SOMETIMES YOU GOTTA GO BACK

ERASE AND REWIND

CREATIVITY Defined

ANNEMARIE MUSAWALE

This is a work of fiction. Similarities to real people, places, or events are entirely coincidental.

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Chapter One: Awkward Menses

Her period was getting embarrassing. This was her third week bleeding, and the flow didn't seem to be abating even a little bit. If anything, it was getting worse. She was seeing double and she couldn't quite walk in a straight line. She couldn't tell anyone though; her father would run screaming from the room if she tried to talk menstruation with him and her brother might drive her to the hospital in a panic. This was one of those awkward times, when she wished her mother had asked her to come along, when she walked out on all of them seven years ago. Well, she hadn't so Rosemary would just have to handle this the best way she could. She excused herself from class to go see the nurse, hoping she'd be able to get there considering her vision was blurry.

This was a good time to have a best friend she could call on. Unfortunately, her best friend was also her panicky brother. So, she was back to square one. She walked slowly arm trailing against the wall to the nurse's office. Nurse Sylvester was always very concerned; her eyes went squinty and she'd lean forward to listen intently when someone was confiding their problems to her. It was as if she was trying to compensate for all the neglectful parents who abandoned their kids to her care. Rosemary didn't buy it though. She knew for a fact that it was nurse Sylvester who'd spread the rumor that Angie Lemon had gonorrhea.

But she was Rosemary's only shot so needs must. She arrived at the door of the nurse's office and found it closed. She knocked tentatively and opened the door to see nurse Sylvester moving swiftly away from the table, where Mr. Maxwell stood stock still, looking like a deer caught in headlights.

"Er…" Rosemary stuttered, "Should I come back?"

"No no", nurse Sylvester said, "Come right in. How can I help you?"

Rosemary glanced at Mr. Maxwell, wondering if she was supposed to expose her issues in front of him.

"I'll er…just leave", he muttered, shoving past her with one hand shielding his crotch. Not that Rosemary didn't know what was going on there…

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“What can I do for you today Rose?” the nurse asked.

“Er..”, Rosemary hadn’t been aware that nurse Ratchet knew her name let alone had given her a nickname, “It’s my period”, she said.

“What about it?”

“It’s been going on for three weeks.”

“Oh. Is that normal for you?”

“No. It’s not normal for me. Is it normal for anyone?”

“Well, it’s not usual but some people *have* been known to bleed for that long. It’s not ideal. In fact, it’s probably not even healthy but it happens.”

“So what can I do to make it stop because I’m getting dizzy and headachy and I can’t concentrate on anything and I smell like iron.”

Nurse Sylvester walked to her medicine cabinet, “I can give you something to stop the bleeding…this time. But you should see your medical practitioner for further help.”

“Yeah okay thanks.” Rosemary said taking the meds. She walked out popping the pills as she went and feeling extremely put upon. Her dad was going to freak.

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“We could go see uncle Rufus. He won’t charge you and he *is* a doctor”, Russell suggested when she broke down and told him about her problems after supper. The drugs were working, she could feel the slowdown in her bleed but now suddenly she was having major cramps.

“Dad doesn’t like uncle Rufus, if he knew we went to him he’d be pissed”, she countered.

“Look, it’s that or look for a free clinic. You want to risk your health on a free clinic? At least you know where uncle Rufus got his medical degree.”

Rosemary sighed, “Isn’t dad like eligible for veteran health care? Why can’t we use that?”

“Because a) we’re not veterans and b) you want to ask dad if we can use his insurance for your menstruation issues? Coz *I’d* buy a ticket to *that* show.”

Rosemary sighed, “Do you even know where uncle Rufus lives these days?”

“Better, I got his number on speed dial. Who do you think sends me those books on occultism?”

“By the way dad was asking me about that. I thought you made sure to swap out the covers?”

“I did. He must have been snooping in the pages the bastard.”

“So anyway…call him now then?”

“Yeah.”

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“It’s not blood. You’ve been poisoned. This is your body getting rid of the toxins.”

“Excuse me what?”

“You. Were. Poisoned.” Uncle Rufus repeated slowly, face impassive like he wasn’t saying impossible things.

“Who would poison me? Why? I’m nobody. I know nothing”, Rosemary protested. Rufus shrugged.

“I’m just telling you the facts. The whys and the wherefores are something you have to work out.”

“What kind of poison is it? Am I dying?”

“Not if I can help it. But I’ll need you to stick around for a few days.”

Rosemary exchanged a glance with Russell. It wasn’t an impossible request. Their father barely noticed them when they *were* around. Rosemary doubted he’d get his knickers in a twist because he hadn’t set eyes on Rosemary for a number of days. Especially if Russell was there to run interference. However, how much did they trust uncle Rufus? Was it safe to stay here with him?

“Are you going to perform experiments on me?” Rosemary asked outright. Rufus barked a laugh.

“Maybe. We’ll just have to see how it goes.” He teased.

“So you didn’t tell me what kind of poison is slowly killing me”, Rosemary said casually.

“Boomslang venom”, Rufus said. Rosemary and Russell narrowed their eyes at him.

“Is that a made up word?” Rosemary asked. Rufus laughed.

“Nope. It’s actually a kind of snake. The thing is, you say you’ve been bleeding for three weeks, which is about three times longer than one is usually expected to live with this poison.”

“So maybe it isn’t-“ Rosemary began to say.

“I found traces of it in your blood. There are no maybes.”

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“Soo, you’re gonna stay here with uncle Rufus?”

“Yeah I guess. He’s kinda cool. Why didn’t you tell me you were in touch?”

“Because dad already has a huge thing about you being the ‘bad child’. If he ever found out, I wanted you to be in the clear.”

“That’s cute. You were protecting me? Aww.”

“Fuck you.”

Rosemary leaned in and kissed him on the cheek, “thanks Ruzz”, she whispered.

“You’re welcome”, he said whispering back as he turned his head slightly so their lips, barely, met. It was a thing that they did sometimes. They weren’t sure if it was wrong or not; but the contact was necessary to them both. Reaffirmation that they were both still here.

Rosemary stepped back, “Okay then. I’ll see you in a few days.”

“I’ll call you tonight Roz”, Ruzz countered.

“Whatever. If he does experiment on me don’t let me be Frankenstein okay?”

“Sure sis. I’ll set you on fire myself.”

Chapter Two: Whodunit

The next three days were a blur of pain and hallucinations. In one fantasy, she was a werewolf complete with fangs and claws, hungry as fuck for human heart. In the fantasy, she leapt up from her bed and landed on her uncle, tearing at his chest and splitting his ribs to get to his heart. He didn’t try to stop her, just watched as she tore him apart and pulled his heart out. Weirdly enough, he didn’t die. He just watched steadily as she sucked happily on his left ventricle. When she was done, she stood up, stepping away from his body as he

continued to watch. She went quietly, clawed hands still dripping with his blood, and got back into bed.

He struggled to his feet, staggering toward her with his chest open and his face impassive. He reached out and took hold of her hands, which were still clawed. Suddenly she was afraid she'd give him tetanus if she scratched him with her long dirty claws. Which was ironic considering he should be dead. He grabbed hold of her fingers, pulling her nails off. To her surprise, they slid right off with ease. He took all five of her nails and then he tossed them into his mouth like they were peanuts.

At that point, Rosemary blacked out and when she came to, her uncle was whole again, and so was she. In moments of lucidity, she tried to talk to Rufus about her hallucinations but he would just fob her off. Like he already knew about them. Or like he didn't want to tell her something.

The next time she felt normal she got out of bed, using her drip stand as a crutch, she shuffled across the room to have a look at Rufus' papers. There were a lot of unintelligible scribbles written in neat lines. Rosemary didn't know what to make of them, but something told her they were important. She fished out her phone and took pictures of all the pages before shuffling back to her bed and climbing in. she sent the pictures to Russell.

'**Find out what the fuck these mean'**, she captioned them.

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"How are you feeling?" Uncle Rufus came in the room with a tray packed with junk food goodness. Cheeseburger, French fries, salsa, hot sauce, a glass of milkshake and a bar of chocolate.

"I'm great. What is all this?" she asked.

"I thought you might be hungry."

"Yeah but…since when do you serve sick people junk food?"

Rufus smiled, "You don't want it?"

"I do. That's the point. Since when do you feed people what they want when they're sick?"

Uncle Rufus put down the tray by her bed, "Since now. Eat. Don't eat. It's up to you", he said as he sauntered out. Rosemary blinked after him, hazel eyes clouded with doubt and fear. Something was just…wrong.

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Raphael, Rosemary and Russell's father and his brother Rufus had had a falling out over a girl. Their mother in fact. She'd been a jazz singer on the riverboats when the two brothers had gone on a gambling spree along the Louisiana River. She was a tall willowy Creole with sultry hypnotic brown eyes. Rufus got to her first, buying her a drink after her set and offering her the world and everything in it…even though he didn't really have much. She was inclined to take it too until later that night Raphael had cornered her at the stern of the boat and told her that she didn't want any part of Rufus' ass seeing as he was manic-depressive. Celestine DuPont really liked Rufus, but not that much. Especially when Raphael was filling her ear with sweet nothings, buying her drink after drink and promising her the world.

