

# NECESSARY FICTION



ELOGHOSA OSUNDE

ALSO BY ELOGHOSA OSUNDE

*Vagabonds!*



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*Eloghosa Osunde*

RIVERHEAD BOOKS | NEW YORK | 2025



RIVERHEAD BOOKS

An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC

1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019

[penguinrandomhouse.com](http://penguinrandomhouse.com)



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Portions of this work first published in slightly different form as “Good Boy” in *The Paris Review* (2020); “Blackhole” in *Somesuch Stories* (2024); and “Last Life” in *Atmos* magazine (2023).

Cover design: Lauren Peters-Collaer

Cover art: Based on *My Brother's Keeper*, 2021 by Affen Segun / Courtesy of the Eisenhower Gallery

*Book design by Nerylsa Dijol, adapted for ebook by Estelle Malmed*

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Osunde, Eloghosa, author.

Title: Necessary fiction : a novel / Eloghosa Osunde.

Description: New York : Riverhead Books, 2025.

Identifiers: LCCN 2024039378 (print) | LCCN 2024039379 (ebook) | ISBN 9780593851203 (hardcover) | ISBN 9780593851210 (ebook)

Subjects: LCGFT: Queer fiction. | Novels.

Classification: LCC PR9387.9.O8663 N43 2025 (print) | LCC PR9387.9.O8663 (ebook) |

DDC 823/.92—dc23/eng/20250511

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024039378>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024039379>

Ebook ISBN 9780593851210

The authorized representative in the EU for product safety and compliance is Penguin Random House Ireland, Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68, Ireland, <https://eu-contact.penguin.ie>.

pid\_prh\_7.1a\_152481315\_co\_ro

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



*For:  
Ivie & Didi,  
Kaiso & Beast  
& for you, who choose life*

# CAST OF CHARACTERS

*Ziz*

Karabo (partner to Ziz)

Maro (best friend to Ziz)

Idris (member of Truth Circle)

Leke (member of Truth Circle)

Tega (father to Maro)

Hassan (lover of Tega)

Akin (musician)

Ayinke (mother to Akin, wife to Ajimobi)

Ajimobi (husband to Ayinke, father to Akin)

Alhaji (lover of Maro)

Jekwu (partner to Maro)

Awele (writer, lover of Yemisi)

Yemisi (lover of Awele, daughter of stars)

Isoken Nomayo (mother to Awele)

Nogie Nomayo (father to Awele)

Ifechi Adams (actor, mother to Yemisi)

Tajudeen Adams (director, father to Yemisi)

Oluchi (student at Woodside)

May (DJ, convener)

Justina (twin, flatmate to May)

Regina (twin, flatmate to May)

Aunty G (aunty to the twins)

Psalm (lover of Asang)

Asang (lover of Psalm)

Love (lover of Psalm)

Black (player at Under Construction)

Kelechi (player at Under Construction)

Yolanda (player at Under Construction)

I.

## FAMILY ALBUM



We were born from beauty. Let no one mistake us for the fruit of  
violence—but that violence, having passed through the fruit, failed  
to spoil it.

—Ocean Vuong

This is kind of how we get through our lives: we tell ourselves stories  
so that what's happening becomes something we can live with.  
Necessary fictions.

—Lidia Yuknavitch

Not trying to get by, I'm trying to get free.

—Mereba

I kneel into a dream where I am good & loved.  
I am good. I am loved. My hands have made some good mistakes.  
They can always make better ones.

