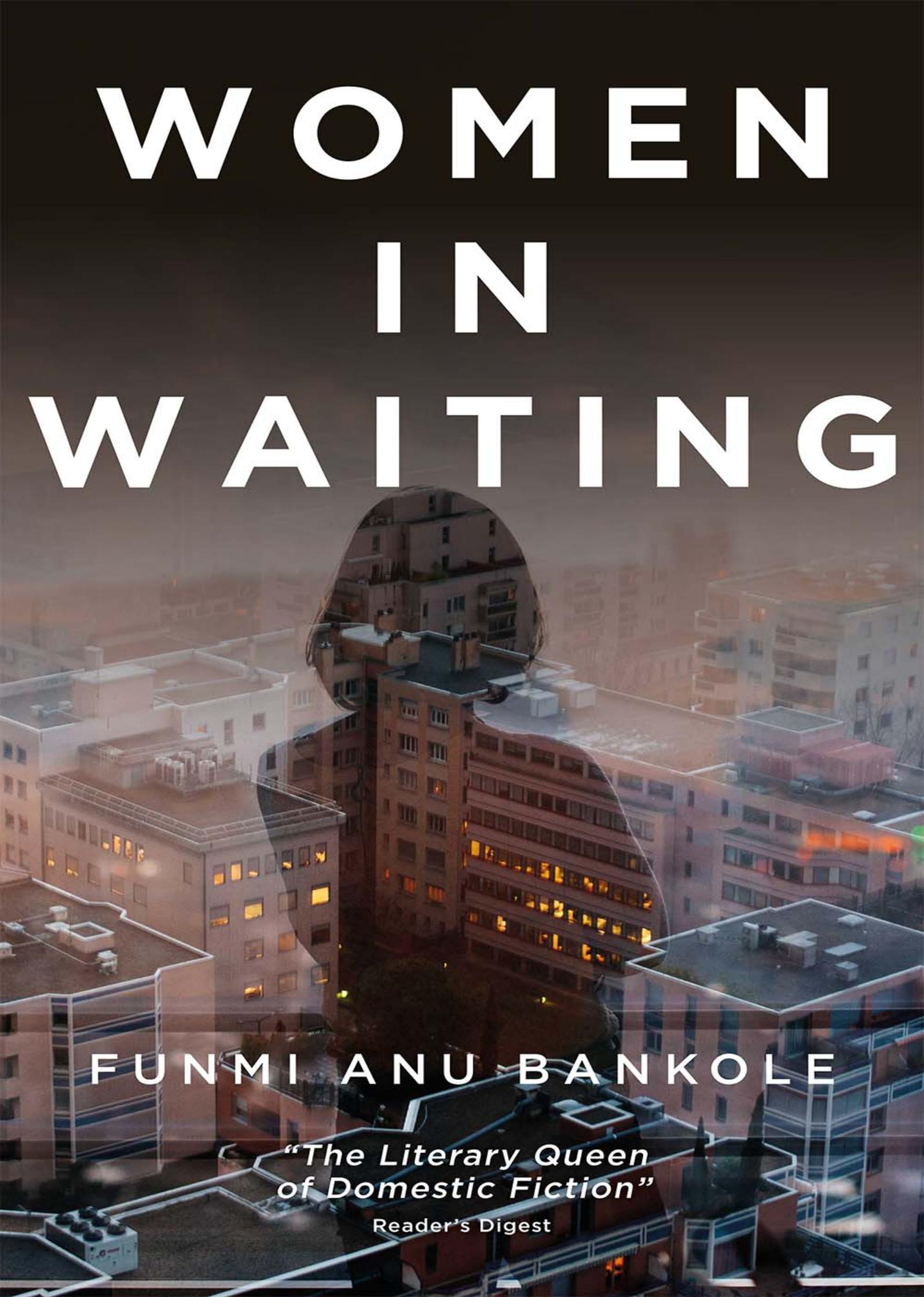


WOMEN IN WAITING

An aerial photograph of a city at dusk or dawn, with buildings and streets visible. A large, dark, irregular shape, resembling a shadow or a hole in the sky, is superimposed over the center of the image. The text 'WOMEN IN WAITING' is written in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the top of the image.

FUNMI ANU BANKOLE

*"The Literary Queen
of Domestic Fiction"*

Reader's Digest

WOMEN IN WAITING

BY

FUNMI ANU BANKOLE

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Chapter 1

The Test

A whole year has passed again; the tenth for Daly and Lara Smith as a married couple. Daly's blissful memories of falling in love with the most adorable woman ever were now almost crashing off the stage. He had suggested that they both wait for three years after marriage before considering having a baby. His plan was to make sure they were capable of taking care of themselves alongside a baby or babies, too. Seven years had since gone down the drain and Lara still wasn't pregnant. She will be 40 in three years' time and this adds to the pressure of wanting her own child, desperately.

The attendants in Straight-Gate Clinic had called numerous times for Daly to come and take his fertility test but, for the most part, he never showed up. Lara, at some point, had taken this as a signal that he was avoiding the truth and didn't want to seek help. She became furious with him and was now determined not to give him rest.

