunk on rest and forgot to complete their journeys. Their wives and children, and in some cases their husbands too, tired of waiting for them to return, packed their belongings in ashasha sacks and joined them,” Kaka had said, eyes staring past Laminde, as if saying this tasked her memory, as if the child had disappeared into a

haze, unnoticed, uncelebrated, just the way Zango had been birthed. It was years later that Laminde would fill in the blanks that Kaka's long silences were with things she gathered from conversations in markets, at school, and the other places secret histories were procured from.

After the wives came, prostitutes who serviced the travelling men set up permanent shacks not far from the park where the roar of truck engines and the blare of car horns masked the noises of indiscretion, and Zango became home for good. This bit, her grandmother never said, but Laminde knew. Everyone did. The prostitutes' shacks still stood and, in their rafters, if one looked carefully, traces of the dust stirred by the first men who had made Zango a town, and their trucks, could be found.

Zango was a river. In parts slow and sluggish, a contented serpent resting from the kill, and in others turbulent and restless. In full flow, Zango, like most ungovernable rivers, collected moss and mud, and little animals that sometimes slipped from its banks. On occasions, it collected the big ones too, those who thought they were too immense for the tides. This, Laminde, by observing, had learnt for herself.

Zango had emptied before, leaving only a deep scar in the earth. And like a river, it had reinvented itself.

"Before this place was called Zango, it was once called Mazade by a people consumed by a plague," Kaka had said, staring before her as if she could see the deserted houses in the evening sun being eaten by termites. But Kaka was already losing her mind at the time and no one knew for sure if she remembered anything right.

What Laminde did know years later, sitting by her window and looking out into the streets filled with residents and travellers, was that deaths in Zango were often as dramatic as life in her was. Sometimes they were bizarre, such as the time Babale died on the eve of his wedding, gored by a rampaging bull that had escaped its minders. The bull, fleeing after its gory deed, fell into a gaping manhole and snapped its neck. Or when the matriarch Balaraba, long afflicted with gloom, was found dead in her cane chair, facing the door with a smile on her face. Nobody knew what she had been waiting for, or what had come through the door and left with her soul. But her smile endured, its impression visible through her shroud even when they laid her in the grave.

Babangida too died happy. He had lived most of his life trawling the streets of Zango, feeding off people's throwaways. One afternoon, he stood, pole stiff, in the middle of the street and started laughing. He laughed nonstop for three hours and forty-seven minutes before he slumped.

"Allah sarki! His leaf has fallen," a bread hawker said, as a crowd ringed the fallen figure, debating the merit of touching a dead or dying mad man with grime on the back of his neck.

"Poor bastard laughed his life out," one of the pallbearers said as they carried him to the cemetery.

Once or twice a year, a corpse with an erect manhood would be found by the riverside. If the rumours were to be believed, they had died in the brothels, from *manpower*

overdose. The whores and their pimps would carry them out and dump them in the river so they could wash up elsewhere. Sometimes they just left them on the banks. Because these men were mostly strangers on failed conquests of the whorehouses of Zango, not much was made of their deaths, or unceremonious disposals, beyond the spectacle and inconvenience they caused.

In Laminde's estimation, none of the dramatic deaths had yet eclipsed Vera's. Vera had been sitting at her usual place under the pedestrian bridge braiding a customer's hair, as she had been doing for years, when she started coughing out strands of hair. When the first hairballs came out, the crowd of horrified women that had gathered, drawn by her violent fits, oohed. They watched her heave and pull out a long strip of braided hair that went on and on and on until it seemed she had swallowed a pony-tailed woman. After the braid slipped out, all one meter, seven centimetres of it—because Zaki, son of Kore the bandit, actually measured it—coiled in front of her like a juvenile python, Vera keeled over. Her face, half-buried in the mass of hair and puke, conveyed the full horror of what she had seen come out of her.

It was this kind of death, this particular one with its attendant horror and agony, that Laminde wished for her co-wife Ramatu.

She knew precisely when that yearning lodged in her heart. She remembered the exact moment at the General Hospital, a year after they started sharing a husband. But the resentment that allowed that seed to even sink roots was

planted long before, on the day her husband Bello had sat before the casserole of tuwo da miyan taushe she had served him, and announced that he was taking a second wife.

When she eventually spoke, it was in a whispered voice of disbelief. "A second wife?"

"In fulfilment of the sunnah, yes," he had said.

"A second wife?" she had asked again.

"In a fortnight, yes." He had taken off his cap then, carefully washed his hands in the lemon-green bowl she had set before him and began to eat. "Masha Allah! This is delicious," he had proclaimed, reaching for another dollop.

All she could think of then was how she had cut her finger making his favourite meal. The drop of blood and the silver of the knife on the countertop had lingered in her mind. Inside, her heart had atrophied becoming an ancient stone that squirted bile into her veins. It blurred her eyes and her mind until those two weeks skulked by, until strangers came to clean the rooms her co-wife would occupy, until the ululations that accompanied the bride rent the night and the cold, black stone that was her heart.

Three years she had been married to Bello before that night. Three years, in which she had born him a beautiful daughter, in which they had loved and laughed and tiffed, as lovers do. Three years in which she had, in moments of unguarded rage, locked him out of the house and enjoyed his pleading voice from the other side of the door. Their marriage was far from perfect, she knew that much, but it wasn't yet beyond redemption. It was just a regular marriage, as all other marriages were. And then he had assaulted her

with this news and these ululations, and these women who had brought a stranger into her house and projected snide missiles in her direction.

“Now Bello will know that he has married a wife indeed.”

“If the sun rises, no palm could block out its light.”

“Malam Bello ya gaji da jagade-jagade.”

She? Jagade-jagade? Like worn flip flops?

Bello had called her queen, his whispered promises had sprouted gardens in her heart. He had pledged undying fidelity to her and called her most beautiful, in impassioned and lucid times. She? Jagade-jagade?

Sitting in the midst of her sisters who had come to offer embellished platitudes, with a veil draped over her face, cascading over her body, concealing her tears, Laminde contained the tremor of these explosions with grace. In her heart, where Bello's garden of promises used to be, resentment swirled, indiscriminately, even for her sisters who were witnesses to her humiliation. When one of them made to rise, to return the intruders' compliments, Laminde had placed her palm firmly on her sister's arm and shaken her head.

That resentment, over time, became a cloud that drifted in her mind with neither the significance nor weight it had had in the early days. It was easy because her co-wife, Ramatu, upon their first meeting, had flashed kind eyes at her, stooped in veneration and called her Yaya. And treated her with the deference she would accord an older sibling. Every morning she would come to Laminde's door to