FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Clarion Review

General

No One Said It'd Be Easy
Suzette Mawote
AuthorHouse
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Three Stars (out of Five)

No One Said It'd Be Easy is the story of fifteen-year-old Hadjame, a dreamy and sensitive Angolan girl who embarks on a milestone journey to the distant province of Kwanza-Sul where she will attend boarding school for three years. Leaving behind her family and her beloved hometown of Luanda, Hadjame's journey towards womanhood is marked by the electrifying thrill of freedom and independence alongside the bittersweet trials of first love and loss.

Pretty, confident, and driven, Hadjame is determined to focus on her academics despite the rapturous attention she has received from many of the boys at her new school. Over time, Hadjame falls for Wassi, the handsome and relentlessly persistent senior student who has been smitten by Hadjame's pretty features and resolute personality from the very start. Their young love waxes and wanes throughout the novel, Hadjame learning the lessons of love through trial and error.

The daughter of a prominent doctor, Hadjame and her story offer readers a glimpse into the upscale lifestyle of a well-to-do Angolan family. Africa as a poverty-stricken continent marred by political strife and conflict, and the Angolan civil war, are never explored at a deeper, more significant level. The focus of this story is on the minutiae of human interaction—the physical and emotional jostling of adolescents hungry for love. It focuses on those small, defining moments that sometimes leads to great, universal passions. Ultimately, this is the story of a young woman finding her way in the world.

Mawote's focus on Hadjame's journey does reflect a sort of authenticity. A young girl raised in the upper crust of Angolan society may very well be far removed from the struggles of destructive wars; she may be completely absorbed by boys and parties, much like any other teenage girl.

The strength in Mawote's prose lies in careful characterization and attention to detail.

One of the most important and memorable settings in the novel is the boarding school and residence where the boisterous, chaotic vibe of adolescents brimming with sexual tension is conveyed through the timely introductions of energetic male characters. This unification of setting through characterization creates a rich, energetic backdrop for Hadjame's future love trials.

At the same time, much of the novel evokes the sense of being rushed—the reader is carried swiftly from one moment in Hadjame's life to the next with little space and time for reflection or understanding. Hadjame's exposure to the loose environment of adolescent society leaves her with the tension-wrought choice to give in to temptation or to hold tight to her principles. She is enamoured by what she sees and this dilemma is portrayed quite realistically. However, Hadjame's moral character and conservatism is never completely understood. The reader has trouble grasping her nature because Hadjame lacks an introspective view. What motivates her feelings and actions? Seemingly, her upbringing within a caring family is influential in her world view, but her personality needs to be shown through details and specific scenarios to avoid skipping key moments in her personal development in a rush to reach the next stage.

A fresh, illuminating read, this story will be strengthened through further development of plot and character. *No One Said It'd Be Easy* will appeal to adolescent females, but contains mature themes that will also appeal to adult readers.

Shoilee Khan