

And Then He Sang a Lullaby

Ani Kayode Somtochukwu

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Ani Kayode Somtochukwu's novel *And Then He Sang a Lullaby* interrogates love, secrecy, and a revolution in Nigeria.

August's mother died in childbirth; he blames himself. His father is distant and inconsolable, and his sisters push him in school so he can pass down his family name. All pressures considered, August is afraid to accept that he is gay. That fear dominates his encounters with other men. Although he has friends who make him question himself (including June, whom he kisses), August rejects them due to internalized shame. His Catholic background and the tumultuous political environment contribute to his uncertainty and fear.

At August's opposite is Segun, who sustains physical bullying due to his outward flamboyance. Segun is loud and proud about his identity. His mother is an activist, and he follows her example with gusto. But he has his own troubled history: his ex, Tanko, was avoidant of their relationship, and was later beaten and distanced himself from Segun. Like Tanko, August has trouble asserting himself and defending others. He is a track runner, and some of his friends make fun of boys like Segun.

Segun and August fight over their different approaches to life, even as they form a heartwarming, supportive bond. Their community is fraught with violence and political and sexual intrigue. The novel shifts between their perspectives, revealing how religion, self-repression, colonialism, tradition and nonconventional relationships impact them both. August is pulled between his desire to be a good son, his pining for other men, and his fears of persecution and alienation; this leads to heart-wrenching scenes revealing longing, hesitance, and internalized shame.

In the novel *And Then He Sang a Lullaby*, a man learns to love and accept himself despite dire circumstances and violent intolerance.

ALI ORTIZ (May / June 2023)

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