—Natalie Wee

## GOOD BOY

I've always had a problem with introductions. To me, they don't matter. It's either you know me or you don't—you get? If you don't, the main thing you need to know is that I am a hustler through and through. I'm that guy that gets shit done. Simple. Kick me out of the house at fifteen—a barged-in-on secret behind me, a heartbreak falling into my shin as I walk—and watch me grow some real useful muscles. Watch me learn how to play all the necessary games, good and ungood; watch me learn how to notice red eyes, how to figure out when to squat and bite the road's shoulder with all my might. Watch me learn why a good knife (and not just any type of good, but the moralless kind, the fatherlike kind) is necessary when you're sleeping under a bridge. Just a week after that, watch me swear on my own destiny and insist to the God who made me that I'm bigger than that lesson now; then watch my ori align. Watch me walk from that cursed bridge a free man and learn how to really make money between age damaged and age twenty-two; watch me pay the streets what I owe in blood and notes (up front, no installments); watch me never lack where to sleep again. Second thing to know about me: I know how to make the crucial handshakes. Third thing: I no dey make the same mistake twice. Almost evict me from my place in Surulere at age X and watch rage stab me forward. Watch how in three weeks, I treat my own fuckup with not just a room but an apartment four times as big in Gbagada. The how is irrelevant. Fourth thing: I am serious about being alive. Because of this, there is nothing I can't survive. Anybody who knows me knows that; the rest na breeze. It is my God-given right to be here. This life? Me, I must chop am, and it must be on my own terms. What



makes all this worth it, otherwise? Nothing. Someone I know joked just two days ago sef, that even if I end up in hell at the end of the day, I won't stop kicking, I won't stop reaching for something, I will insist on my space. In reality, I'm not the kind of guy who ends up in a place like that because fifth thing: I'm not the kind of guy who believes in hell, or in a god who imagines a lake of fire. I just can't see it—you have a mind that's wider than the sky and that is what you use it to picture? To me, that sounds too petty, too human, too undivine to be real. People sell all kinds of gods all the time. I know the One that moves me and it's not the one I was raised on. To me, you can't say you're love, choose to roast people for eternity, and then pretend it breaks your heart. Pick a side. Anyhow, the guy said the hell thing to make a point and it's true—luck finds my head, business competes with my blood on who keeps me best, and either might fail depending on the day. So now, I always wonder: What do people want to use my name for? It will not buy you anything. Name-drop me and they'll still redirect you to me. In that sense, it's irrelevant to know. I answer a first name only and it's for the people I know. But my story? Ah, damn. Now, that? That, many people can do a whole lot with.

Start here: I'm not inspiring. When I first moved to Lagos, I didn't come here with good mind. I came here with one mission and one mission only: to get a lot of money, so as to prove my popsy wrong. That's all. For me, blood family doesn't mean shit. Family is your spine dividing into four, hot metal in your back, red life shooting out of you in a geyser. It's you falling forward in slow motion, a yelp in your neck, whole outfit ruined in the air. You, reading this, you're here, alive, because your parents synced and you showed up. That's it. Even if they planned for a child, it was still a raffle draw. A hand went in a bowl and picked you. The tree shook and a fruit fell down. If it pains you to read, then cry. It's deeper for your mum because she probably pushed so hard her body gasped, only for your ungrateful head to come out of it. But your father? Half the time, all he did was grunt and drop some bands. And on the way to where I am, what I learned is that anybody with money can drop money. And most men, ehn? Can drop money. Even poor

men. That's something I wish my mother had known so she wouldn't have but-at-leasted herself into the ground. Money loves circles and men run in circles stinking, adrenaline pumping. Money hardly goes to lone dots, unless you threaten it. And even then, believe me when I tell you it probably took a hundred-person team to execute that threat, most of them unnamed. The face of a thing is not the body of it. Even women with serious money—few and far between dots—have to pretend they don't have. There's a reason, you know? It's in the code; it'll take a new world for that to stop being true. Men with small money will still impress each other over beer, men with medium money will find ways to barter, and men with large money will slice this country like cake if they get sad enough, bored enough. Dropping money is all tied to pride and they taught us that we need pride. So for many of us, that act alone—of rescuing someone, of fulfilling a duty, of settling a debt—pumps blood somewhere specific.

When I lost home, my goal was simple. All those insults that my father used to be casual about, I wanted to erase them. I wanted to outdo him so that when people called our family name there would be more to say about me than about the man who picked me up as a boy and stretched me into a man in the space of an afternoon. I was on the streets so fast it felt like I dreamed those memories of the Man reading a newspaper, the Head of the House watching the news, the Father petting the koboko like something safe. He beat the sound out of all of them, so those days when I used to play my mind back wondering if things could have been different, I met more bite than bark. But he hardly talked anyway, except to say things like *You won't amount to anything*, so it's not like I was missing much. He was furious a lot, which makes sense. People are like that when they hate themselves.