"Come home with me", he pleaded.

She laughed in his face, "Are you mad? We just met!"

"I know but I think I love you", he said.

"Come back when you're sure", she replied with a smug smirk before walking off into the riverboat lounge.

He pursued her for months, following the riverboat down the Mississippi and bringing her small gifts - flowers, candy, jewelry. She took them all and laughed at him when he asked for her hand. Three months after he gave up, she showed up at his doorstep…pregnant.

"I thought about getting rid of them", she said.

"I'm glad you didn't", he replied.

The pregnancy was hard, she was sick for most of it, throwing up, weak and dehydrated. At eight months, she developed eclampsia and the doctors wanted to operate. She wasn't really sold on that idea and asked them to wait. She wanted to give birth naturally she said. She called her mother, who came with unspecified herbs and potions. They locked themselves away in her room, not really talking to anyone else. Celestine's mother took control of every aspect of her care and Raphael was locked out. Three weeks later, Celestine went into labor and her mother Delphine summoned a midwife, would not let Raphael take Celestine to the hospital, ordered him to boil water and shut the door of the bedroom in his face.

Chapter Three: What Actually Happened

Celestine was very sick after her pregnancy. She hardly had any energy to take care of the twins and Raphael had to hire a nanny right from the get go. He was working triple jobs to pay for everything Celestine needed to get better. She was bedridden for a year, her mother sending her more herbs and potions to consume. The twins were no trouble, seeming not to need much from the world as long as they had each other. This was a good thing because neither of their parents had very much time to spare on them.

Rufus had taken the loss of Celestine with grace, or at least Raphael thought so. He was naturally concerned when she got sick and was around pretty much for the entire latter half of her pregnancy as well as the first year of the twins' life. Raphael was grateful to his twin for the support. He really didn't know how he would have managed without him. He lavished attention on his niece and nephew and was even able to connect with Delphine in a way that Raphael never managed. It was a relief to Rafe. Rufus *had* always been better with people than he could ever be.

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The kids were ten years old when Celestine up and left. She said she felt stifled by their life, that she missed singing and was sure she could be as big as Beyonce if only she pursued her dreams. She packed her bags and took off to California. Rufus gave her the money to get started. Raphael never forgave him for that. He never forgave Russell and Rosemary for not being their mother either. Rosemary more than Russell; because she was the spitting image of her mother but was more like her uncle Rufus in personality. It was a mind fuck that Raphael just couldn't take. He began to drink. He began to disappear for days at a time, coming back drunk or high, sometimes with a prostitute who he insisted his kids call 'auntie'. He was just…absent.

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Rosemary woke up from a drugged doze to find that at some point her uncle had moved her from his Frankenstein lab to a bedroom. The room had a red rose design on the wallpaper, arranged in what Roz was sure was some sort of specific Celtic pattern. She couldn't quite make it out though. The bedspread that covered her was a luxurious silken blue and her thousand thread count sheets and pillowcase were off white. She felt extremely decadent just being in here. She looked to the side where the bedside table held a glass of juice and a sandwich. Looked like she could eat again. She reached out for the sandwich and a movement over in the corner caught her eye.

“Good. You’re awake”, said a young man she was pretty sure she’d never seen before in her life. This was a small town. If this gorgeous creature lived anywhere in it, she would have noticed him before. Marked his presence. Maybe even followed him home. In a non-stalker kind of way of course. Why was he speaking to her like they knew each other?

“And you are?” she asked her voice embarrassingly croaky.

He started like the question surprised him then he smiled ruefully; a smile that showed just a bit of his milk white sharp teeth, “I keep forgetting. You don’t know me.”

“No. I don’t. Who are you?” Roz knew it was very blunt but she didn’t have the social graces right at the moment to be more subtle.

“My name is Philippe. Philippe Dupont Du Lac. Your mother and I are cousins.”

“Oh really?” Rosemary said ignoring the way her heart sunk to find out they were related.

“Distantly. I think our families came to New Orleans from Hispaniola on the same vessel. A great uncle of mine might have married a great aunt of hers. I’m not sure of the details.”

It was like he could read her mind.

“Oh. That’s nice”, she said trying to be nonchalant about all this, “And you just happen to be in my room because…?”

Philippe took a step toward her, “It’s time Romarin. Time for you to *remember*.”

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The world spun away from her like some psychedelic disco mural. Suddenly she was slammed into some other body, a bigger one…stronger. She was on a ship and the seas were choppy judging by all the shouting, running and upheaval. But then suddenly she could understand the language and what they were shouting was a warning. They were under attack. Something was coming for them.

Rosemary looked around her, trying to situate herself in time and space. She looked down at herself, she was wearing clothes that she would normally never be seen dead in. A long dress that brushed the floorboards of the ship, there was an apron covering the front. And she had some sort of headdress on her head; like a shower cap but made of cloth. She touched it briefly wanting to fling it off and throw it in the sea but then figured it was on there for a reason. Maybe she was having an extremely bad hair day. Her hair did that sometimes; just would not behave. Other times she just couldn’t be bothered and let the curls run amok in a huge untidy afro. Her father hated it when she did that. Rosemary

couldn't give a shit. She was half-black in case he forgot. Which she hugely suspected he liked to.

She took an unsteady step toward a sailor who was frantically pulling something in from the ocean.

"Excuse me?" she said tapping him on the shoulder. The words that came out of her mouth sounded different; kind of like…*eskize m*.

The sailor turned frantic eyes toward her. Those eyes widened when he saw who had tapped him "Madame, ki sa ou fée?" he asked frantically.

What are you doing?

How did she know what he was saying?

"What's going on?" she asked and heard the words coming out different.

"*Mons*" he answered and pointed.

She looked toward where his hand directed her and her eyes literally refused to believe what she was seeing. A man. No, a monster like the sailor said, walking toward them on the water. This man shaped monster had no actual corporeal form, he seemed to be made of wind and smoke and evil. He was making pushing motions, and every time he pushed, the ship moved a little bit.

Chapter Four: Mons

"*What is that*?" she exclaimed in fear taking an involuntary step back.

"*Djab*", the sailor said falling to the ground.

Devil.

The devil was pushing their ship? What. The. Fuck?

A weight hit her from behind and she was in fight mode before her brain could assimilate what was happening, trying her best to get out from under whatever held her captive.

"Stay still", a deep voice said and she turned to see who…Philippe. *Philippe*? What the hell was he doing in her dream/fantasy/memory from long ago?

"Umm?" she said.

"If he sees you, he will take you", Philippe said.

"Why me?" she protested, "I ain't done nothin' to him."

"It is a curse. Your grandmother sold her soul for freedom and now, the Djab comes to collect a fee from every generation."

"And what? I'm the fee?"

"Yes. You took this boat to the Americas to try to escape but the devil will not let you go."

Rosemary thought about this, "Well, since we apparently did get to America I'm assuming we got out of this?"

"Yes", Philippe said avoiding her eyes.

"How?" she asked feeling like she might not like the answer. Philippe met her eyes.

"By sacrificing everyone else on the boat", he said.

They stared into each other's eyes, one waiting the other incredulous.

"You have *got* to be shitting me", she said at last.

"I wish I was", Philippe said with a shit eating grin that lit up his face. Rosemary totally wasn't expecting that.

"So as in you're saying I tell the devil to take all these guys and what? Fly to New Orleans or do I happen to know how to drive a ship?"

Philippe laughed, “Romarin, you made a deal with the devil. Do you think he can’t get you to New Orleans?”

“Okay but there has to be a plan B. Tell me we’re here for plan B.”

Philippe shrugged.

Rosemary was pensive with thought for a few minutes, “Wait. So if this is my ancestor selling off her shipmates to welsh on paying her debts, why am I here? Why do you want me to remember this? And why would I remember this? I wasn’t there. Hell, I’m just a seventeen year old from 2016. This ain’t my problem.”

“Your family has suffered loss and pain for generations because of what happened here. It is said that only the blood of one born twice from another born twice can be able to halt the cycle of pain and misfortune. You are the twin progeny of a twin. Your brother is your soul mate just like your father and his brother are soul mates. One soul, two bodies, two generations. Only you can stop this Romarin.”

“Why me? Why not me and Russell? Or even just Russell?”

“Because you are the female. A female began this, a female must end it.”

“Huh. Typical. Blame the woman.”

Philippe gave her a sidelong glance, “Well…it *was*-“

“Don’t say it”, she snapped.

Philippe put a dramatic hand to his lips and zipped them as Rosemary threw him a quizzical glance. Should he know how to do that? Was he a product of this century or of the millennium?

“Who are you really?”

