

THE LIST

PROPERTY OF MISSOURI BOOKS

ALSO BY YOMI ADEGOKE

(with Elizabeth Uviebinené)

FICTION

The Offline Diaries

NON-FICTION

Slay In Your Lane: The Black Girl Bible

Slay In Your Lane: The Journal

Loud Black Girls

PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS

Yomi Adegoke

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**THE
LIST**



MASOBE

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In loving memory of my loving grandad

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PART ONE

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1

28 days to the wedding

They had been out celebrating the night before it happened. Their table, an unintended shrine to the schadenfreude gods, littered with emptied, gilded champagne flutes and bottles now upturned in their buckets. The happy couple unknowingly toasting the beginning of the end.

The room was dimly lit, the air salted by sweat from sticky-skinned revellers. It was after 9 p.m., so the bar area had morphed into a makeshift dance floor where London's shabbily dressed creative elite were slotting together like Tetris blocks. Michael surveyed the scene as he sat in the corner of an oxblood-coloured booth, his wife-to-be's long legs stretched out across his lap. He felt like the man. Sloppily drunk, Ola yawned jungle-cat wide under her mop of dark-blue braids. Then she stumbled slightly as she pulled herself upright to start their third fake fight of the night.

'But I CANNOT believe you,' Ola said faux-sulking, sticking out her bottom lip in a manner that took years off her. This was not helped by the fact that her dark plum lipstick was smeared at the corners of her mouth, making her baby-face resemble a

toddler who'd raided her mum's make-up bag. 'You really can't say it?'

Michael reached over her lap for another glass. 'How am I supposed to know the answer, bruv!' he said. Though tipsy, he hadn't drunk that much and realised it would be some time before he caught up with her. They'd moved on to wine now and were sat in a private members' club whose name he couldn't remember; he wasn't even sure how'd they'd got in. Indiscriminate EDM was blaring from somewhere in the crowded room as he felt the Merlot mingle with his blood and warm him. It was all a happy blur: he wouldn't remember most of it the next day but the small details would stick with him. Ola's outfit – a black-lace bralette paired with a grey blazer and tapered trousers. Their stifled laughing at the wall-to-wall, off beat dad dancing. How her neck smelt, the softness of her skin and lips. They'd spent a good portion of the evening snogging in darkened corners like teenagers.

'It's a straightforward question, babe.' She pushed out her lip further still, in an unconvincing attempt to appear serious and slighted. 'You not answering is an answer, to be honest.' Ola clumsily untangled her legs from his and turned her back to him, arms crossed. Very obviously, she peered over her shoulder to see if he was still looking at her. 'If you're not gonna shed thug tears at the wedding, I don't even want it,' she slurred.

Michael feigned a pensive sigh, knowing it would rile her up. 'Aight, give me a minute to think.'

She whipped back around. 'A MINUTE? An entire sixty seconds to decide whether the 8th of June will be the happiest day of your life? The day you *yourself* said you've been waiting for since the first time you laid eyes on me? And then you wonder why I say men can lie!'

'I mean, I did see Thierry Henry at Gatwick that time in '08,' he offered wryly. 'And he nodded at me, I told you innit?'

'You're a prick ...'

'Let me at least get to the church and see what it's saying,' Michael chuckled. 'You know I don't like weddings like that.'

Ola kissed her teeth. 'Yeah, well, at this rate there won't even be one. The fact you're saying you're not gonna be happy on our own wedding day—'

'Ola! When did I say that, please?'

'—is an absolute madness. What's currently ranking higher? Enlighten me.'

Michael stroked his beard.

'Do NOT say the first time I let you smash, Michael!' she said, jostling a glass in her right hand and punching his arm with the left.

He shot her a falsely incredulous look, eyebrows raised in mock shock.

'I mean it! Because I'm about to go full "Real Housewives of Streatham" and dash this at you.'

Laughing, Michael pulled her face towards him. He looked at her, taking her in for a moment with his eyes dopily half closed, and kissed her forehead.

Ola wriggled and wiped it, giggling hysterically. 'Move, man! You're trying to distract me and it won't work. I want answers, Michael. ANSWERS!'

She was raising her voice now, a few heads at the bar had turned and begun to look over. Michael could not believe how much he loved to indulge her, even when she was causing a scene. Today, he felt he could say without hesitation he loved every single thing about her. In fact, he was sure at this very moment, he loved her more than anything else in the world.

He couldn't remember a time they'd been happier. He never would. He would revisit this evening in the weeks after it happened, and think about all the things he would have said and done differently. That if he had known what the next day held, he wouldn't have dared to risk joking about their future together. He would have told her that he struggled to pinpoint the happiest day of his life because he couldn't decide between the day she agreed to marry him or the day she told him she loved him too. That he knew it would next be their wedding day, but one day that too would be overtaken by them having their first child.

He let a smirk slip, before kissing her forehead tenderly once more. 'When did we first smash again?' he asked, flinching as her fist missed his arm and landed on the seat cushion with a thud.

2

27 days to the wedding

Ola awoke at half past eight on a dreary May Monday, to the sound of her alarm accompanied by the concurrent pinging of WhatsApp messages. The high-pitched beeping did little to pull her out of her morning fog, made all the cloudier by bottles of champagne purchased for two (polished off primarily by one) the night before.

