

EDGE OF HERE

PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS

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**STORIES FROM
NEAR TO NOW**

PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS

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MASOBE

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All the characters in this book are fictitious, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

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Dedicated to my Egbé Ọrun.
Thank you for reminding me.

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Introduction

I had never considered myself to be a writer. An actress and director, yes, but never a writer. When people would suggest it, I would scoff. ‘But you have such a way with words?!’ they’d say. Yes, a way with words when it comes to taking this wayward society down a peg or two.

There are so many ways to share our truths though. In one regard, using social media to get my points out there to the world at large – but this collection of stories helps me to not only get a message out into the world but invites you into my inner world. I have often felt misunderstood in my quest for a fairer and more beautiful world. These stories allow me to share with you my deepest hopes and dreams, represented through the protagonists. I was particular about writing stories that weren’t wrought with trauma as it pertains to Black women.

This is a world where Black women love and are loved back. This is a world where Black women don’t have all the answers, but they pay attention to life when it offers something up. In every woman there is the story and there is the Story. I didn’t have to make this part up, because in every Black woman I encounter there is a story dancing in their eyes and on the edge of their

smiles. All they need is the space to tell that story. Until they decide to, I hope these stories allow them to feel seen, even in the most subtle ways.

WHY ‘EDGE OF HERE’?

Because this is the space I’ve grown up in. That liminal space that feels like no place. Where you are both the observer and the hyper-observed. All the stories are borne of a simple truth that I’ve turned up the proverbial volume on. What does it look like if a Black woman literally carries everybody else’s grief? What would it feel like for non-Black people to experience the real pain of racial trauma? I could give more examples but I’m not trying to steal the cute moments of revelation as you read through the stories.

I’ve lived life at the edge of this current reality for a while and I know the versions of reality that I propose aren’t too far away. Join me in exploring the stories at the edge, before it becomes the centre of here.

The Watchers

PROLOGUE

In the sliver of space between this world and the next, we the Watchers reside. Our purpose is simple: to guide the souls we are assigned in the task they chose when they were formless orbs of light.

There are many times we have looked on as you humans (or, as we know you, ‘the Watched’) have described an experience as a mere coincidence, instead of accepting that there is a particular path you are on. Those gentle nudges are our way of reminding you of that which you never wanted to forget.

We can only help so much, because ultimately whether Watcher or Watched, we are all an aspect of the divine and must be allowed to express that divinity in the way we choose. We slip between time and galaxies, simultaneously observing all that has been, all that is and all that will be. Time is only a suggestion and yet I have watched as so many of you enter a world only to obsess over this measure of your own making. The Watched

return eventually and are reminded that what seemed like a lifetime barely amounted to a moment here.

Returning to this place that is really no place while being every place, is a chance to reflect on the lessons garnered on earth, and to plan which lessons still need exploration until the time comes when all the lessons have been mastered.

The Watched tell themselves that time is the best healer but what they truly mean is that love is the best healer. Time cowers in the face of love's many manifestations. In this realm, the Watched decide on a theme of love they want to explore in various lifetimes. The soul remembers the task, but once the Watched enter into a human form, they go through the forgetting that is necessary at the beginning of each lifetime. The Watched are always aware that they will forget once they enter the earthly realm, so they chart reminders in their human lives just in case they are to ever lose their way. It sounds simple enough, until the Watched enter into a world where so many obstacles have been put in place, some by those higher than us and some by those who are not, to test their will and power to love against all odds.

Many of the Watched tire quickly when they feel that they have very little control over the life they chose – but then there are others, like Chinonso and Ndidi, who persevere lifetime after lifetime.

They meet in each human stint having no memory of the other meetings, only a vague yet visceral sense of having met before. I must make it known to you at this

point, dear honorary Watcher, that this isn't a love story of the sort the Watched seem to spend an amusing amount of their lives chasing. This love is not propelled by flimsy romance. Instead it is spurred on by the unwavering desire to evolve into one's highest self while in human form. In other pairings between two beings of light – or twin flames, as they are commonly known – there is an alternation between who remembers something of the task both beings agreed to complete. The being who remembers will usually be the chaser, the one tasked with helping the other to acknowledge something greater than the human flesh they now inhabit. The other, being the runner, will avoid the intensity of the calling for a number of earthly reasons. Between these two, though, it seems that Chinonso has taken on the role of chaser for many lifetimes, which isn't to indicate Ndidi loves less, because in fact her devotion to being human helps them both to grow in their understanding of humanity . . .