Philippe looked at her eyebrows raised, “I am Philippe DuPont DuLac, I thought I told you.”

“Yeah but you’re here, you’re there; are you a spirit? Are you a figment of my imagination; because if I was imagining a hot hot guy, he would look just like you.”

“You think I’m hot?”

It was Rosemary’s turn to give an epic side eye, “Like you didn’t know?”

Philippe laughed; the sound of it startled Rosemary. It wasn’t what she was expecting at all. If asked, she would say that he’d probably have a booming laugh, which echoed creepily,

with curious vibrations. Instead, it was a soft laugh, almost soundless but low and deep reverberating gently around them. Now that she thought of it that was appropriate too.

“I didn’t”, he said, “But it’s good to know. And for your information I am both here and there; just like you.”

“What’s up with us; how are we doing this.”

He gave her a sly glance, “How do you think my dear? Witchcraft.”

“Witchcraft? Seriously? That’s the answer you’re going with?”

“That’s the answer I have. You can believe it or not.”

“So tell me Dumbledore, what now?”

“Now, you talk to it”, he said.

‘I talk to…it?”

“Yes.”

“Like, do I just stand up and talk, is there a ritual or..What?”

Philippe just looked at her impassively. So she got up stood straight and looked at the cloud of smoke and evil, which was still causing the boat to move against the tide; pushing it back presumably to Hispaniola.

“Hey. Er…hi”, she called, “Hi.” She waved both hands.

There was a certain ebb in the inexorable progress of the boat backwards, the wind dropped slightly and the creature or smoke thing, stopped moving along the water.

“Er, I would like to negotiate”, she stammered.

The creature’s limbs or appendages came up as if he meant to continue pushing the boat.

“Wait, please. You came for me right? Well I’m here. Leave everyone else alone.”

The wind died down altogether.

Chapter Five: Sacrifice

Suddenly her head felt too full, like she was hosting a party for three hundred in a small room and everyone was jostling and wriggling in an effort to fit. And loud; shouting, talking loudly, babbling voice over voice. She put her hands up to clutch at her head, somehow hoping to contain all the…*fullness*.

“Help”, she called with no voice.

“Do you give yourself to me Genevieve Du Pont? Do you come of your own free will?”

The voice seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere.

“My name is Rosemary”, she told it.

“*Roumarin? Jimo a”* The voice said.

“Umm, yeah?”

“What do you want little twin. What’s done is done.”

“Hasn’t been done yet. I’m here to make you an offer you can’t refuse”, she said in a Michael Corleone voice.

“*What is this offer*?” the voice said, no reaction to the Italian Mafia voice.

“Let the ship go, and you can have me. That’s the me now, and the future me”, she said voice not even shaking a little bit.

“Rosemary, are you sure?” Philippe whispered in her ear.

“Shut up”, she replied. This was not the time to be distracted by his warm breath on her neck.

Suddenly they were engulfed in smoke and flame. Rosemary could feel Philippe’s presence beside her but she couldn’t see him or hear him. She *could* feel his hand holding tight onto her own. Almost bruisingly so.
“Phil”, she said shaking her hand.

Suddenly she was alone somewhere with no sound, no light and no gravity. At least she figured there was no gravity because she couldn’t feel the ground beneath her legs but she wasn’t falling.

“Hallo?” she whispered and listened to her voice echo infinitely. Her heart was going so fast and so loud she was surprised she couldn’t hear it echo too.

“Roumarin, do you give yourself to me of your own free will?” a soft voice said in her ear.

“Er, yes?” she replied trying not to tremble with fear, “You going to kill me now?”

“Oh no Roumarin. I send you back to your body, and you will be in my service forever.”

“Oh really? Well I hear your proposal and I’d like to make a counter offer. How about I be in your service for nine hundred and ninety nine plus one years and then all debts are cleared; for me and my family, forever.”

The room or whatever shook as the voice laughed quietly, “You are a bold one Roumarin. You seek to bind me with conditions?”

Rosemary took a deep breath, “Yes. I do.” She said and put a hand to her chest trying to calm the fuck down. Heaven knew what this creature would do to her. Or hell. Whatever.

There was a silence so deep and long that Rosemary thought she might hyperventilate to death waiting for whatever would happen next.

‘Done’ the creature whispered and suddenly she was back in the luxurious blue and red room, in bed, just having woken from sleep. She looked to the corner to find Philippe, but there was nothing there.

“Well…” she said aloud to no one, “That was a mind fuck.”

Suddenly there was a pulling motion in her head, and she arched backward in tetany, unable to stop her body’s uncontrollable shaking. She thrashed about, perfectly lucid but apparently in the midst of the mother of all convulsions. Something was beeping loudly and the door crashed open as her uncle came rushing in.

“Rosemary!”, he exclaimed as he ran to her, and tried to hold her down. He turned away looking for something on her bedside table. He was bent to it for a while, a syringe in his hand, and a small phial in the other. He drained a liquid from the latter into the former and then turned to her, trying to hold her hand down.

“Russell! I need you”, he called and then there were running footsteps and her brother was in the room, rushing headlong toward her and enveloping her with his presence.

“It’s okay Roz. It’s going to be alright”, he said softly, soothingly with love. Rufus was able to grab her arm and hold it steady as he injected her. He stood back as she collapsed, vision blacking out even as her body relaxed. It was strange; she could hear them talking even though she *knew* she was unconscious.

“What’s happening to her?” Russell asked fear apparent in his voice.

“I don’t know. But I think…”

“You think what?”

“Whatever it is, *we* can’t stop it. It’s up to her.”

“Shouldn’t we take her to the hospital or something?”

There was a flumping sound as if someone had collapsed in a chair.

“The hospital can’t help her. Just sit down and try to relax Ruz. She’s got this.

‘What have I got?’ she wanted to ask her uncle.

“Time to get to work Roumarin”, the voice in her ear said, “Get up. Now.”

Rosemary sat up in bed and opened her eyes; her gaze fell on her brother Russell hovering anxiously above her and her uncle Rufus, waiting expectantly.

“Hello”, she said.

“Roz!”, Russell said leaping forward to hug her, “Thank God.”

She placed her arms slowly about his back, “I’m fine Russell. Nothing to worry about.”

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This is a work of fiction. Similarities to real people, places, or events are entirely coincidental.

LUNCHTIME STORIES

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Bitch Better Have My Money

The ringing telephone woke her with a start. It was so loud and insistent. She was used to the soft tones of *Westlife* on her cell phone.

Who kept these old-fashioned clunkers around anyway?

The phone wasn't even a touch phone, but one of those old ones, which had to be at least thirty years old. The telephone was fitted with a Dial, Automatic, 21FA. This had a number ring with black figures on an antique silver background and a transparent fingerplate. The dial cord had spade-tags at one end for connection to the dial terminals and ring-tags at the other for connection to the telephone terminals.

Diana hadn't seen its type since she'd been no more than a tween. But now here she was, in Back Water Australia, on a sheep farm, unable to sleep for fear of some king cobra curling itself around her. Confronted with the shrilly ringing contraption that used to be a communication device back when the earth was cooling.

She reached out hesitantly and picked it up.

"'lo", she said sleepily, her voice rough and cracked with disuse.

There was no one else to talk to for miles.

"Di! You're still alive. That's great. How's it going?" Andrew's cheerful voice danced down the line, sharp and clear as if he was in the room with her.

"Fuck you, Andrew, and the wagon you rode in on", she replied, her voice lowering even further and hardening.

"Aww, don't be like that Di darlin'. Hey, it coulda been worse. You could be here right now, facing the lynch mob known as your creditors."

"Or I could be in the Bahamas, spending those millions you promised me," she bit out, poison in every syllable.

"You could I guess; except…"

“Except you're a goddamned motherfucking liar is except!” she shouted at him.

“Di, Di, Di…come on. I told you the risks when you decided to invest your client’s money with me, didn’t I? I was upfront and honest about all of it. Not my fault you got greedy”, he said, voice dripping syrup and toxins in equal measure.

Diana sighed rolling her eyes even though he couldn't see.

“That’s what I get for sleeping with the enemy I guess. What do you want?”

She heard Andrew sigh on the other end of the line.

“I just wanted to check up on you babe, see how you were, if you're doing okay. How’s my brother treating you?”

“Like poison ivy. He dropped me here in the middle of fucking nowhere and took off!”

“He’s a busy man Di, you have to cut him some slack.”

“Sure thing, babe. I'll do that. Just as soon as I see him again. I’ll definitely cut him *something*.”

“Hey, I won't call you again if you're gonna be like that.”

“Like what? Pissed as all get out?”

“Yeah. Like that.”

“Well fuck you, Andrew. Fuck your brother *and* your mother who birthed you both.”

“Tsk tsk. Language my dear. You still want me to get you out of this jam you got yourself into, don’t you?”

“*Jam I got myself into!! You fucking bastard*,” Diana’s voice was so high, possibly only the bats could hear her.

