

"Nwabineli is magic with words." –BOLU BABALOLA,
internationally bestselling author of *Honey and Spice*



A NOVEL

SOMEDAY, MAYBE

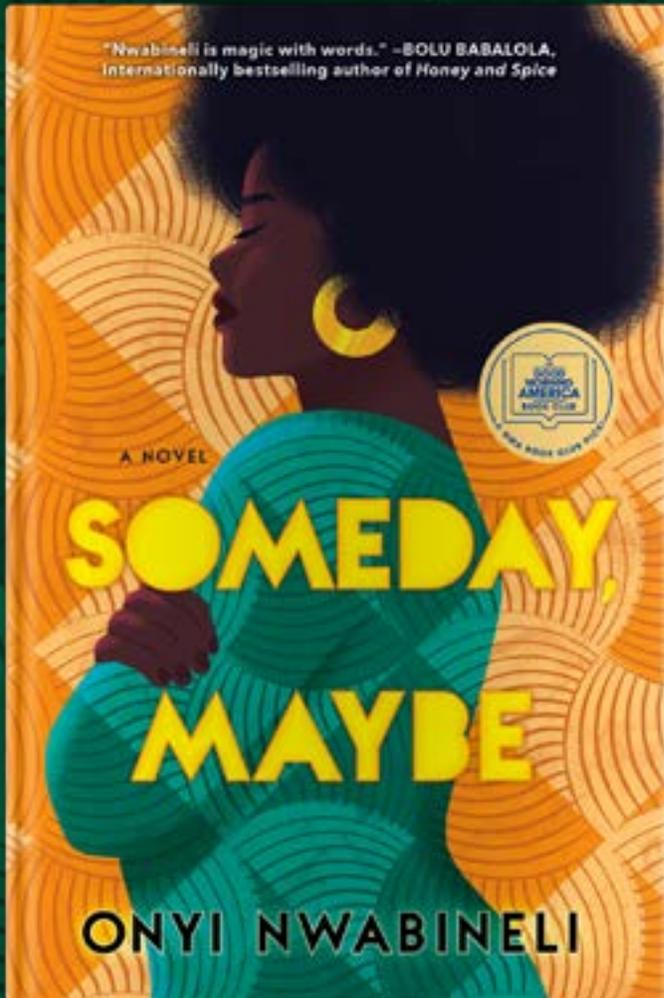
ONYI NWABINELI



GRAYDON HOUSE

SOMEDAY, MAYBE

Here are three things you should know about my husband:



1

He was the great love of my life despite his penchant for going incommunicado.

2

He was, as far as I and everyone else could tell, perfectly happy. Which is significant because...

3

On New Year's Eve, he killed himself.

And here is one thing you should know about me: I found him.

Bonus fact: No. I am not okay.



GRAYDON HOUSE

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Author: Photo: Precious Agbabiaka



Born in Benin, Nigeria, Onyi Nwabineli grew up in Glasgow, the Isle of Man, Newcastle, and now lives in London. An English and Creative Writing graduate, Onyi works in technology and project management. She is co-founder of Surviving Out Loud, a fund that provides survivors of sexual assault with legal assistance, therapy, and temporary relocation. The youngest of three children in a boisterous Nigerian family, Onyi has spent her life immersed

in Igbo culture, is an advocate for the preservation of the Igbo language and can be found brushing up on creative Igbo insults and proverbs in between conference calls. She is a mentor of young Black girls, a prolific hostess of brunch, and a Nigerian-British headwrap aficionado. ***SOMEDAY, MAYBE*** is Onyi's debut and she is currently at work on her second novel.

ONYI NWABINELI

Praise for ***SOMEDAY, MAYBE***

“If you are someone who gravitates toward emotional gut punch reads, allow me to introduce you to this spectacular debut...”

—**BuzzFeed**

“A masterfully woven exposition on love and loss, of the undoing of us, of what it takes to heal. Nwabineli is magic with words, and manages to be at turns biting funny and heart-breakingly gutting. A book that acknowledges despair whilst encouraging hope.”

—**Bolu Babalola,**
internationally bestselling author of *Honey and Spice*

“An excellent choice for book clubs and for readers who enjoy thought-provoking, deeply emotional fiction.”

—**Booklist**, *starred review*

“Onyi Nwabineli’s *Someday, Maybe* is a blistering debut that packs a punch. Phenomenal.”

—**Melissa Cummings-Quarry**,
Black Girls Book Club

“Incisive and witty, this deeply moving debut about the many faces of grief took me on an oscillating journey of emotions. I couldn’t put it down. Each richly developed character leaps off the page with vivid dimension through Onyi’s razor-sharp voice. Fresh and original contemporary fiction from the Diaspora I’ve long yearned for.”

