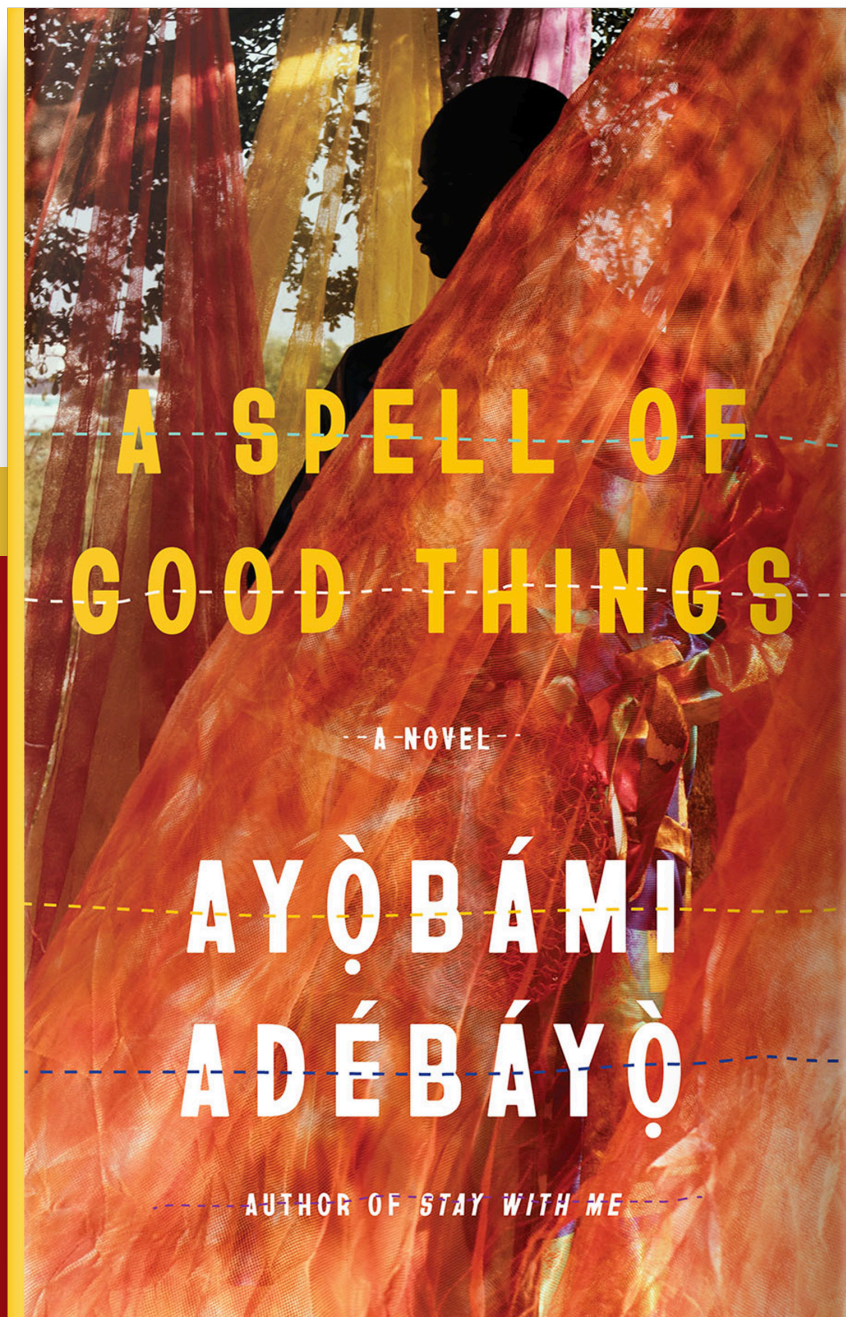


BOOK CLUB KIT





Dear Reader,

The last time you were on a bus or on the train, did you wonder if your life might intersect with the life of the person next to you beyond that random encounter? There's a similar moment in *A Spell of Good Things*. A teenaged boy and a young woman sit in the back of a shared taxi. This is not their first meeting, but only one remembers the other and neither knows all the ways their lives are bound together. This book is mostly about these two people. It is also the story of two families, one rich, the other poor, both all too human. Though it is set in an unnamed city in Nigeria, in my head it's my ancestral hometown. It's the sort of place where lives can intersect across all kinds of divides. I imagine your hometown might also be that kind of place, and I hope you enjoy this novel.