“I'm hanging up now,” Andrew said and matched his actions to his words.

Di was practically foaming at the mouth she was so mad. Upside though, she wasn't currently thinking about snakes or snakebites.

“Did you get the location?” Andrew asked the CID officer standing beside him.

“Yes. Good work, that was long enough,” the cop replied with a curt nod.

He turned to his fellow officer and said something *sotto voce* to him. Then he turned back to Andrew.

“Once we have her in custody, you're free to go,” he said.

“Thank you, sir. I was just an innocent bystander. She’s the one who was the mastermind. You’ll see once you bring her in, she can tell you where all the money from the pyramid scheme went.”

The officer just gave him a non-committal nod and left him in the room to marinate. Andrew could see them outside, discussing in low tones. Probably planning to get in touch with authorities in Australia to see if Diana Lucifera could be extradited to Kenya for prosecution. Andrew didn’t know how strong the relationship was between Kenyan police and Australian police was. It was the furthest point in the globe they could think to evacuate Di when they found out that the police were closing in on her. Andrew had kept completely out of the limelight. He couldn’t imagine how the police had gotten his name. But he was a con artist first, ex-lover second. He wasn’t about to go down for something when he could pin it on someone else.

Di had no proof he was even involved in the pyramid scheme, let alone the mastermind. Good sex could do that to a person; it made them sloppy and careless. Andrew had learned that lesson long ago.

A cop came to return him to his cell. A little greasing of palms had made sure that he was alone in there, and a cleaning lady came by twice a day to keep it spotless. Also, those pizza deliveries from pizza inn were like clockwork. It was good to be flush with cash, especially in these hard Kenyan streets.

Di lay back on her bed thinking hard.

Why the fuck would Andrew call her? And for seemingly no reason other than to raise her blood pressure. There was more going on here than met the eye and Di's spidey senses were tingling. She didn't like it one bit. The last time she'd ignored her spidey senses, she'd ended up on the run with a target on her back. She sat up fast, looking around the room for her bag. She had not unpacked it, so it was the job of seconds to swing it up on her back and exit the ramshackle she was in. She had a hundred thousand dollars cash.

Time to disappear where *no one* knew where she was.

Never Complain, Never Explain

Roy was walking in the woods, studying the tall redwood trees, looking for the perfect one. The one that would hold his weight without cracking and turning his suicide attempt into an embarrassing accident that would probably leave him with a broken leg or worse. Of course, the leg would take forever to heal, and it would probably get infected and kill him slowly and painfully.

That *was* the nature of HIV after all, wasn't it?

It turned the body's attempts at healing into a joke. The thought was almost enough to turn Roy Lestrange away from his quest. But no, fuck that; he wasn't waiting around for the grim reaper to take him slowly and painfully. He didn't want to hang around until the skin diseases had the whole town knowing exactly what was wrong with him, maybe shouting 'fag!' as he passed. He wasn't no fag. He didn't even understand how he'd gotten the disease. All doctors were liars. And that bloody scary witch his mother had taken him to, who'd confirmed the diagnosis was a liar too.

Suddenly the sun came out, bathing the glade where he was in magnificent light.

It was heartbreakingly beautiful, and Roy wanted no part of it.

How could such beauty exist amidst the ugliness suffusing his soul right now? Why hadn't this darkness killed him already? Or at least overshadowed the light so that he didn't have to remember that there was more than disease and sickness in the world?

He slumped to the forest floor, leaning his head back against a vast redwood and looking up into the sky with despair. He howled his grief and rage at the heavens. There was nobody to hear him here after all…

Suddenly his vision began to blur, dizziness overtook him, and he clutched his head in confusion.

"What?" he asked nobody in particular, realizing he'd shut his eyes when he opened them again to find a huge, naked, black man peering down at him.

"*O hola si*?" the man seemed to be inquiring…in a language Roy had never heard before.

The man seemed to shimmer in front of him and then turn his head to look deeper into the woods.

"*Báareende liikeenda,"* the naked black man said peering into the distance.

"I.don't.know.what.you.are.saying," Roy said with angry emphasis.

"Get out of here. The Ageless One approaches," the man said in perfectly good English.

Roy frowned wondering why the man had to spout all that foreign shit if he could speak the language well enough.

"Who's the Ageless One?" Roy asked.

He wasn't moving just because some naked black man told him to. Suddenly there was an inexplicable mist in the sunny glade and the man he'd been speaking to was just…gone.

"What?" Roy asked no one again looking frantically from side to side.

Was the disease giving him dementia already? He'd heard that was possible. Then he heard voices approaching and scrunched himself low against the tree. For some reason, he didn't want these new guys to see him.

"…Even the slaves are getting restless," a deep baritone was saying as the shushing sound of feet on leaves indicated that they were coming ever nearer.

Roy scrunched lower down against his tree.

"There is nothing to be done but wait, Armand. The slaves are restless because they know their freedom might be nigh. *Might.* They've been waiting a long time," the second voice said.

This voice had a lower register than the first, like car wheels over gravel. It also shook with a timbre that Roy had not heard before. If he were a guessing man, he'd say that this one was the 'Ageless One' that the big black man had mentioned.

Come to think of it, the naked man had been covered with scarring over his scary tribal tattoos. The kind of scarring produced by whipping, if Roy remembered his history books correctly. Were these the 'slaves' these two beings were discussing? Had he somehow traveled back in time? It was all very disconcerting. Suddenly, Roy found that he just wanted to go home to his mama.

He made a small sound, which to his dying day he would deny was a whimper and then started when the shuffling on the leaves stopped abruptly.

The two had stopped walking.

“Did you hear that?” the baritone inquired.

“The whimpering? Yes I did. Nothing to be concerned about. In fact Armand, there is nothing going on right now that need concern you yet. Why don’t you go back to the hospital? Play craps with Bernard and just wait? You will know immediately when they begin to play your song.”

“It’s easy for you to say. *You* haven’t been waiting millennia for this.” Baritone…or ‘Armand’ sounded a little sulky.

“Oh Armand, ever the impatient one. I have this to tell you. Already the signs begin to manifest; and whatever will happen, it will be soon. Your wait is almost over. There. Satisfied?”

‘Armand’ laughed bitterly.

“Your idea of ‘soon’ probably doesn’t match other people, Mama Ruth,” he said.

“Indeed,” she agreed, “But it certainly matches yours…”

Armand sighed.

“I will go now…because I realize I cannot get anymore from you. One more question though, the Andrewes witches…?”

“Again, my eye is on them and when something happens, you’ll be the first to know.”

“The animals gather outside their shack every night and simply stare. Did you know that?” he asked.

“Armand, the swamp is full of mysterious things. If we wondered at all of them there would be no time to do anything else”, the ‘Ageless One’ sounded tired.

“In other words, you already know why they do that,” he said.

“Go home Armand,” she replied and this time, the tone of command was unmistakable.

The one called Armand was silent for a bit and then he said, “As you wish, your highness”.

There was a terrible disturbance in the air and then after a time, the birds in the wood began to chirp again. It was then that Roy realized they’d gone silent when the black man appeared. Roy looked around him, searching for signs of danger but all he saw were motes of light dancing on the leaves.

“I need to get out of here,” he murmured to himself as he hastily got up and got moving.

What If

Mary Magdalene woke up late, her head throbbing with misery.

Newsflash. Tequila was really the devil. Somebody needed to tweet that. Not her though. Someone else. She could hear her notifications going off at the rate of a mile a minute and she knew what it was about. She knew she was being trolled like nobody's business.

It was that nude pic that Rick had posted of her. Her friends had warned her about him being a nasty piece of work, but did she listen?

Nooo, she went ahead and let him woo her into an affair. Even though she knew, he was married to that Paris chick. He *said* his wife didn't understand him; that she was cold to him in bed. He'd been so needy. How was Mary to know that he was a stinkin' liar? Well…okay, maybe there were signs. For one thing, his Facebook page was full of pictures of him and his supposedly cold wife doing fun things together. Rick had told her that it was all show. Just for the cameras. That as soon as they got home, Paris barely spoke to him.

Who was she to dispute that? Heaven knew she'd never been married so she didn't know that married people did or didn't behave like that. Besides, he was so nice to her, so attentive. He picked up every time she called, texted her like two hundred times a day. It was intoxicating. Plus, there was that Mazda he'd bought her for her birthday – to show her how much he cared he'd said. Okay so it turned out to be leased and she'd had to pay like a thousand dollars, which Rick had neglected to pay…he'd apologized so sincerely. Said he'd forgotten to pay that cash and promised to pay her back. I mean he was so sweet!

Who wouldn't be taken in?

When he'd asked if he could take her picture naked, just so he had something to look at when he was lonely, how could she say no? Besides, they were really classy. Only one really showed her cunt; and it was a pretty cunt anyway; all womanscaped and such…she was proud of it. In fact, Rick had also promised to get her some cash so she could have it vagazzled. I mean, how cool would that be?

