



Diana Evans

26a
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Q: To what degree is *26a* an autobiographical novel?

A: It was inspired by a personal bereavement so in that sense it is autobiographical; and I did draw from memories and sensations from my own childhood. But I would be uncomfortable calling it a portrait or a blueprint of my life. When you are using autobiographical material in fiction, it is absolutely necessary that you distance yourself enough from the subject so that it becomes something of its own, nothing to do with you, so that the imagination can take flight and all kinds of unexpected twists and turns of plot and character come into play. This is what happened with *26a*.

Q: *26a* shares some qualities with magical realist fiction. Have you been influenced by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Salman Rushdie, Isabel Allende, and other magical realist writers? Or does this quality flow into your work more from African folk-tales?

A: I would not attribute either source to the 'magic realist' aspects of the novel. It's simply the way I write. I love the supernatural, and I am enthralled by writing that dares to venture into the impossible or fantastic. It's great fun and takes the writer and the reader into another world, which is what fiction should do. However I do have an interest in African folk-tales; even an unwitting, innate knowledge of them, which is to do with being half Nigerian.

Q: *26a* is, in many ways, about the search for identity—who we are as separate beings and who we are in our connections to others. What interests you about this search?

A: I am very interested, simply, in the human struggle to be who we are, who we really are. There are so many expectations placed upon us, so many restricting places in which we are supposed to place ourselves in order to function in the world. There is often a struggle to hold on to who we are through all of this; either we lose the struggle and we are lost, almost deadened, or we simply don't survive at all. I'm very interested in this difficult intersection, and how it manifests in people's lives.

Q: Why did you decide to move the action of *26a* from London to Nigeria and back again?

A: I wanted to see what might happen to Georgia and Bessi in another place, their mother's homeland. I suppose I wanted to bring to life certain aspects of a mixed race childhood. And at that point in the novel I needed something huge to happen, a turning point that would change the twins forever. I thoroughly enjoyed writing the Nigeria section.

Q: What were the most pleasurable and most challenging aspects of writing your first novel?

A: The most challenging was definitely in conquering fear, facing this great daunting task of writing a novel and making it the best it could possibly be. The most pleasurable, ironically, was actually conquering that fear, entering into the dark hazy world of the book, and letting myself go, swim around, float, let my imagination run wild. I loved that feeling of absolute freedom. It was incredibly powerful.