Warmly,

AYÒBÁMI ADÉBÁYỌ



Q&A WITH AYÒBÁMÌ ADÉBÁYÒ

Was there a moment that prompted the concept for *A Spell of Good Things*? What was on your mind as you developed the story and the characters?

A Spell of Good Things began with a detour. At some point in 2012 or 2013, I was on my way home from work and there was traffic on my usual route. The bus driver turned off the thoroughfare into a side street. Soon after, we burst into a neighborhood I'd never been in and found almost unrecognizable. This was in the town my family had lived in since I was eight. The town where I'd gone to secondary school and university. A place I thought I knew. Yet there I was in a neighborhood more decrepit than I would have believed existed close to mine. This experience informed the novel in several ways. It shaped how the story developed.

The idea of “a spell of good things” comes up a few times in the book. Where did this phrase come from?

I tried a few titles that had “good things” at the core. Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* was very important to me as I wrote this book, so I wanted the title of this book to pay homage to that in some way. I was also thinking of what the characters aspire to, what they might consider a good life for themselves and how fragile many if not all aspirations can be.



Emmanuel Iduma

As with your first novel, *Stay with Me*, this book is told primarily from more than one perspective. What draws you to the multi-perspective format? What does this offer the storytelling?

In all, there are nine perspectives in *A Spell of Good Things*. And though most of them appear for just a chapter, each is essential. As a reader, I find the multi-perspective format quite illuminating, particularly when I have the opportunity to see the same character or event refracted through multiple prisms.

When Wúràplá gets engaged, she immediately sees the difference in how the people around her—her family, their friends—treat her. And her younger sister is constantly being reminded to prepare for her own future married life. Is this pressure and incentive to marry something you've encountered in real life?

After one of the events I did for *Stay with Me* in Lagos, a man walked up to me and asked if I was married. I told him I wasn't. He then spent the next few minutes explaining how none of the things I'd accomplished



Q&A (continued)


really mattered until I was married. I found the whole exchange hilarious. Later on, I began to consider how pernicious that kind of perspective and pressure could be if it came from family or friends.

Eniqlá's education seems to be his only hope to get out of poverty. How does his mother's decision to prioritize his sister's school fees affect Eniqlá and his path? What are the options for young people like Eniqlá?

The decision his mother makes is a critical turning point for Eniqlá; it makes him even more vulnerable than he was at the beginning of the book. Another path is available to him in the tailor's shop, but it isn't the one he wants or has envisioned for himself. The way his society is set up leaves young people like him with very limited options, and that's where we find him towards the end of the novel.

How did the experience of writing this book compare to writing *Stay with Me*?

It was challenging in a number of ways, and I enjoyed that. *A Spell of Good Things* is a more expansive book, with many characters and perspectives. Completing *Stay with Me* equipped me for this novel. I think I've grown as a writer from the experience of writing it, and I hope it has prepared me for the book that comes after this one.



“As a reader, I find the multi-perspective format quite illuminating, particularly when I have the opportunity to see the same character or event refracted through multiple prisms.”



QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Revisit the epigraphs that mark the novel's four parts. How do they amplify the themes of the story and set the tone for each section? Consider exploring the works of T. M. Aluko, Chika Unigwe, Helon Habila and Teju Cole. How do they speak in conversation with Adébáyò's novel? Why do you think she selected them as structural elements of the text?
2. Ayòbámi Adébáyò investigates topics such as class, education, family, gender, marriage and domestic violence in her fiction, and this novel touches on them all with complexity and nuance. What is one passage that stuck with you in particular, and why?
3. *A Spell of Good Things* tells the tale of two families whose lives become intertwined without relying on extended physical encounters between them. Revisit the moments when their paths do cross. How would you describe the exchanges? Why do you think Adébáyò chose to keep them brief yet impactful? What do these encounters reveal about the relationship between political elites and the working class in modern Nigeria?
4. Despite their different socioeconomic backgrounds, Èniqlá and Wúràqlá's families both instilled in their children a high regard for education. Why do you think education was an important asset in this society? Do you think its emphasis harmed or hindered the different characters and relationships in the story?
5. Èniqlá's mother is faced with the difficult decision to further the education of one of her children and not the other. What factors influenced her decision? Do you think she made the right choice?
6. Who is Auntie Caro? What is the significance of her connection to Èniqlá and Wúràqlá's families? Why do you think Adébáyò chose to open and close the novel with her?

