

Nights of the Creaking Bed

Toni Kan

Cassava Republic Press (Sep 10, 2019)

Softcover \$14.95 (192pp)

978-1-911115-84-7

In the fifteen stories of Toni Kan's short story collection *Nights of the Creaking Bed*, characters in contemporary Nigeria navigate struggles including family situations to government corruption. These short sketches—sometimes disturbing, other times bleak or darkly humorous—impart a clear sense of place and have surprising outcomes.

In the suspenseful and atmospheric "The Car They Borrowed," a man opens the door of his new car to find blood on the driver's seat. His history of violence alternates with the events that led to his car being "borrowed" by street criminals who attempt to buy his silence. In "My Perfect Life," a content woman, through unexpected circumstances, reconnects with an old flame who left Nigeria years earlier; she has to choose between a rekindled affair and her stable life.

Many of these stories paint unsettling pictures of characters dealing with taboo emotions. In the eerie "God is Listening," assault and the objectification of women are the focus; in "The Passion of Pololo," a boy witnesses his mother having sex and finds himself drawn to her. "The Harbinger" is a bleak story, both about a father who goes off to war and about the messenger who reports when family members are killed in action. It builds to a brutal and earned turn. Such stories are visceral in detailing the horrors of their characters' predicaments.

The stories' narrators range in gender, age, and circumstances, helping to differentiate entries from one another. Their tragedies are near casual, and their awful predicaments come to seem a rote part of life, which itself seems an obstacle course. Combined, the stories of *Nights of the Creaking Bed* form a memorable, sometimes sad portrait of modern Nigeria.

JEFF FLEISCHER (September / October 2019)

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