He was wrong about what he said, though. Embarrassingly wrong. What I have amounted to can buy who he was at least twice. My father was a well-educated man, a man who had a *should-be-so* for everything. The table *should be* set so, all family members *should be* at home by seven P.M., breakfast *should* always include eggs, a wife *should be* this way, a husband *should be* that. Dutiful, he never excused himself from his own hand. The

one time he was unable to pay our school fees and our mother offered, the house did a headstand and blood rushed into our brains, I swear. We sat at home that term. That's what *should* can do. About me, he believed I should be grateful he chose to raise me, having noticed my *softness* from early; he believed I owed him something and feared that if I didn't love the way he prescribed for me, I'd ruin my life. Funny, because his love tied his hands often; his love made an army out of us. That day when he walked in on me and my classmate, I saw him fight himself to the ground. What followed was what he thought he *had* to do. He questioned every feeling, tested it for fitness. If he didn't think it would suit a man his size, he'd treat it like a son, send it away with its head bowed. Rage was good, rage was a feeling with a hard core and some biceps. So, a beautiful rainfall of blows. What kind of weak father would have no problem with what he saw? What kind of weak man would see such a thing and let his son go free? *Look at yourself*, he kept saying, staring me down. *Look at yourself. You've destroyed the family name*. I dropped the family name after four years away. They can keep it. It stopped meaning anything to me. Any weight put on my name since then comes straight to me. Is for me. Just me.

He used to say, *It's as you make your bed that you lie in it*. I sleep in a made bed every night. King-size. It's someone else's job to make it. He also loved to say, *Any man who comes back home after seven P.M. is a thief*. Some days, I leave home to work at seven P.M. because I can. Na me get my life. I'm many things but a thief is not one of them. The easiest way to put what I do in context is to quote Jay-Z: *I'm not a businessman. I'm a business, man*. Everywhere you look around you, there are gaps in markets. I see them and fill them. That's what I do. I did some shady things in my earlier days, I can't front, but those ones are not for the books. When popsy first kicked me out, I went to my uncle's house—a pastor—and he housed me. I don't discuss those years for good reason. Let's just put it like this: everything that was "holy" in me left me there. Na there my eye first tear. So when I left, I worked with churches, supplying actors for dramatic miracles. I trained them from experience—taught them how to faint, how to roll their

eyes into their heads, when and through where exactly the spirit should flee. Pastors rushed it. Me and my guys got our first place in Opebi with the money we made. We paid two years' rent, cash down. I'm sure the landlord thought we were Yahoo boys, but why question cold cheese when you can just shut up and feed your family? After that, as a side gig, me and my guys used to move shrooms in on a steady. People went crazy for that. We opened a barbershop in V. I. briefly, but they shut it down when the queues became too long. They said we were doing illegal shit, but really, one of us was a therapist and many men needed somewhere to talk on a low. After that, I used to organize people for VIPs. My friend was a sitting politician's son, so he plugged it. As for how we run things, Wizkid don already talk am: *I know bad guys that know real bad guys that know some other guys*. We made a low-key app with photos and specifications—twins, triplets, dark-skinned, mixed race, BBW, gay men, drag queens, lesbians, kinksters, all sorts. All our clients needed to do was tap the screen and a fee would appear. Whoever they chose would be on the next flight in. It's not mouth I'll use to tell you how much money we pulled from that. It's not a small job to guard a tall gate. If you know, you know. But over time, it became too heavy, because secret yato si secret, kink yato si kink, and if you know anything about underbellies and darkness, you know their everlastingness. The deeper you go underground, the darker it gets, because the more they trust you with. And you know what? In life, you have to be careful who you allow to trust you; you have to know where to stop before life stops you.