Then…last night, she'd gone to surprise him at his club appearance in Miami and she'd caught him tongue wrestling some other chick. Some tall blonde leggy slut with obviously plastic double d's and a body modeled on Barbie.

Mary hadn't been able to control herself. She was so mad. She'd grabbed Rick's drink and thrown it in his face, badly stinging his eye. Then she'd called him a cheating liar and left the club. Too bad that TMZ had been on the scene and taken a video of the whole thing. Worse, Barbie girl found Mary's nude pics on Rick's phone and posted them online. Ever since, she'd been getting nasty messages from trolls, and she didn't know what to do.

rickswife67 wrote: Kill yourself bitch. You're nothing but a husband stealing slut!!!

nastygalzsquad wrote: Your vagina looks like it smells of patchouli and regret.

videovixen78 wrote: If I ever find u anywea nia ma man I'll burn your nipples off cunt

kissmyattitude wrote: Whore. God will punish you for being a husband stealer.

songsoffireandice wrote: if u wa in GOT they'd have made u walk in the street naked already. SHAME on you.

Mary scrolled miserably through her notifications, looking for she knew not what. Would it stop soon, or would she be hounded off social media forever? She couldn't leave! Social media was her life; she might as well be dead without it. She tried tweeting positive uplifting messages to maybe shame the trolls into leaving her alone, but they just responded with even more gusto.

kissmyattitude wrote: You have nerve to even get on here with u're fake messages. We know who yu r bitch.

pharisee123 wrote: yeah, go on run u're lil bitch ass outta here slutty mcsluttington. How you even show your face? Your cunt looks sick

devotee101 wrote: YOU HAVE AIDS!! YOU'RE GONNA DIE.

fiftyshadesoffierce wrote: bitch u luk lik a man. Ugly ass vagina.

Mary threw her phone across the room with an anguished cry. It was the new iPhone 6, and the screen cracked as it hit the linoleum. Mary screamed even louder. She wasn't anywhere near finished paying for that thing. Now it was broken.

"God!" she cried, tears streaming down her cheeks in despair.

There was a soft knocking at the door. Mary stopped crying to listen.

"Mary? You in there? I heard screaming. Are you alright?" a soft voice floated in from the other side of the door.

"Who are you?" she asked suspiciously.

Had her trolls found out where she lived?

"My name is Jesus. I live just down the hall from you?" he said.

Mary hesitated for a moment but then shrugged. If this was her day to die from some crazed ax man at her door well…it was a good day. She was just about done. She opened the door to behold a Persian guy of middling height, long brown hair tied in a ponytail low on his head and beard flourishing on his face.

"Is everything alright, Mary?" he asked.

She shrugged.

"I guess you don't do social media much huh?" she said.

Jesus smiled.

"Not really," he said.

"Come in," she said stepping back and letting him into her apartment.

"Thanks," he said as he stepped in.

He reached down, and picked up her phone, handing it to her. Inexplicably, the screen was repaired.

“Is there anything I can do for you Mary?” he asked.

She smiled wryly.

“Can you stop people trolling me on twitter?” she asked.

Jesus smiled and kissed her forehead.

“Is that all?” he asked.

“Yeah,” she said.

“Consider it done,” he said and suddenly the constantly beeping notifications stopped. Mary stared at him.

“Why…? How…?” she stammered in disbelief.

Jesus smiled.

“Let him who is without sin, cast the first stone,” he said. “Or tweet as the case may be.”

Mary bent her head, tears leaking in gratitude. Jesus stroked her hair.

“Go forth Mary Magdalene, and do not sin again,” he said.

***

For those about to rock, we salute you.

"You're fired. Have your things packed and out of here by noon."

Diego breezed into the office, throwing the information at Angel as he passed. She stood up and followed him into his office.

"You said get it done; I got it done. What are you in such a tizzy about now?"

"You told Alexandro that our child was sick! Have you no sense of boundaries? . I want you out of here now or I'll turn our enforcer on you so help me," he growled, looming over her like a volcano about to erupt.

"Diego. I got the job done. You know he wouldn't have come back for anything less," she soothed, arms making calming gestures like there was a hope in hell that he could calm the fuck down.

AFTER WHAT SHE DID. There were limits. I mean sure he lied to Alexandro; he did. Mostly to save him from worry or heartache; NOT TO GIVE HIM A FUCKING HEART ATTACK!

"I need you to go, Ang," he bit out pointing imperiously out the door.

"You can't fire me," she fired back.

"Why not?" Diego asked, momentarily perturbed before he remembered that he was the boss here. *He* was the rock star. People did whatever he fucking wanted. Not the other way around.

"Because there is a clause in my contract that says so," Angel said.

Diego stared at her flummoxed.

"That's not true. None of my employee contracts have such a clause."

"Mine does."

Diego drew himself to his full height and folded his arms, hazel eyes narrowed as he glared at her.

"Let's see it then," he said.

There was a flash of light and then Angel was holding a paper. On first glance, the paper seemed to flame with an eerie otherworldly glow but then on second look it was just an ordinary parchment. Wait. Parchment? They didn't use parchment to write employee contracts.

"Diego Santiago, erstwhile boy King. The witches didn't exactly bring you to other-Earth out of the goodness of their undead hearts. They needed you here so that you weren't there to stop something from happening. I am your very own guardian witch, and you *can't get rid of me*," she said her voice slightly lower and hoarser than Diego was used to.

"What did you do with the real Angel Houston then?" he asked.

It was the first thing that occurred to him. That Angel existed after all; and if he could find her…maybe, she could help.

Redheaded Angel inclined her head to the side.

"She's a vegetable confined in a mental institution by her family for her own good," she told him.

"Oh relax," she said when she saw him flinch. "She was there long before you came here. Some of the things she saw were a little too much for her poor psychic mind to take. This wasn't your fault. It was a gap. Just like you and your brother filled a gap. Suck it up."

Diego was breathing hard.

"You caused me a lot of trouble, Ang," he said.

She was nodding sympathetically.

"I know. I know. Who knew Alexandro would take his child's fake illness that hard? But, I'll make it up to you. I have tickets. To AC/DC," she said proffering them as if giving a two-year-old candy.

Diego's eyes cut to the tickets then back to her face.

"I can buy my own concert tickets, thank you," he said.

Her smile widened and she beamed at him.

“Not like these; these are exclusive backstage passes mate! And an invitation to the after party where Bon Scott will be taking requests. You know he didn’t die in this realm. Can you imagine how surreal it’ll be for your brother?”

Diego just stared at her.

“Give him the tickets. Don’t offer to go with him, don’t make him take you. Just give them to him as a gift and then back off and look like a lost puppy. I guarantee you; you’ll be humping like the wolves you partly are before the end of the evening.”

Diego Santiago so wanted to believe her. But, he was experiencing for himself the seismic shift that happened when someone you thought you knew has been lying to you about who they are for the longest fucking time. He reached out though and grabbed the tickets. Then he slammed the door in Angel’s face. He grabbed his phone and called Alexandro’s agency.

“Santiago Security, how may I direct your call?” a female voice answered at once.

“Macy, I need to speak to my husband please,” Diego said.

As far as anyone in this realm knew, Diego and Alexandro shared the same last name because they were married. It was a surprisingly easy sell. Alexandro had been pretty perturbed by that shit but for Diego it was just another lie that was maybe based in more truth than all the other lies they were telling. Okay, *he* was telling.

