

**PRAISE FOR**  
***ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE MYSELF***

“I loved everything about this book, from the original portrayal of social media and influencer culture, to the excellent humour, to the way it never paints anyone as entirely bad or entirely good, but allows the intricate threads that weave us together as people to create characters who are fully realised, flawed and relatable. Once again, Onyi Nwabinele tells a story that is wise, captivating and unforgettable.”

**Ore Agbaje-Williams, author of *The Three of Us***

“A tack-sharp, beautifully told tale of agency and reclaiming your power. Nwabinele creates deeply drawn characters, uses perfect metaphors, and possesses an immersive storytelling style that never releases its grasp on you as you journey into the darkest recesses of her characters. Nwabinele is the queen of flawlessly blending serious topics with witty contemporary prose. Her way with words is an incredible gift.”

**Lola Akinmade Åkerström, author of *In Every Mirror She's Black***

“An unputdownable read! Skilfully and delicately written, *Allow Me to Introduce Myself* helps us behave more ethically in this age of social media obsessions. Onyi Nwabinele is an immensely talented writer whose pen is sharp and unflinching.”

**Nguyễn Phan Quế Mai, author of *Dust Child***

“Rich with emotion, heartbreaking, and timely. A fresh and compelling perspective on living online.”

**Peace Adzo Medie, author of *Nightbloom***

PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS

Also by Onyi Nwabineli

*Someday, Maybe*

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MASOBE

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For all the kids who wish to be a little less visible.  
And for my niece, nephew and godchildren—the stars of my heart.

PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS

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These are the products her stepmother released using Anūri's likeness before she was three years old:

- Desktop wallpapers (ages six months to two years)
- Socks (age eighteen months)
- Natural baby wipes

These are the products her stepmother launched using the money made from the products she released using her likeness:

- High-end scented candle range
- Subscription service for "Curated Samples of Elite Living"
- *Raising Anūri*, a #1 *New York Times* and *Sunday Times* bestselling book
- *Monetizing Motherhood*, a #1 *New York Times* and *Sunday Times* bestselling book
- Ophelia May range of natural haircare products

This is the number of attempts made to abduct Anūri before she turned twelve:

- One

And this was how old Anūri was when she decided enough was enough:

- Fourteen



# ONE

Her last meal, she had decided, would be gelato. The craving eclipsed all other senses. She would savour it and then she would die. It was a Sunday afternoon, four years prior. Anūri, twenty-one at the time, had chosen her method and left it in her living room. She spent part of the morning on the bathroom floor, the tile stamping its memory into the left side of her body. However, the inconvenient doggedness of life steered Anūri down another path.

Ammah was not supposed to be working that day. The gelateria staff, however, were, and yet they were nowhere to be seen, and as Anūri pressed her brow against the shuttered West London shop front, she repeated this heartbreak in a whispered, distraught loop: *You're supposed to be open. You are supposed to be open.* She could not die without a final taste of pistachio melting on her tongue, so she would call them, and they would arrive and rectify the mistake. She misdialed the number on the wooden shop sign and Ammah answered, deftly cutting through Anūri's garbled desperation and identifying a more urgent distress. Ammah tossed death out onto the street. Anūri knew that she, without hyperbole, quite literally owed Ammah her life. Before that day, luck was for others; a remarried father, an astute stepmother. The moment she stepped into Ammah's office, Anūri believed it might be for her as well.

Of the five therapy practitioners Anūrī had tried before that Sunday afternoon, two murdered her name with their mouths despite gentle then pained correction. One sought tears in a way that bordered on sociopathic. The other two were fans of Ophelia—an affliction even years of training failed to smother or at the very least shroud. Before Ammah, therapy, Anūrī decided, was yet another facet of normalcy that would remain out of her reach. How painful to possess the privilege to access the method of fixing, yet to remain unfixed.