‘Shit,’ she heard herself whisper, nothing on her body moving but her lips. There was no way she could have had more than four hours of sleep. She lay there for a moment, savouring the last few seconds her face could remain sunken in her pillow before she was officially going to be late. Languidly, she stretched her arms above her head and turned towards the wall where an iPhone lay charging next to her like a neglected lover. She slid her finger, lengthened by a lime acrylic nail, across the cracked screen to silence it and squinted at the row of notifications.

139 flipping messages. Ola could guess who from and what about, too – the season finale of *Game of Thrones* had aired the night before, and she could already picture the group chat’s breathless commentary.

RUTH: Nah Im sorry guys but Dany is an icon. WE

HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO STAN OUR KHALEESI 🌿🌿🌿



CELIE: Erm, I have a choice. I do not stan.

Something, something, Lannister. Something, something ‘The Wall’. Ruth in all caps lock with gifs and meandering paragraphs, Celie punctuating her friend’s emphatic tirades with a solitary ‘sis ...’ or just a silent string of question marks. The more rabidly they discussed it, the more certain Ola was that she wanted no part in what to her sounded like *The Lord of the Rings* with a dark sexual violence arc and a dash of casual ableism.

A couple of dozen messages would no doubt be from the florist, asking for the details of something or other that Ola had outlined the day before. She would feel less affronted by the continued enquiries about the peony to rose ratio in the bouquet if she hadn’t spent so much money hoping to avoid being this hands-on. She wondered if the florist was simply doing her best to justify her extortionate rates by looking as busy as possible, or if she genuinely needed answers. Ola wasn’t sure which was worse.

She winced as her phone buzzed twice more. It slowly occurred to her the likely source of most of the messages (which had now crept up to 141) was her boss, Frankie. Ola had promised to file the copy for a sponsored post by 7.30 a.m. that morning, ‘at the very, very latest’. The deadline had been batted right to the back of her mind by the rental orders for the wedding: the special chairs, the high table, the linens, the draping, the lounge furniture, the portable dance floor, the lighting.

And then, calculating the costs of those things: currently more than her student debt. The week before, she had asked for an extension on the piece, as she was struggling to make the brief work. She'd been tasked with finding a seamless link between the male founders of Danish CBD-infused sex-toy brand 'Kalmte Kut' and body positivity. Ola had put it off partly in the vain hope that Frankie would foist it onto someone else at *Womxxxn* who was better at dressing up press releases from pseudo-feminist brands as actual articles. But she hadn't, and the piece remained unwritten.

Tooting to Victoria – Ola had less than twenty minutes to get ready. Bleary-eyed, she tapped the year of her father's birth into her phone. It shook in response.

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You are #BLOCKEDT till 9.30am (56 minutes)

Suddenly overwhelmed, she inhaled.

'Shit. *Shit.*'

Ola's iPhone was heavy with long-forgotten 'get-your-shit-together' apps. Unused apps for insomnia. Long-abandoned running apps, since she was sedentary for 80 per cent of the week. And, of course, #BLOCKEDT, the weapons-grade phone restriction app she'd recently installed to keep her off apps in the morning, since she was probably addicted to apps. She was tired of her Twitter feed being the first thing she saw when she woke up. Her screen time was close to six hours a day last time she checked – double the national average – and after three consecutively failed New Year's resolutions, it was either #BLOCKEDT or some sort of tech rehab. It did the job – a pop-up window would obscure her phone screen and stop her from accessing it at all until the block was lifted at 9.30 a.m. But

as her phone continued to vibrate noisily, she felt its virtues were eclipsed by it being a total pain in the arse.

Ola sat up properly now. She drew back the curtains, bright orange against the dismal south London sky, and turned to survey her bedroom for damage. Not *too* bad. Last night's clothes were flung at the end of her bed. She avoided the gaze of the Maya Angelou line drawing she'd ordered from Etsy, with the words 'Still I Rise' written underneath in cursive script, and by her fishbone cactus, noted a star-spangled box marked 'Chicken Corner' filled with gnawed bones. A mug of wine without a coaster had marked her desk, but bar that, she'd got off lightly. Still, evidence of her night was laid out across the room like a crime scene, drunk Ola leaving clues and cues to fill in the evening's blanks.

She entered the bathroom, iPhone lodged under her chin, and carefully peeled off the oversized T-shirt that she wore as pyjamas, too hungover to pick up her pace. She scooped her endless navy braids into a large bun on top of her head, which she partially covered with a too-small shower cap. Placing the phone on the side of the sink, Ola stood naked in front of the bathroom mirror and stared. Her dark-brown eyes, now dark underneath. She bared her teeth, her gums and tongue blackened by Merlot. As she stepped into the shower, she smiled remembering the night before. It had been a good one. Not quite like old times, maybe better. The poor boy got the Uber back with her to put her to bed, bless him – she could still smell Michael's Tom Ford aftershave in the room – and though she couldn't recall the journey home, she could vaguely make out him removing her heels and her pulling at his face, saying his name in a sing-song voice as he bundled her under her duvet. Ola felt a pang of guilt – he'd had an early start this