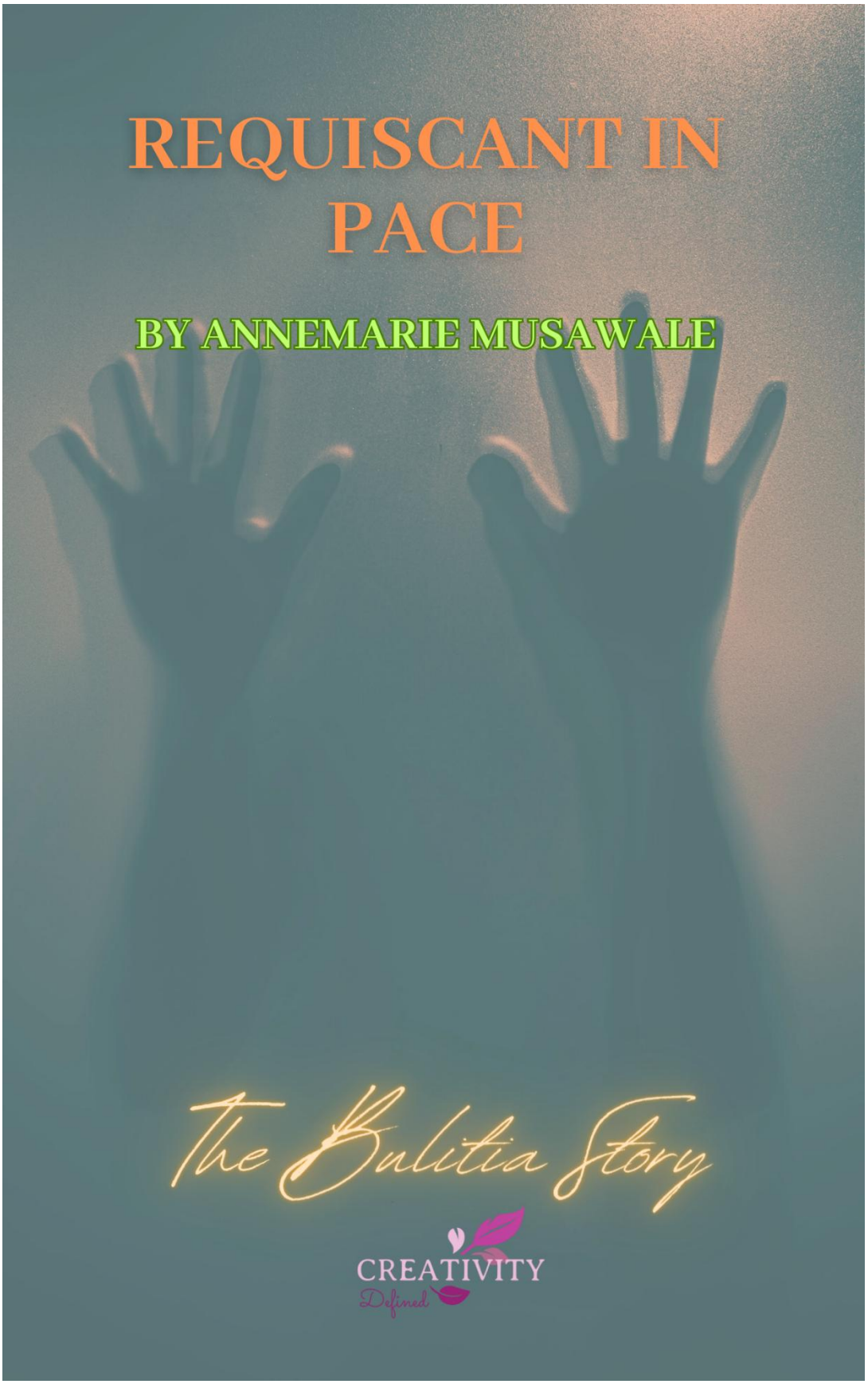
“Good morning, Mr. Santiago. I’ll connect you now.”

Macy had been to lunch at their house more times than Diego could count. She had baby sat their kids on more than one occasion. Still, when she was at work it was always, Mr. Santiago for either of them. Diego listened to Alexandro’s office phone ring, wondering if he would agree to even speak to him.

“Hello,” he said in Diego’s ear, intimate in the way only a voice on the phone could be. And what a voice Alexandro had. It was low and gravelly like honey pouring over grits. Diego loved it in a visceral way that could not be enunciated with mere words. He could feel himself stirring with arousal just listening to it. He didn’t think that he and Alexandro had ever gone this long without seeing each other. Not in this realm anyway.

“Alexandro,” he said and what he was thinking must have been reflected in his voice because Alexandro gasped. There was silence on the line.

“Can I see you tonight?” he asked, eyes closed, fingers crossed.


REQUISCANT IN PACE
BY ANNEMARIE MUSAWALE
The Bulitia Story
CREATIVITY
Defined

This is a work of fiction. Similarities to real people, places, or events are entirely coincidental.

REQUISCANT IN PACE

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Prologue

A millennium ago, a prophecy was made about a child. This child would be something special; his entire being made up of pure magic. It was a prophecy that set many hearts aflutter, either they wanted to control the coming of this child, or they wanted to prevent it. Fair means and foul were employed; dirty tricks and any means necessary were used. Nobody knew from whence the child would come, but one name; Devereaux permeated every rumor. Rumor fueled by the persistence of Armand Devereaux, a four-thousand-year-old being held hostage by Fate for unknown reasons. Unknown to any but him; and he wasn't talking.

Across the globe, Bulitia was going about his daily business, tending his cows, nurturing his maize crop, impregnating his wife…when the slave raiders came. They decimated the village, killed the weak, and captured the strong. Bulitia was half a day away, trading with the next village. They picked him up on the trail, he heading home laden with goods, they heading out from the devastation they'd wrought. Bulitia's wife was dead; though he didn't know it. His unborn child would never see the light of day.

Chapter One: Amistad Ain’t Got Nothin On Me

Bulitia looked up at the black hole that narrowed until there was just a small circle of blue at the top. This place was aptly named; Shimoni. Bulitia had never been anywhere so dank and dark and miserable. The woman lying next to him was dead. He knew she was because he'd been listening to her laboured breathing for the past three days. It was the chest illness she had; and no way to treat it down here. He didn't know if he would treat it if he could. The slavers looked out for such things. He didn't want to make himself more attractive to them. Perhaps when they were loading them into the ship, and they saw that the woman was dead, and threw her overboard...he could pretend to be dead too. His father, Mulungu bless his soul, had taught him to swim long ago. He could hold his breath under water for as long as it took. Then he could make his way back...back to his people and his new wife; his little baby that must have been birthed by now. Yes, Bulitia was motivated. If he had any leverage, he would have climbed up the hole to the sky. Perhaps enough people would die down here so he could pile up their bodies, climb over them and escape.

No such luck though; the slavers came for them before enough people were dead. They were led out, through a tunnel to the very edge of the sea. Bulitia had smelled it; but that was the first time he was seeing it. It was vast, endless and intimidating. A person could get lost just trying to find the horizon. How was he to get back if they took him away now? Bulitia rattled his chains, looking left and right frantically, trying to find a way; but he was securely tied between a woman whose baby was dead on her breast – yet she clung stubbornly to it – and a man with a potbelly so large it covered his nakedness quite effectively. Bulitia shivered; there was a cool breeze blowing in spite of the heat. The slavers were whipping their backs so they could get moving; get on the huge ship waiting on the docks. One last time Bulitia looked around, looked for a way out. But there was none.

The lady they sold him to scared Bulitia more than the slavers. There was something about her that wasn’t right. He could not say what it was but he knew in his bones she wasn’t all the way human. There were five others with him; all from his own tribe. They spoke Bukusu among themselves, speculating on what she might be, and what she would do with them. Bulitia hoped that it was something that would end in death. He was not about this slave life. It was not his destiny.

The woman took them to a plantation in the bayou where sugarcane grew high in the damp humid air. The air smelt sweet and cloying yet familiar to Bulitia. He'd been somewhere like this before, in the time of Nabongo Mumia he had travelled to his kingdom to trade. It smelled sort of like this - only without the underlying smell of blood, excrement and death. Bulitia wondered why he wasn't dead yet; he was starving, he had wounds from the whippings some of which were infected and he wanted to be dead. So why wasn't he? Perhaps it was fate. Perhaps he would find a way to go home again. Bulitia didn't share this thought with his companions; they would just laugh at him for his naiveté after all; there was no getting out of this life.

Bulitia was assigned to cattle pen; there were six cows on the plantation and one bull. He was to feed, water, and milk the cows and make sure that the bull remained virile and ready to serve. This was familiar work to him. On his own land, he had thirty cows and three bulls. He wondered who was looking after them now.

One day as he was cleaning out the cow pen in preparation for milking a shadow fell over him that made him cold to the marrow of his bones. He did not have to turn around to know who was there. He went down on one knee and tried to still his trembling.

"Mama", he said submissively, hoping she would get whatever she wanted and go.

"I have been watching you, Bulitia", she said in a low voice and he trembled. The slaves had been stripped of their names; they were nothing but numbers. How had she known what his was?

"Don't be afraid", she whispered coming closer her cold breath fanning on his naked shoulders. Bulitia wanted to shy away, to turn and run. But he could do nothing but stand there and wait to see what the creature would do to him.

"I think you were meant for greater things than this Bulitia, am I right?" she asked putting one hand on his shoulder in a light caress. Bulitia wanted to scream but he knew better. She didn't know that they knew that she was some creature from hell. She thought her human disguise held. He could not show more fear than a slave would at being singled out by his master. But what was he to say to her? He had no words to answer. If he told the truth, then Mulungu knew what she would do. If he told a lie…she would know. He was doomed. So he kept silent.

She ran her hand slowly, speculatively down his back until she got to the crack of his ass. He tensed as her finger dug inward, sharp nails causing injury as she pressed into him. He bit his lip so as to not to make a sound but he couldn't still the trembling.

Suddenly her hand was gone from him and she stepped away. He dare not turn to see why.

“You’ll do”, she said.

Chapter Two: Porn With Plot

"What did the jitu want with you Bulitia?" the woman whispered to him as they lay facing each other on the bed. He shrugged, not wanting to even think of the mama and her cold hands penetrating his anus like…he cut that thought off fast. Turning to the woman next to him he turned her so her back was on the bed and vaulted his body over her, looking down at her luscious body as his heart beat fast in his chest. He needed to forget.