Today, a Thursday, and most of Ammah's office was in shadow. A fact that made little sense to Anūrī as this was the room where said therapist bathed her in the kind of light she often found inconvenient—the type that reached with soft but insistent fingers into the recesses she would rather keep hidden. She sits in this office, in a sienna-coloured armchair, and spills her guts onto the limewashed oak flooring, and when they are done, she wades through the viscera, pausing at the door to say “Same time next week?” as if it was not always the same time. As if they would not repeat this dance with a slight variation in choreography.

Ammah's micro-locs were twisted into a snake that coiled down the back of her head and made an attempt on her spine. Anūrī noticed new growth. The new growth would have been there the last time Ammah turned the spotlight on her, but last time, Anūrī was pushing her words out around shallow breaths. After too many exchanges with her father's voicemail culminating in a sleepless night, her mind was black. Ammah's questions chased her around the room. Anūrī saw her without seeing her. Today was different. Anūrī was calm enough to see that it would take her just shy of four hours to retwist Ammah's entire head. She could almost feel the gel on her fingers and they twitched involuntarily until she squeezed them between her knees.

“Do you think a part of you wishes to be immortalised?” Ammah asked, and this was what it meant to be in that room. The

softness of your underbelly was never safe. You simply felt less fraught about it being cut open.

“I think,” Añurị told her, “I would be more open to immortality if it was my choice.”



In Ọdịnani, the traditional religion of the Igbo people, Chukwu is the High God or the Supreme Being, responsible for first determining and then allotting the other deities their roles and tasks. Auntie Nneoma said Chukwu hand selected Añurị to be a conduit for the awe and inspiration of others. That she was God-ordained to open eyes and peel away the veil that allows people to see only filtered versions of themselves—a mirror wrapped in five feet and ten inches of dark skin and darker eyes, topped with copper-streaked hair. Auntie Nneoma said this because she loved Añurị. The truth was more brutal.

There is no perfect way to describe what it means to exist in a body that is not your own, that never really was. To walk on legs, speak with a mouth, a tongue to which others have laid claim. Before Ammah or any of the others, Añurị learned to move through the world gingerly, to tread as if she were made of glass. Understanding that a misstep could mean breaking into unsalvageable pieces. She was accustomed to, but ever disturbed by, eyes sliding in her direction or an elbow digging into the ribs of an oblivious companion. The accompanying whispers.

You play like it doesn't bother you and you almost believe it. Until. Until the first guy you sleep with—an oversized collection of languid limbs whose face you tattoo on the inside of your eyelids because you are craving a connection that has nothing to do with bits and bytes—waits until after he has reached his all-too-hasty climax, then lazily traces the appendectomy scar on your stomach and informs you it looks different in person. His mother, it turns out, is a fan of yours, and he knew parts of your body before *you*

knew he even existed. You cease to be a human then, under his hands, and revert again to a collection of parts; a commodity to be consumed by others. This happens and there is a weekend of blurred half memories lost in the bottom of innumerable bottles; smudged against the rim of martini glasses. The invisible line in the sand—the one separating your online life from your “real” one—bursts into flames. Simi and Loki had picked her up from the floor of a bar bathroom. Anūri sought therapy for the first time four days later.

It was the seeming permanence of the entire thing that hurt the most. No doubt there would come a time when Anūri would fade into the nothingness of human memory, but that knowledge did little to combat the anxiety of knowing she would be accosted again, but never knowing *when*.

Today, Anūri recounted for Ammah how three months earlier, Sade warbled in her earbuds as she considered a shirt in cornflower blue, lifting the matte satin to her skin and wondering if her energy might extend to a trip to the fitting room when suddenly her wrist was wrenched away and the shirt floated to the ground. She knew the girl, the wrencher, meant no real harm. That she was propelled by an excitement that turned unintentionally aggressive, and it mattered not that she waylaid a stranger in a store in the middle of the day. What Anūri also understood was that this girl did not consider her a stranger. You watch enough YouTube videos, spend enough time scrolling the archives of someone else’s life, and you too may feel you know them, that you have some say in how their steps are ordered. This girl showed Anūri her phone, the photos she had saved of Anūri that she and her friends used as memes—private moments reduced to internet punchlines. “It’s you, isn’t it? God, isn’t this amazing?” the girl said. Her friends were going to *die*.