—**Lolá Ákínmádé Åkerström**,
international bestselling author of *In Every Mirror She’s Black*

“A powerful debut novel about young love, profound loss, and the possibility of hope. Onyi Nwabineli is an author to watch.”

—**Brenda Jackson**,
New York Times bestselling author of *The House on Blueberry Lane*

“Nwabineli debuts with a powerful tale of a London widow whose photographer husband died by suicide... The genuine displays of emotion and sharp narrative will keep readers turning the pages.”

—**Publishers Weekly**

“Touching, funny, insightful and, well, beautiful.”

—**Dorothy Koomson**,
bestselling author of *My Other Husband*

“A beautiful and heartbreaking meditation on the layers of grief and love, the complicated expressions of human suffering and the courage it takes to let go the past. There is hope in these pages, and the promise of rebirth after losing so much.”

—**Derek Owusu**,
award-winning author of *That Reminds Me*

“*Someday, Maybe* is an honest and profoundly stirring portrait of loss. Onyi Nwabineli peels back the veneer of sympathy and expectation to reveal the effects a young widow’s grief can have on her family, on her circle of friends, and even on the strangers she encounters. Eve’s emotional paralysis is heartbreaking to witness but at its heart, *Someday, Maybe* is a beautifully written love letter to the resiliency of the human spirit. A stunning debut.”

—**Xio Axelrod**,
USA TODAY bestselling author of *The Girl with Stars in Her Eyes*

“Onyi Nwabineli’s graceful prose carries you through this moving meditation on grief, memory and community. *Someday, Maybe* is an astonishing debut, rich in both heartbreak and humour.”

—**Jendela Benson**,
author of *Hope and Glory*

“*Someday, Maybe* is an intimate, stunning novel. Onyi Nwabineli weaves a tender portrait of grief that attends to the ways that healing is never linear and is a life-long journey for those experiencing loss. At turns deeply poignant and darkly comedic, the novel is a beautiful rendering of an Igbo-British family’s ways of loving and caring for each other in the midst of great personal tragedy. This book will stay with me for a long time.”

—**Jade Benti**,
author of *Rebel Citizen*

“Readers will find grief portrayed realistically as a complex, long-lived creature that embeds itself deeply, shifting but always present... Nwabineli’s first novel is a clear-eyed, compassionate take on grief.”

—**Shelf Awareness**

An excerpt from *SOMEDAY, MAYBE*

PROLOGUE

Around the time my husband was dying, I was chipping ice from the freezer in search of the ice cube tray wedged in the back. But only because I was taking a break from filling his voice mail with recriminations about his failure to communicate his whereabouts. The memory of this along with countless other things would weave together the tapestry of blame I laid upon myself in the days and weeks after his death.

Therefore, in the spirit of continued honesty, here are three things you should know about my husband:

1. He was the great love of my life despite his penchant for going incommunicado.
2. He was, as far as I and everyone else could tell, perfectly happy. Which is significant because...
3. On New Year's Eve, he killed himself.

And here is one thing you should know about me:

1. I found him.

Bonus fact: No. I am not okay.

HOME

I read somewhere once that going through a breakup is like experiencing the death of a partner. They called it a “kind of bereavement.” While there are certain similarities—the spontaneous tears, the despair, the need to press items of clothing to your face and inhale the lingering scent of your beloved—this sentiment is incorrect. Bullshit. Well-meaning, perhaps, but bullshit nonetheless. Of course death trumps breakups. Always. How could it not?

Death makes it impossible for you to demand a list of reasons for the demise of your relationship. Logging on to Instagram to stalk his profile reaps a hollow reward; there will be no updates, no new faces, no experiences lived without you. Your beloved is frozen in time. There are no relapses, unplanned nights of passion wreathed in nostalgia followed by bittersweet, awkward mornings where you navigate the putting on of clothes, suddenly aware your jeans are ripped, your underarms unshaven for the past three weeks.

But the worst thing about death, the thing that makes the comparison laughable, almost cruel, is there is no chance of reconciliation. With death there are no do-overs. No drunk-dialing snowballing into hour-long reminiscences that end in reunion—the kind of sheet-tangling makeup sex that makes you stop in your tracks when you are besieged by a flashback. This isn't something that can be forgiven with a kiss.

With death your suffering is permanent.

When someone you love dies, there's this period of disbelief—a time of dug-in heels, the refusal to process your new reality. A preamble to real Denial, which brings its falsehoods and proclamations of *It's not true* and *Not you, girl. Someone else.*

I spend the first two days after Quentin dies pacing the house, twitching curtains to watch the parade of visitors arriving only to be sent away and dodging the arms of my family, who, after the police finally ceased their questions, begin asking their own. “How could this happen, Eve?”

