



# Medicine Man

*Ibeh Liedstrand-Nwokocha*

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## **Medicine Man** Ibeh Liedstrand-Nwokocha

When we meet Obioma as a child in 1983, he is threading his way through the centre of rush hour Owerri, South East of Nigeria, with its cacophony of traffic, people, market traders and amplified music, in search of 5.00 Naira. This is the price of entry to the school's effort at winning a French song competition, instigated by the charismatic Mr Success. We immerse ourselves into his chaotic and exciting life. The mesmerizing smile of Nneka, Obioma's childhood sweetheart, adventures with Kalu, his best friend and possibly the cleverest person in the universe. Then the rural village, Umuwe, from which Obioma's family hails. There his uncle, Iwuagwu, a traditional healer, starts to initiate Obioma into the centuries old profession of traditional medicine. When the young school-mates, Obioma and Kalu, conceive a way to make 80 million Naira by growing and harvesting palm-nuts and making palm-oil, they painstakingly work and save towards this goal over the next few years. As a result, Kalu is drawn into his older half-brother, Benjamin's, use of his vulcanizing business as a front for swindling, through running errands and carrying messages for him to the teenage girls he routinely deflowers. Meanwhile, Nneka, having struggled to avoid being sucked into the nexus of providing sex for favours from older men by which her fellow-university students finance their studies, succumbs when her mother falls sick and needs what seems like a fabulous amount of money – 800,000 Naira - for an operation. Over the course of two decades more tectonic plates move, and on a pivotal day Obioma joins one of the swelling crowds of hundreds marauding through the city with toppled burning cars lit up in their wake. Obioma, spade in hand, has become a truth-seeker. Who knows where the bodies are buried? Even for a country whose pre and post-Independence history has been as turbulent as Nigeria's, the ten years covered by this novel - 1983-93 - will be remembered as a period of unprecedented social change. The novel is not, however, a record of the political upheavals that marked this period, so much as a dramatization of their effects and consequences on ordinary people in a particular place.

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