It was then Anūri decided that she had yet to break free of Ophelia. There might be no new content with her name or face; a battle fought and won over a number of agonizing years, but no.

Añurị wanted that which existed to be erased. She wished to be wiped from the annals of Ophelia’s personal yet public history. She left the cornflower shirt on the floor of the store and went to rage then weep at the desk of her lawyer, Gloria, a fellow Igbo woman and the one responsible for steering her through the choppy waters of previous litigation. Añurị told her she needed it all gone: the videos, the blog posts, the merchandise. All of it would have to crumble before she could truly be whole.

“There is no real precedent here. It won’t be easy. Ì màtàlù ife m kwùlù? You have to understand,” Gloria said and when Añurị nodded, she struck a match and began her best to try to burn it down.

Three months. And now it was time for Ophelia to be served. This was not the first fight through which Ammah had guided Añurị. She asked her questions because Añurị was backing away from the flame; refusing to attack this with her usual fervour. Ammah asked if Añurị was dragging her feet.

“More like conserving my energy.” Añurị’s calculated approach was mistaken for reluctance. “I’m picking Noelle up today, so I’ll tell Ophelia about it when I drop her off.”

Her eyes drifted to the brass-rimmed clock on the wall and she cut the session short.



In a world carved from hardness, Noelle was a soft landing. Añurị waited for her outside the school gates where the supermums and the nannies no longer eyed her with the same curious contempt they had been cultivating since she bullied her father into adding her name to the safeguarding pickup list. There were some lukewarm attempts at camaraderie but over her twenty-five years, Añurị’s fake-bitch radar was honed to a knifepoint—a survival technique. Still, she knew that Elisa, the au pair for the Fords, smuggled her boyfriend into her basement quarters three times a week, and that

Briony Gillespie was pregnant with Kid Four despite telling her husband she'd had her tubes tied. She knew that the sixteen-year-old stepson of Charmaine Parker-Green was sending such shock waves of chaos through the family that delicate Char had no other option but to embark on an affair with her husband's business partner. It was fascinating what could be absorbed after mastering the art of being visibly invisible.

That Thursday, the day before Good Friday, London was sitting under a blanket of premature warmth meant for later months. Decks had been hosed down, outdoor furniture hastily assembled, barbecue grills procured and fired up for impromptu gatherings awash with the bewildered gratitude of the English experiencing unexpected heat. Anūri plucked at her shirt and trained her eyes on the exit. Somewhere inside the school, a bell rang. This was not the same place Ophelia and her father had sent her. This place, a sandstone architectural triumph set in a leafy London enclave, was different in that the children here had allotted time for something called “innovate free play,” and model scouts had an ongoing agreement with the faculty and the parents to arrive quarterly and “observe.” The similarities to Anūri's school included the fees, which soared to the tens of thousands for the pleasure of being told that Araminta was—at this time—decidedly plain (“But there's always next year!”).

Because it had always been this way, Anūri felt Noelle before she saw her. On the day she was born, Anūri stared down into the face of the child, her hair already springing into dark and damp coils, and felt part of her soul detach and fuse itself with her sister's. Since then, Noelle had only to breathe and Anūri's heartstrings were pulled taut. The coils were longer now and had lightened in colour, but Anūri still wished to carve the image into her memory; make it indelible: her sister, spotting her by the gate, the realisation moving from trickle to dam break; the miniature uniform hanging on slender brown limbs, the brightness not yet dulled in her eyes. Wishes were for children and hope for the deluded, so Anūri, as