Now I run a souvenir shop. I sell fridge magnets from all sorts of countries, for people who lie to their partners about traveling abroad for work. If you lie like that, you need supporting gifts. I woke up one day, saw the gap, and did quick maths. We fly things in from all over, daily. We have our own duty-free—everything from perfumes to whiskey to Montblanc to Swarovski to Crème de la Mer and La Prairie dem—you name it. Now, it's not just husbands and wives who use us. It's people who lie to their parents about what they do and how much they earn and how much they travel (and dem plenty). We found a guy who's a wizard with Photoshop, hooked him

up. Now we also have a photography studio to complete the whole deal. We work with low-key hotels, too, for those who need where to hide until the lie expires. Just last week, we sorted out an influencer who wanted to turn her Instagram around but didn't have the funds for it. After she filled the forms, our photographer took the pictures and placed her in multiple locations in all the countries she said she wanted to travel to. From this Lagos here, she was posting photos of herself on the plane, at the airport, in the cities themselves. Our plugs do the legwork and get their cut. In the photo I like the most, the babe is sitting in the Rock Zanzibar and there are prawns inside her mouth that she never tasted. In the next grid, her internet self is in Sandton Skye with a friend, eating risotto and drinking sauvignon blanc at the Codfather. They posted it from 1004 here. The week after, we dipped her Insta self in Lac Rose in Senegal. Come and see comments. Her leg has never touched there, the water doesn't know her skin, but who must know? She gained thousands of followers from that move, because image. Everything in this life is what? Image. These days, people always talk about getting a seat at the table, putting a foot in the door. Me? I make doors out of thin air.

In my life, I have never put on long-sleeve shirt, lined my own collar with a tie, knotted it and pulled it up to my neck. I've never worn suit in this Lagos heat or carried briefcase to any office, and since I turned twenty, not once has landlord knocked on my door for rent. I know I'm lucky, trust me, but when people look down on me for being me, I just know their brains are small. If you think it's only hard work, and not smart work, that will keep your life together in this country, then you're a fool now. Are you not? You're a fool. We started this thing last year. So far I've seen over two hundred clients, and we don't charge chicken change. Why does it work? Because there's always a market for lies. It's the demand that makes the supply necessary. The other day, somebody asked me what I'll do after this and I told him I don't know. I always know; I just don't discuss my moves before I move. My next target market is already set. Never forget: wherever there are people, there are opportunities, and anything can be doctored so far you know who to call doctor.

Me and my partner live in a six-bedroom house in Lekki, except for when we're at our beach house in Ilashe. We got this place when he moved from Jozi to come and be with me. He's half from there and half from here. When we got tired of the distance, we had to choose. In that his old apartment in Maboneng, all it took was one look at each other and K laughed because he already knew. We didn't even table the question twice; his bags were here a month from then. Between me and K, we can afford to live nice on some expat shit because he has never not earned in dollars, and for him, work is a drug. If you step outside our front door, we have two Mercedes-Benzes parked in a line. Behind the Benzes a Bentley, behind the Bentley a Lexus convertible that was just delivered last month. We bought it together, tear rubber. All this and thirty is not that far behind me. Next is a G-Wag. K doesn't know yet, I'm surprising him with it for his thirty-eighth, and I know he'll cry. We like cars, both of us, but his own is different. He knows everything about engines and wiring and all. Me, I collect them because I can. In a way, your car is like a second outfit. My wardrobe is full of casual things, but I'm always making statements. Short, memorable statements. Clothes are just one way to tension streets. But a mad whip is a great way to say, *Don't fuck with me*, and here the streets need to hear that in pidgin, Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, plus many other languages. For everyday things, we ride either Benz. Both are tinted, with customized plates. Police have not checked our licenses or car papers in years. To them, our names are Chairman, and why wouldn't it be when we're more government than their governor? *Here, this one for you. This one for the kids*. We keep them happy and they save us stress. For parties where there will be VIPs, we use the Bentley and leave with the right business cards. Me and K wear rings, but people don't ask personal questions when they see what you've come out of. We bought that right to go unchallenged. It was not cheap. When I'm going somewhere chilled with K, we take the Lexus and drop the top. Still so new, it gives me what they call...endorphins. Me and K love watching sunsets like that. When he falls into his dark moods, I take him on long drives and he blasts the music until the mirror starts beating and we can't hear our heads.