“Did he have a doctor, Eve?”

“But you saw him that day, no? How did he seem, Eve?” *Eve, Eve, Eve.* My own name becomes a curse. I have no answers for them.

Then, when I learn that there is to be a postmortem, the emotional duct tape keeping me together finally gives way. I take to my bed like a consumptive Victorian lady. And so here I am. I can no longer miss him like I have been, like there’s an end in sight. I am no longer suspended in that terrible limbo. He is gone. The house is silent, his noises conspicuously absent. He is not coming back. The realization keeps hitting me, clubbing me over the head, pounding away at the back of my skull.

It would have been a lot easier to just break up with me. But Q was nothing if not thorough.

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In the film *Run Lola Run*—one of Q’s favorites and eventually one of mine—Lola, the red-haired heroine, sprints through the streets of Berlin in a bid to procure an obscene amount of money to save her hapless boyfriend, Manni. She runs because she has only twenty minutes to secure the cash. During her mad dash to save a man whom, frankly, she might have been better off leaving to perish, she bumps into strangers along the way. The best thing about this film and one of the reasons Q fell in love with it is that we, the viewer, are shown flash-forward sequences depicting the futures of those Lola meets. We are privy to the consequences of Lola’s fleeting interactions with these people and they are often lovely or sad. It’s a wonderful thing to watch and watch it we did, repeatedly, never tiring of Franka Potente’s questionable late-90s fashion or the way we felt when the credits began to roll: spent, like we had done the running ourselves, but also sort of grateful.

I slip our well-worn copy of *Run Lola Run* into the DVD player (because Q insisted that DVDs could live alongside streaming services in perfect harmony) and watch it start to finish in a continuous loop. And I imagine a

series of alternate futures for Q and myself; futures where he lived like he was supposed to. In my little scenes, there are the usual things most married couples imagine for themselves: trips and birthdays, house improvements and career advancements, but mostly I dream of simple things like calling in sick to work so we can spend the day in bed or having someone handle the spiders who act like they pay rent. It's a future full of moments like this I would sell skin to have back.

I focus on the back of Lola's head as she races around a corner and ignore my sister, Gloria, who stands beside my bed with a plate of food I won't eat.

"Eve," she says, "this has to be the sixth time you've watched this today, love." Her voice is gentle. A voice that has quelled a thousand toddler tantrums and stilled courtrooms across the country. She is right to use it here. My behavior is bizarre, and what people cannot understand, they fear, more so when five days prior, the person in question was able to dress herself and form coherent sentences.

I say nothing but reach under his pillow and drag out Q's sleep sweatshirt—a gray thing with frayed sleeves. My stomach bottoms out as soon as I pull it over my head. Wood and soap and the slightly acidic tang of photo-developing chemicals—his own scent. I curl into a ball, desperately pressing the sleeves to my nose, wishing I could conjure him back into existence, and when I start to cry, Gloria draws the duvet up and curls around me until I fall asleep.

• • • • •

To grieve is to frighten the people you love. My behavior seems to have scared my husband's name right out of my family's vocabulary. They treat me like a patient afflicted with a nameless disease. But patient or not, they do not leave me in peace.

"Please try," Gloria stage-whispers from my bedside. Two days have passed since I took to my bed and I have neither spoken nor moved. "Ma is constantly speaking in tongues. If you get out of bed, she'll stop."

My mother loves Jesus. Therefore, she does not get stressed; she gets holy. Straining, I can hear her milling about the kitchen uttering a stream of spiritual gibberish. She must be beside herself. I respond by wrapping Quentin's sweatshirt around my face. Gloria eventually disappears. But not for long. Since I ignore all the advice offered to me—to eat, wash, move—since this particular case of misery eschews company, and since Gloria pioneered Nigerian guile, she sends in my niece and nephew to hold my hands and stare at me with wide eyes until I am moved to sit up.

I drag my heavy limbs into the bathroom, where I spend half an hour in the shower, trying to sluice the cloying stench of loss and sadness from my skin. Using your own children as soldiers to fight your emotional battles is the type of tactic that will see Gloria rule over us all one day.

As I exit the bathroom, I hear my phone ringing and I can be forgiven, can't I, for thinking, just for a second, that it's him. My mind races for the familiar. I know Quentin is dead. But I fall into that gap between reality and memory. I forget about the police and the blood, and my husband's lips—lips I had kissed mere hours before—cold, blue and lifeless. The time I have spent sweating under our duvet evaporates. He is on his way home, swinging by Sainsbury's to pick up a cheesecake in lieu of dinner because he is a man and, as such, lacks the gene that produces common sense. Nobody tells you that irrational hope is a side effect of grief. And they should because it is dangerous.