He leaned down and placed his teeth on her left nipple, biting down, hard. The woman hissed with pain and hit him over the head but he ignored her, using one of his strong thighs to make a space between her legs. She got with the program pretty fast after that, widening her legs on her own and allowing himself to lower himself onto her. he grunted, transferring his mouth's attention to her lips; and bit her lower one before sucking it into his mouth. She moaned softly, arching upward gently, urging him. He took it for the invitation it was and reached between them, fisting his penis in his hands and guiding it none too gently to her waiting, dripping hole.

She'd snuck into his cabin one night as they slept; five to a cabin – surprisingly luxurious accommodations for slaves. She had stepped over the other men and came to lie next to him, pressing her naked body into his. His heart was still in the hills of Mt. Elgon, with his new wife and their offspring; but his body had needs in the here and now. He had turned to her, pushed her under him, and pounded her into the floor. She'd been back every night since.

It made him angry that they were reduced to this; late night trysts that would never mean anything more than physical relief. At least not to him; he was not getting involved with anyone who would be taken from him on the whim of some not quite human master who had somehow managed to reduce a bunch of people into commodities. It was hard for Bulitia to wrap his head around and he was angry all the time.

He slid into her warm, soft, wet hole and it expanded around him, welcoming him with open arms as he thrust into her. and again. And again. The woman reached up and folded her strong thighs around his waist, pulling him as close as she could. Bulitia let out a breath, hips stuttering with desire as he tried not to come so soon. Her moans were getting louder as she came closer to her own climax. The other men around them lay still; pretending to be asleep. Bulitia caught movement at the corner of his eyes. A hand moving rhythmically up and down as Abednego, his roommate brought himself to his own completion on his right. Bulitia cast his eyes to the left

where he could see the shine of eyes in the dark. Someone else was watching them; most likely Jefta. He was a short man, teeth stained brown from tobacco and a freaky little bastard.

Bulitia redoubled his efforts, pounding harder into the woman, giving them a show. He found to his surprise that it turned him on to know that the men were watching him fuck this woman. He withdrew himself from her to the head of his penis and then thrust back in with renewed force. She cried out in shock and arousal, pulling her own legs further toward her shoulders to give him better access. He did it again, grunting with effort and heard someone in the room groan. His mouth was set in a rictus of effort and he let go of the fear and anger; drove them into the woman with every thrust and then released it all in a flood of seemingly endless come. She took it all, begging all the while for more, her muscles clutching and releasing him as her own orgasm took her. he dropped down beside her, turned away and closed his eyes. She could stay if she wanted; just as long as she was gone by morning. There was no guarantee though, that one of the other men would not try to rape her if she did. Bulitia heard the woman gather her clothes and creep out. He closed his eyes and slept.

"Did you enjoy yourself last night Bulitia?", the monster disguised as a woman asked him the next day as he raked out the stable. He was in nothing but his small clothes. Louisiana was sweltering with summer humidity; Bulitia could barely abide the weather. He was used to the mountain coolness of his home; still. He ruthlessly cut off that thought. To think of home was to stab himself in the soul.

"Beg pardon ma'am?" he asked submissively hoping she would think him slow and leave him to his raking.

She took a step toward him and ran a hand down his sweaty back.

"Your session with Asha last night; was it good?" she asked. Bulitia froze, but only for a moment. He would not show his fear for any reason. But she was watching them? Of course a creature like her probably had many ways of finding things out. But how had she found this? Did she perhaps watch them in her fire or perhaps she was right there in the cabin with them, invisible to human eyes.

But no…Bulitia would have known if she was there. He was sensitive like that to the supernatural. Just as he had felt her coming long before she appeared around the cow pen.

"Are you a man or a mouse?"

His father's voice reprimanding him in his head shocked him so much he almost stopped working. And then he decided that he would stop; he would stop being so afraid; such a craven that he could not turn and face his fears. He stuck the shovel back in the cow patty and turned to face the monster.

"What do you want with me?" he asked.

Chapter Three: The Plot, It Thickens

"You are a medicine man are you not?" the woman said to him, "You know how to heal and how to…kill?"

Bulitia stared at her, wondering how she could possibly have come by that information. Nobody knew; not his fellow slaves, nor the slavers who caught him. He had been very careful not to give himself away. For his own sake and that of his wife and child at home: if he had any hope of seeing them again he could not become essential or important to these people. He had to fade into the background, be forgettable. Looked like that plan was out of the window though. This monster knew, and whatever she wanted from him, Bulitia knew it was not good.

"I…have some herb-craft", he said, "But…semanya ta."

"Oh but you do my reluctant witchdoctor. You 'manya' a lot", she said. Bulitia felt his heart go cold and shrivel in his breast. Was she some kind of spirit? How had she come to know Bukusu? He knew it wasn't commonly spoken here; most of his fellow slaves were from Hispaniola, St. Domingue, and from West Africa. They had strong juju there; and this…creature liked that. So why him when she was so spoiled for choice?

"It has to be you my young prince. And you will know why soon. For now, I need to transfer you to another part of my ranch. I need you to keep watch for me."

"Keep watch on what mistress?" Bulitia asked wanting to say no with every fibre of his being. Wanting to stand up and fight and scream and rage. Wanting to escape this place and go home.

"My erstwhile neighbour…Sylvester B. Devereaux, he has a young boy; this boy isn't very well behaved. Sometimes he wanders over the line to my side of the fence. I need you to keep watch for him. Make sure he doesn't do that. Kill him if you have to."

Bulitia kept his eyes on the ground, not sure he'd heard correctly. His master…wanted him to kill a young boy? A young white boy? Bulitia might be new to the continent but he already knew that shedding white blood was a death sentence. And though he was willing to die… not like this. Not with the blood of an innocent on his hands. The ancestors would never accept him. He would be thrown into the empty. No; there had to be another way. Bulitia resolved that very day to run. His first thought, to kill his mistress, was foiled by the fact that he did not know what she was; or if she could be killed.

Asha was cleaning the mistress' bedroom when she came in and leaned on the doorway watching her. It always made Asha really nervous when her mistress watched her and she would literally do anything to make it stop. She turned around and curtsied prettily.

"Mama I did as you asked", she said eyes cast down.

"Oh, I know you did. And you did it well. I just might sell you to a brothel. You're a natural", she said proudly, "But that is not what I am here to discuss. I need to know; what is he holding on to? Why does he still resist?"

Asha bowed her head lower, heart speeding up with anxiety, "Mistress I do not know. I have tried to speak to him, draw him out…but he just turns away from me and goes to sleep. He won't talk."

"Perhaps you're not trying hard enough Asha. Do you need to be motivated? Because I can motivate you. I am a wonderful mistress like that. Let's see, I could cut that baby out of your belly and sell it to the shamans in New Orleans. They have so many uses for innocent blood you have no idea." The mistress sauntered forward, running one long-nailed finger down Asha's abdomen. Her nails were sharp enough that Asha thought they could cut her open if they were so inclined. They seemed to grow longer and sharper the closer they got to her womb, where the baby she hadn't known she was carrying lay vulnerable. Perhaps it would be better for the baby to be cut out while it was still growing. Allah knew this was no life for a child. Or for anyone really. But what of the child's soul? Would it be trapped here if this creature got its hands on it; perhaps she would eat it. She looked like she fed on the souls of babies.

Not mine.

Something in her rejected completely the thought of giving up her baby to this monster. No, she would protect it to her last breath.

"I will try again mistress", she said, "And this time, I will succeed."

"Good girl, Asha. Now go; babies are hungry things and you have not eaten today."

Asha hurried off before the mistress could change her mind. The only advantage to being a house slave was the access to food. The mistress didn't care what they ate; so long as she had food when she asked for it, and drink when she wanted it. So the house slaves were fairly well fed; her field slaves too. Still once in a while, one or two would disappear without explanation. They were not sold…Asha suspected that they were eaten. So did the others. They didn't discuss it though, not even among themselves in their own languages. The mistress was all knowing –

they all knew that. And they did not want to know what would happen to them if her red eye fell on one of them. So they kept their heads down and did as they were told.

"Asha", Laila's deep voice cut into her musings. She was a fat old woman who spent her days ordering the kitchen slaves about and grinding corn in her huge mortar and pestle.

"Yes mama?" she said.

Laila sighed, "This time, you have bit off more than you can chew", she said sadly.

Asha looked at her, wanting to ask what she meant but fearing that Laila already knew what she had been sent to do. The thought filled her with shame. Her mother had taught her better. Still, she was a slave; mother's lessons meant less than nothing compared to what the mistress wanted.