CHINONSO AND NDIDI

Today I watch Ndidi teeter in the heels she debated over wearing, while cocooned in her sanitation pod and navigating it on a cobbled pavement by Albert Docks. The pods were interesting inventions and still needed a lot of work, but in a world where the fear of pandemics had taken hold, government-issued sanitation pods had become the norm when out in public. Made from self-sterilising thin plastic, the pods would enclose the

individual, allowing for normal range of movement while limiting contact with others.

I catch the ‘fucking hell’ Ndidi mutters under her breath as her ankles momentarily wobble in the pod because of the uneven ground and maybe the weight of her expectations of the evening ahead. ‘Who the fuck chooses a slavery museum for a first date?’ I hear her think to herself. Chinonso is the ‘who’.

Chinonso loads his phone screen onto his pod to see if an ‘almost there!’ text has been sent by Ndidi. Nothing. He would usually be annoyed by this lack of an update but on this occasion it makes him smile. He likes that this woman he is about to meet seems to care very little about explaining herself and just seems to dance to her own tune.

‘Nonso?’ is what he hears that causes him to turn around and look straight into the face of Ndidi.

‘Ah! Didi, hey!’

A thick Liverpoolian accent cascades out of Ndidi’s mouth as she smilingly says, ‘I told you not to call me that, professor boy, it means nowt. You of all people should know that you don’t fuck around with Igbo names – they have meanings, you know. I noticed in the app that you shortened your name, but I won’t be joining you in such rebellious behaviour.’

I look on at them meeting for the first time again and notice as always the way time bends to allow a brief instant of knowing. They both feel it but laugh it off as first-date jitters.

‘I’m very happy for you to still call me Nonso,’ he teases. They both laugh, while taking each other in. They’ve sent so many messages to each other on the dating app that they mistake the pre-existing deep connection with one another for merely feeling comfortable from such long conversations. Swiping on a person’s picture on a dating app had become mechanical for the two of them, so it is a relief they cherish to have found someone that feels different to all the other dates they have been on. A brief silence is Ndidi’s prompt to say what has been on her mind.

‘Not being rude or nothin’, but a slavery museum for the first date? I know I agreed but fucking hell, it’s intense, innit?’

Chinonso worries for a moment that he might sound weird for admitting how he had come to decide on the venue of their date, but decides to be brave, as something tells him that he will be safe here.

‘I actually had a dream about you before—’

Ndidi interjects, ‘Oh come off it! A dream! About me? Do you use that line on all the girls then?’

Chinonso continues, sensing that somewhere in her tone Ndidi believes him.

‘Before seeing you on the app, I had a dream where you turned to say something to me and it was in front of one of the displays at this museum.’

Curious, Ndidi asks, ‘What did I say? And was I dressed like this?’

With the courage fleeting now, Chinonso smirks. ‘I’ll

let you know when you say it. As for what you were wearing, I can't remember. But the shoes looked more comfortable.'

Ndidi is surprised by her own laughter at the cheeky joke.

'The museum will close soon, so why don't we go in and I can show you the things I find most fascinating here, then dinner after?' Chinonso feigns confidence as he states this because it is unlike any other date he has been on. Usually, it would be a coffee and a chat or drinks mixed with a fun night and mundane texts thereafter.

Chinonso's decision to move to Liverpool from London so he could teach Postcolonial Studies seemed very random to everyone who knew him, but, as he explained to them all, once he had seen the job vacancy, a gut feeling led him to apply. As you, honorary Watcher, are beginning to learn, nothing is really by chance. From Chinonso's father in Nigeria being an avid Liverpool FC supporter, to the 'Visit Liverpool' billboards Chinonso kept noticing when he was out and about. Everything delicately placed and carefully planned so this moment could happen. This moment where they would both make the choice to pursue their task in this life or not. It would seem rather peculiar to someone unfamiliar with fate and free will as to how these seemingly opposing systems could coexist, but the truth is that they were and always will be one. Chinonso and Ndidi haven't always decided to exist in the same lifetime as each other. It has happened in a few lives where one of these flames