7. How would you characterize Yèyè's fiftieth birthday party? Joyful and celebratory? Tense? What was your reaction to the party's ending?
8. On page 163, Wúràqlá describes the feeling of being engaged to that of being a celebrity: beloved and valued. What do the reactions to Wúràqlá's engagement reveal about the importance of marriage in this society? How do love, cultural customs and social class shape partnerships? Do all of the novel's characters share the same views on marriage?
9. In the novel, Mótará repeatedly calls her sister "Saint Wúràqlá the Impeccable" (page 226). What are the expectations placed on Wúràqlá and Mótará as the young women of their family? How do they respond to these pressures? What do their reactions reveal about their own values?
10. *A Spell of Good Things* touches on the circumstances that keep women in both abusive and unsatisfying relationships in great depth. What forces keep Wúràqlá from coming forward with her experience of Kúnlé's abuse? How would you characterize the reactions of her sister Mótará and the assumed reactions of her friends? Were they beneficial, or did they fail to fully comprehend the difficulty of her situation? How do the factors keeping Wúràqlá in her relationship compare to the reasoning provided by Yèyè and Ìyá Ẹniqlá for staying in their unhappy marriages? Are there any examples of admirable partnerships in the text?
11. The novel also sheds light on the experiences of men trying to live up to patriarchal standards of masculinity in a world where women are finding empowerment through greater levels of education and financial independence. What differences did you notice between the generation of the novel's parents and their children related to gender roles and the place of women in society? How do the male characters, including Ẹniqlá and his father, Láyí, and Kúnlé, react to this shift?
12. Describe Kingsley. Why do you think he becomes a significant figure in Wúràqlá's life as she reaches the turning point in her relationship with Kúnlé?
13. Central to the novel are the language, traditions and values of the Yoruba people in Nigeria. What did this add to the story and your experience of reading it? Why do you think it was important for Adébáyò to tell the story in this way?
14. Adébáyò writes that Yèyè "had never been able to shake the sense that life was war, a series of battles with the occasional spell of good things" (page 157). Reflect on the novel's title. How does each character cope with this feeling of instability?

RECOMMENDED READING

Stay with Me

Ayòbámi Adébáyọ

Dele Weds Destiny

Tomi Obaro

Half of a Yellow Sun

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

The Thing Around Your Neck

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Little Fires Everywhere

Celeste Ng

Better Never Than Late

Chika Unigwe

Well-Behaved Indian Women

Saumya Dave

What a Happy Family

Saumya Dave

The Performance

Claire Thomas

The Death of Vivek Oji

Akwaeke Emezi

You Made a Fool of Death with Your Beauty

by Akwaeke Emezi

COOK FROM THE BOOK

Chin-chin is a crunchy and delicious Nigerian snack featured in Chapter 17 of *A Spell of Good Things*

Ayòbámi Adébáyò shares her mother's recipe.

INGREDIENTS

- 2½ cups or 13 ounces all-purpose flour
- ¼ teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon grated nutmeg or cinnamon (to taste)
- 1 teaspoon powdered milk
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted
- 1 large egg
- ½ cup water
- ¼ cup or 1.78 ounces granulated sugar (to taste)
- Oil, for frying

STEPS

1. Sift the flour, baking powder, grated nutmeg or cinnamon, and powdered milk into a bowl.
2. Add the melted butter and egg to the sifted ingredients.
3. Fold in the ingredients with a spatula, then rub the mixture with your hands until you achieve a crumbly texture.
4. Gradually add in the water and knead into a dough. Once the dough is formed, transfer it onto a non-sticky surface and knead some more. Transfer the ingredients to a non-sticky surface and knead further.
5. Allow the dough to rest for fifteen minutes.
6. Roll the dough out on your non-sticky surface until it is about ¼ inch thick.
7. Use a knife or pizza cutter to cut the dough into equal-sized cubes or any shape you desire.
8. Preheat oil in a pan; use a generous amount, as chin-chin needs to be deep-fried. Test the temperature with one piece of the cut-up dough. If the oil is hot enough to fry chin-chin, that piece should sizzle and rise to the surface almost instantly.
9. Fry in batches, being careful not to overcrowd the pan.
10. Remove once the chin-chin is paper-bag brown.
11. Scoop into and leave to cool.
12. Enjoy your crunchy chin-chin!