Chapter Four: It's a Rat Race

Asha stood outside the cabin door, debating with herself. Should she come clean to Bulitia? Tell him she was pregnant and that the jitu had threatened the baby? But he was just as much a slave as she was; there wasn't much he could do…if anything. But if he wasn't some kind of special then why was the jitu interested in him? He must have some special powers or something. Which meant he could help her if he knew…Knew what though? What could she tell him really? The jitu had come to her, and asked her to seduce Bulitia; didn't tell her why or how long or anything. Didn't tell her anything really about Bulitia. She knew he was from East Africa and he and his shipmates were still hopeful; still green. They continued to think there was a way for them to get home when there really wasn't. They were fucked the moment they got on the boat. No, probably before. The minute they were captured. Not like their families would be willing to take them back if they returned. They'd probably think the runaway slaves were ghosts and kill them on sight. These Africans were very superstitious. Asha had been born a slave; it was the only life she knew. She watched the new recruits come in, still thinking they were people; still thinking their opinion counted for something – that they had rights…it made her sad for them. At the same time, she was contemptuous. Why couldn't they see? It made things very tiresome for the rest of them; having to train them, teach them; whip them, break them…Asha had watched it happen so many times; she was tired of it. Tired of it all. Sometimes she wanted to walk into the creek and let the alligators take her. But she was scared; scared that it would hurt worse than the whips and chains. What if the afterlife was no escape, but just more of the same? She had to know for sure before she tried anything.

She pushed open the door and entered. Bulitia was lying on his side, nearest the door. His head was pillowed in his hands and she could see the glow of his eyes as he looked at her. He wasn't asleep then. Good. She crept to him and lay down next to him matching him shoulder to hip to ankles. She was a tall girl too; almost as tall as him; she looked up into his eyes and smiled.

"Bulitia", she whispered, "Will you save me?"

"Save you from what?" he asked not bothering to keep his voice down.

"From her. From the woman who holds our souls in her hand."

"No one but Mulungu holds our souls woman. You are mistaken."

Asha sighed, “You do not get it; the woman who owns us; she is no ordinary human”, she tried again.

“Oh, I know that. But she doesn’t own our souls”, he said.

There was silence in the cabin broken only by the loud snoring of Jefta on the other side and Abednego’s restless rustling. There was a rhythmic slap of flesh on flesh. He was stimulating himself as he was wont to do every night Asha came. She wondered why he didn’t just get himself a woman.

“What is she?”, Bulitia suddenly asked, startling her.

“She is a monster who eats souls”, Asha told him.

“You know that for a fact?” Bulitia persisted.

“Yes”, Asha cried softly, desperate to convince him.

“How do we kill it?” he asked.

Mama Ruth sat before her fire, scrying for the gatekeeper she knew was nearby. She had settled here because it was a beacon for magic; it drew things to it; including the future Child and the forces trying to thwart its existence. She had followed the trail of soulless bodies; and they had led her here. Met Kafu was up to something; something bad. With the help of Asmodeus the demon he was creating chaos where order should be. Using the lust of man against him. His plans must not be allowed to succeed. Not if there was to be any hope for the future of mankind. Mama Ruth sat back, pondering her own stake in that future. She didn’t know how it would be; would the child destroy her? But she could not let that deter her. There was too much at stake to worry about herself.

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Bulitia was standing guard where he had been bade to. Keeping watch on the wall of sugar cane that separated one homestead from the next. He could see the child, the one he had been ordered to kill. He was climbing a tree, following a cat. His nanny was standing below the tree, bellowing up at him to get down. He simply grinned happily at her and kept going. There was no way he would be able to come back down. Perhaps he would fall and break his neck and save Bulitia the trouble of having to make a choice. Do it…or don’t do it? The girl had said that the woman who owned them was a demon. Demons could not be killed; not by humans. But there were others, others with power. Bulitia could feel them close by. It was his gift; the one that his owner must have known about somehow. He could smell it out like a hound on a scent. He could

follow it. But this child that his owner wanted dead; he had no such power. Bulitia didn't understand it at all. He closed his eyes, sought for the power he could feel. It was close. She was close. He summoned her.

'In the name of Mulungu and all the spirits of the ancestors; I bid you…help me'

In the name of your ancestors and the god that you call on; what would you have me do?

The reply was instantaneous; it startled Bulitia. He had known she was there but he had expected to have to do more begging before she answered.

'Kill the demon' he begged.

"Bulitia Bulitia Bulitia…you disappoint me. Conspiring with unknowns to kill me? How very impolite of you", The Woman said from behind him and Bulitia froze. So she could read minds for sure. He kept quiet knowing that he was fucked whether he spoke or he didn't. And so he opted to go out with his dignity intact.

"You realise that this will result in severe punishment don't you?" she whispered in his ear as her nails scratched at his throat. Bulitia kept completely still.

"I'll have to kill you", The Woman actually sounded regretful, "But I will also kill all your friends", she continued. Bulitia felt his knees go weak.

"Please mama", he tried to whisper but his voice had disappeared.

"Yeess", she said with relish in her tone, "I will kill you all; and bind you here…so you can be my slaves forever. Wouldn't you like that?"

Chapter Five: R.I.P

"No mistress. Please!"

"Ah, he talks", she said with satisfaction.

"I'll talk, I'll kill the boy, I'll do whatever you want. Just…don't kill them."

Asmodeus laughed and laughed. The sound was an assault on Bulitia's ears. He felt like they might be bleeding. But he dare not lift his hands to cover his ears. Nope. He just held his breath and bore it, praying for the end to come quick. It didn't though. The laughter went on for an interminable time. And then Bulitia was being lifted from the ground, levitating above the grass as his heart threatened to run out of his chest. He was perishing with fear and there was nothing he could do about it; no one he could call.

He closed his eyes, waiting for the end but it didn't come. And then suddenly, the woman was gone. He opened his eyes and looked around. There was a body on the ground, a man. Lying there with his eyes closed, legs and arms spread-eagled. He was a tall man, well built, toned. He wasn't breathing. Bulitia stared at the body; it looked familiar. Very familiar. He looked around to see if anyone else was around but the area was deserted. He walked quickly toward the sugar cane where culling of leaves was taken place. He caught sight of Jefta, slashing away, complaining under his breath as he was wont to do.

"Jefta!", he called, feet pumping as he hurried toward him. Jefta didn't so much as turn a hair. Bulitia came toward him and extended his hand out to shake Jefta out of whatever reverie he was in. His heart stopped as his hand sank into Jefta's with no regard toward the solidity of the other's being. He withdrew his hand and then tried to rest it on Jefta's shoulder. The hand sank into Jefta's shoulder, and disappeared.

Suddenly Bulitia understood. He knew who the body under the trees was; staring up into the rain. Sightless. Because death had taken his sight away. He looked around fearfully; waiting for something, or someone to come for him. He waited and waited, but no one came.

Once the men were through with the field, he followed Jefta listlessly back to the cabin where the slaves gathered together under a huge three stone fire and watched the women cook catfish and hoppin john for them. After dinner, some of the slaves began to sing songs of sadness and fear and defiance. Bulitia sat and listened sadly, reflecting on the fact that he would probably never see his family ever again; until Mulungu claimed him….why hadn't Mulungu claimed him already? What was the hold up. Bulitia stared up into the sky and thought about screaming.

“Forget it man. You are yoked to me; nobody’s coming for you.”

The creature was sitting next to him with long horns like a goat and red eyes; sharp teeth and a grey wrinkled face. The thing turned to look at him with a wide grin that showed all its sharp teeth and Bulitia wanted to scream and scream. Because even as he saw the creature’s true form, he also saw the woman it was pretending to be. It was the most terrifying thing that had ever happened to him. He tried to move away but found that he couldn’t.

“And now, your friends can join you so you aren’t lonely”, the thing said its sharp toothed smile widening in a way that had Bulitia holding his breath. Would she eat him now? But then she turned and her eye fell on Khakati, tending the fire or staring into it. She pitched forward, face first into it with no warning. The others tried to get her out, beat the flames from her face and body, blow some life back into her…but it was too late; Khakati already sat next to Bulitia, staring at him and the creature in fear.

“Please mama, spare them?” Bulitia tried again even as his non existent voice threatened to fail him. One by one, Abednego, Jefta, Asha, Lucia, Tosi and Luby fell down where they stood and soon there was a new circle of brethren surrounding Bulitia. The brethren to whom he’d brought death. He looked down, wanting to have tears to shed, but nothing came.

“You will wait, and you will watch and when I command you…you will kill”, Asmodeus informed them. No one said a word even as the creature disappeared into the ether. Khakati turned to him, “Bulitia, what is happening?”

Bulitia looked at her and then at the circle of slaves surrounding him, “I don’t know. I wish I did.”

They heard footsteps approaching from the right and turned around to see a tall, handsome being with black hair and grey eyes watching them all sadly. He shook his head and bowed it.

“I am sorry”, he said.

“What are you sorry for and who are you?” Asha asked.

“My name is Armand”, he said, “And I along with you await the same thing.”

“And what is that?” Bulitia asked.

“The Child of Destiny”, Armand said.