"You have to visit the clinic this weekend. You have to! Just clear your schedule for it," Lara said as she walked into the kitchen, noticing his shadow stretching towards the dining table.

"This weekend?" Daly asked.

"Yes, this weekend. Or have you got another appointment like you always have?" she said in a mocking tone.

"Okay, I will go. Just remind me."

...

The nurses and auxiliary nurses in the clinic had just finished their morning brief when Daly entered through the ICU access point. The reconstruction of the main entrance had taken longer than expected but Daly made it on time for his test.

"Good morning," he said.

"Look who we have here: Mr Daly Smith. How are you today? My name is Linda," The slim matron said to him as she led him to the clinic's fertility lab.

"Thanks, ma'am. And for the calls. I would like to apologise; I was always busy each time they came in."

“Okay. You are here now and that is all that matters,” Linda said while handing over his file to the lab attendant.

Daly couldn't sit still. He immediately stood up from his seat and approached the lab attendant, saying that he would love to take a walk outside the lab. The ever-smiling attendant nodded and told him she would come and get him when the time comes. But as he was about to leave, another attendant with a deep baritone voice called his name.

“Mr Daly! Please come over.”

He didn't argue since this was why he had come in the first place. He walked into a room filled with machines and was given a test container.

“Please sir, we need your semen sample in this container. Kindly be fast about this. Thanks,” the male attendant, who had earlier called on him, explained.

There really wasn't anything harmful in releasing his semen for the test. What uneased Daly was his uncertainty over the outcome of the test. Lara, on several occasions, had gone for these tests and the doctors had found nothing wrong with her. It was from these tests that she became suspicious of him being the root cause of her childlessness. For seven good years he had refused to visit any hospital or specialist and even when he drove Lara to some of her family planning tests, he made sure he left immediately when the doctors began to attend to her and returned minutes before her sessions were over.

Daly did as he had been instructed and a few minutes later he was called again—but this time by an elder nurse who directed him to an office with a sign on the door reading ‘Dr F. Richards’. The curiosity in Daly's eyes made him focus his attention only on Dr Richards' mouth. He took note of his cracked lips and how uneven the lower lip was in comparison to the upper lip. Dr Richards was such a fleshy man.

“Mr Daly, the result simply shows that you are fine and in good condition. You are okay. There is no reason you can't father a child,” the doctor announced.

Nothing aside from this would have made Daly feel like a man again. For so long, he had carried an unloving fear of being the probable cause of their barrenness. But Dr Richards had confirmed with hard evidence that he wasn't. He returned home late that night and met Lara, who was sitting on the chair directly facing the entrance. All Lara expected was for him to come out plain and join her in battling their childlessness but he proved her wrong on one of her conclusions: he wasn't infertile.

“Baby, the doctors said I am fine and okay. We both are fine,” Daly shouted as he hugged her.

A rush of guilt instantly shot through Lara’s body. She felt guilty for wrongly accusing him about her childlessness all along. As she held onto him, tears ran down her cheeks. She had loved him even when no one believed she did and she wondered how did she ever get to the point of doubting him. She inwardly begged for forgiveness and held on to him until he made signs of being pressed. Daly knew that the results weren’t the solution to their problem but, at least, it was proof that they were fine and could work together in making things work for them.

Daly closed his eyes and a sense of relief overwhelmed him. He wondered to himself how he would have been able to look his wife in the eyes and say to her, “I am infertile”. What a statement, but somehow he had been saved from having to say that. He waited to collect the letter from the reception as proof of his test. In this circumstance, it was not enough to confirm by word of mouth; hard evidence would be needed. Lara dropped him at the doctor’s clinic and then set off for the office.

Six months later, Lara realized her monthly flow hadn’t come. She needed to be sure it was what they both had been anticipating so she asked Daly to stop by at the mall and get her a self-pregnancy test kit. Their hands shook as they administered the test in the toilet. It was a ‘two blue dotted line’ result and both Daly and Lara screamed and hugged each other tightly. She was pregnant and, the following day, Dr Richards confirmed that the pregnancy was eight weeks gone already. Lara’s colleagues took it upon themselves to help her with some of her office duties and Daly also made her comfortable at home. He would leave work early to drive her back home and made sure she relaxed while he did the majority of the house chores. It wasn’t that she couldn’t do any of these chores but Daly insisted that she shouldn’t.

The little angel whose face both Lara and Daly daily imagined bonded the couple more than ever before. Daly became a regular at home and Lara always informed him about everything happening around her. It was a heart-warming phase, recognising that they, too, were going to become parents. Everything was going well until the pregnancy entered its sixteenth week. On this day, Lara felt uncomfortable going to the office and put a call through to her HR superintendent that she needed to take some rest. She made a plan to visit the clinic after breakfast and

quickly rushed to the bathroom for a quick shower, only to feel like urinating and defecating at the same time. This experience was strange and painful but she bore it. Lara managed to walk back to the toilet seat but before she could get there she felt something cold which later became warm. It was as though something was flowing through her thighs down to her legs. On looking down, she saw blood flowing through her legs and the whole toilet was covered in it.