



26a

By Diana Evans
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Introduction

In this haunting tale of innocence lost, Diana Evans evokes, with unforgettable vividness, the wonders and terrors of childhood and growing up. Identical twins Bessi and Georgia Hunter create a private universe in the attic room at 26a Waifer Avenue in a drab, lower-middle-class section of London. Here they sit back to back when making important decisions and hatching dreams (will their parents get divorced? how will they create their flapjack empire?) and share an intimacy, a mystical sense of connection, that they feel will bind them forever. But theirs is not an innocence immune to the tensions arising from their Nigerian mother's distracted nostalgia for the home she left behind and their British father's drunken rages. When the Hunter family returns to Sekon, Nigeria, Georgia has a terrifying encounter with a night watchman that plunges her into a world of inner separation, self-consciousness, and painful secrecy and that pushes the novel to its harrowing conclusion. At once playful and serious, magical and real, *26a* explores the ties that bind family members and extend from

this world to the beyond.

Questions for Discussion

1. In a dream William Gladstone tells Georgia that "one day you will see that there are no answers, only the places we make" [p. 30]. What does he mean, exactly? In what ways are place—and displacement—important in the novel?
2. Why doesn't Georgia tell Bessi about being sexually assaulted by Sedrick? Might her life have turned out differently if she hadn't kept this awful secret to herself?
3. Is Georgia's suicide attributable chiefly to her sexual assault? What other causes might have contributed to it? How does the attack change her?
4. In what ways does the deep connection—the emotional telepathy, the oneness in twoness—between Bessi and Georgia change over the course of the novel?
5. What does *26a* suggest about gender relations—about the differing ways men and women view sex and love? How are women treated by men in the novel?
6. Why does Evans include the story, told by Ida's father, of the "evil twins" Ode and Onia [p. 76-77]? In what ways does Bessi and Georgia's story parallel the folk tale? Are we meant to see Georgia's death in mystical or supernatural terms?
7. How is Evans able to recreate so vividly the feel of childhood—all the whimsical imaginings, grand plans, secret dreams and fears that children have?
8. Bel describes their father as a "repressed male animal" who didn't "answer his demons . . . And now they're eating him up" [p. 116]. Is she right? How does this statement explain Aubrey's behavior? Does Georgia answer *her* demons?
9. When Jay asks Bel if Nne-Nne is a "real gran," Bel explains that when people get lonely they sometimes imagine a special person who will make them feel better. "If you imagine it hard enough, it becomes a real thing" [p. 163]. In what ways does *26a* demonstrate both the powers and the dangers of the imagination?
10. In what ways can *26a* be read as an extended meditation on the theme of connection and separation?

About the Author

Diana Evans has worked as a journalist and arts critic, contributing to *Marie Claire*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Observer*, and the *Independent*. Her short fiction has appeared in a number of anthologies. She lives in London, England. *26a* is her first novel.