I run into our bedroom, calling his name, voice made bright by the mad, delusional happiness rearing up inside me; felled when I reach my phone and see Aspen's name flashing on the screen. The mistake hardly warrants my reaction, which is to pause as I understand that it is not, in fact, my husband, but the person I would rather remove my fingernails than address, and then I scream for so long Dad calls in an emergency prescription of diazepam. These are the perks of having a doctor for a father. Hands on my shoulders and my wrists wrestle me from the floor to my bed. My towel slips. My scream turns to a howl.

It turns out you can only scream for so long until you extinguish your own voice. Mine burns itself out like a spent match. I turn my back on my family, who have congregated around my bed and are watching me with matching expressions of horror and helplessness. I am exhausted, but as always when I close my eyes, sleep dances out of reach.

When Dad returns, it is with two pills, which he presses into my palm. I let him hold my hand while I swallow them dry and I wait for darkness. When it comes, I step into it, gratefully blacking out as Gloria calls Dad from the room.

“She’s going to have to speak to Aspen, eventually. She’s his mother.”



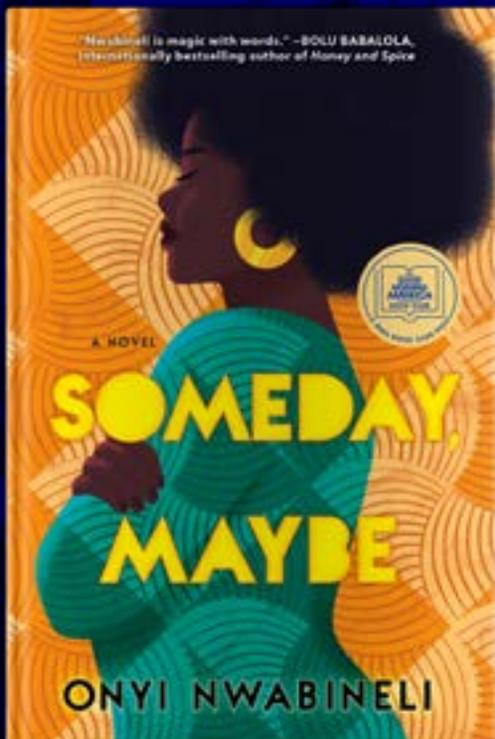
SOMEDAY, MAYBE discussion questions

1. Eve and Quentin meet at ages nineteen and twenty. Do you think their age and lack of romantic experience has any bearing on their relationship dynamic? If so, in what ways?
2. The story begins after Quentin's death. Does knowing he is already gone and that he died of suicide shape the reading experience or color your perception of him in any way?
3. What significance, if any, do you believe Quentin's upbringing and background have on his relationship with Eve and her family, and his inability to voice his struggles?
4. How do you interpret the various manifestations of Eve's grief? When, if at all, do you feel the healing process begins for her?
5. Eve is from a Nigerian (Igbo) background. How do you think her culture influences how she and her family deal with Quentin's death and the grieving process?
6. Eve and Aspen have always had a contentious relationship. How do you feel Quentin's death impacted this? What do you think about the way Aspen and Eve behave in the aftermath?
7. Although Eve and Quentin were unsure about children, Eve learns she is pregnant quite by accident but ultimately decides to keep her baby. What do you think led to this decision? Do you think the same decision would have been made if Quentin was alive?
8. Eve becomes fixated on *She*. Why, out of all of Quentin's work, do you think this particular photograph resonates with her?
9. Despite her promise to Nate, Eve is unable to attend the support group and chooses a life drawing class instead. Why do you think she is so averse to joining the group or seeking out a therapist? Why does art appeal to Eve? Why does she choose to stay in the class?

10. What were your thoughts when it was revealed that Eve had given Aspen half of Quentin's ashes? Why do you think Aspen tried to get Eve to give her more—the ring, the rattle, possibly rights to the baby, etc.?
11. Why do you think Aspen did not acknowledge the happiness and creative achievements Quentin had in his life?
12. Eve meets Luisa and Drew during the life drawing class. What role do they play in Eve's post-Quentin life?
13. Eve and Gloria have always been close. Why do you think Gloria becomes so angry with Eve?

SOMEDAY, MAYBE

Don't miss this stunning and witty debut novel about a young woman's emotional journey through unimaginable loss, pulled along by her tight-knit Nigerian family, and the love and laughter she shared with her husband.



Available November 1!


GRAYDON HOUSE