single motherhood unplugged

Single Motherhood Unplugged

Annemarie Musawale

Published by Creativity Defined, 2017.

While every precaution has been taken in the preparation of this book, the publisher assumes no responsibility for errors or omissions, or for damages resulting from the use of the information contained herein.

SINGLE MOTHERHOOD UNPLUGGED

First edition. November 7, 2017.

Copyright © 2017 Annemarie Musawale.

ISBN: 978-1508084860

Written by Annemarie Musawale.

This book is dedicated to all those unprepared single parents slogging away in the trenches, just trying to do their best. Cheers, mate.

Chapter One: What Are We Here For?

SOME PEOPLE THINK THAT WE were put on this earth for a specific purpose. Each and every one of us, armed right from the onset with an individual, divinely-designed purpose. Others believe that life has no meaning, and that we are all here by accident. Watch out for this latter set of people on Suicide Watch. Yet another section people believe that we choose our individual purposes, and then we execute them; and with nobody to judge whether we did a good job or not. I'm guessing this last group doesn't do many eulogies.

Not that it matters to you I'm sure, but I personally believe that we are all born with a purpose. Why do I say that? Because if I were to choose a purpose for myself, without regard to passion or ability, I'd definitely choose to be a pilot (fear of height notwithstanding). Or perhaps a rally driver (fear of speed notwithstanding). But if my purpose in life is defined by how much passion, energy, time and spirit I put into any one pursuit, I would have to say that my one passion is Motherhood. I've always liked babies, and they've always liked me.(I was told, the other day by a fellow mother, that it is because I have a good spirit...just saying.) I take care of people; that's my thing. Even my day job as a pharmacist isn't satisfying unless I'm in a position to solve someone's health issue, and make them feel

better. When I write it's usually some Aesop's fables-like piece with a moral at the end of the anecdote. It is supposed to help the reader deal with something I have also fought through; and awarded myself expert status in tackling.

So falling pregnant, having the father of my child semi-abandon me, having to drop out of school, deal with my family, and take care of a baby while trying to get a basic qualification that would help me earn a livelihood, completely dependent on the goodwill of a disappointed parenthood was just up my alley. Of course, as is par for the course with me, nothing turned out to be as simple as it sounds.

The average Kenyan female has no clue about contraception. Sexual education in schools, if present at all, is limited to 'don't have sex'; and parents, unfortunately, seem to think that speaking to their children about sex is tantamount to encouraging them to engage in it. Therefore, they refrain from even alluding to it, and let their children glean all their sexual knowledge from television, the internet, older friends, house helps and watchmen. Precocious children that we are, our first sexual experience could happen before we become teenagers. I remember a case involving a nine year old girl who had been impregnated by her twelve year old brother. Sadly, this wasn't the first time I had heard of a minor getting pregnant. Yet, even as we explore our half-baked sexuality, we have only the vaguest notion about what it's really about. What is it really about anyway?

There are also the religious aspects of the typical Kenyan upbringing during my time; I was brought up in the Catholic Church, went to a Catholic primary school, and was well-schooled in all the subtleties of Catholic guilt; in short, I was

a good Catholic girl who knew that sex outside marriage was a mortal sin, contraceptives were bad and all that boys wanted was to have sex with you and then leave you alone, disgraced and labeled a slut (completely true by the way - the church doesn't lie here). This religious conditioning passed on many powerful messages that shaped my attitude towards sexual relationships as I entered my teenage years. Then my breasts started to grow and everyone started to take notice long before I was ready for them to (I was an early physical developer, but mentally, a completely late bloomer) and all hell broke loose.

Our attitudes greatly shaped by our early experiences, and my early experiences of 'relationships' and 'sex' included being inappropriately kissed by a relative, inappropriately touched by a houseboy, and being accosted by a neighbor trying to 'persuade' me to have sex with him. I was only twelve. The said neighbor is dead now; car accident. Karma is a bitch. *Requisat in Pace.*

So by the time I reached my majority, like a lot of my peers, I knew next to nothing about contraceptives. I only knew that they made you fat, gave you cancer, and interfered with your normal body functions.Oh, and I also knew that only sluts insisted on using condoms. Still, when I did get into my first serious relationship at eighteen, I did pay a visit to the nearest family planning clinic to get advice about contraception. The lady I spoke to looked at me with a disapproving air; asking me what a little girl like me was doing in a place like that with her eyes alone. Maybe that was not her train of thought, and I was being paranoid, who knows? Eighteen is a crazy age. However, I do know now, that eighteen was a little late to be seeking such advice. Today, pre-teens are sexually active. But it seemed that

having me, an eighteen year old, walk into the clinic to inquire about contraceptive advice was so out of the ordinary that perhaps the advisor was taken aback. She did mention the fact that she thought I was very young. So where are all the other girls, eighteen years old or below, getting contraceptive advice then, because I had visited what I thought the most liberal medical clinic I knew?

Lessons learned; it's important to talk freely and openly with your children about sex, their sexual experiences, and what they should expect. Don't let your kids be caught off guard; like YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN. Physical AND MENTAL maturity ARE NOT ALWAYS AT PAR. Naïveté is not a virtue; it's ALMOST LIKE HAVING A BULL'S EYE EMBLAZONED on your back. Let your children into your life. Let them know about what you went through. LET YOUR CHILDREN SEE HOW HUMAN YOU ARE TO HELP THEM DEVELOP some awareness of the dangers awaiting them. Shielding your kids just leaves them unprepared; And shutting them out of your real life is a missed opportunity to have them let you into theirs.

Chapter Two: Pregnancy and Contraception; How the Fuck Did This Happen?

SERIOUSLY SPEAKING people, I am not a relationship kind of gal. While other girls were dreaming about white weddings and prince Charming; I was dreaming about monster trucks and being a mom with a significant other whose career took him away from home a lot. And I mean, a lot. Not that I didn't believe in love; I did. Just not for me.Love snuck up on me. Or, should I say; the closest equivalent to love I'd encountered at the time. No. It was love; just because it went wrong does not mean it wasn't real. They do say that the definition of love 'desires the highest and best for the other'. I think this fails to take into account human nature. Perhaps he did desire the best and highest for me; as far as he was able within his own insecurities and neuroses – perhaps I did the same, within my own insecurities and neuroses. Possibly, it came at the wrong time for both of us; when we were not prepared for it. It has endured subliminally; unacknowledged and ignored...

The pregnancy was one of those avoidable accidents. We had had a serious disagreement over a third party, and sort of broken up in an interim I-still-love-you-but-what-am-I-to-do-with-this sort of way. Apologies were tendered, and, I suppose,

accepted, and one thing led to another. It wasn't so much forgetting about protection as I-love-you-so-much-I-want-to-be-as-close-to-you-as-possible-if-I-could-melt-into-your-skin-I-would type of thing. Afterward, the thought of emergency pills did cross my mind, but with no idea how to get my hands on some, I simply dismissed it or rather, let what would be, be. Besides, I'd just had my period the week before! Most so-called unplanned pregnancies probably follow the same pattern. I will say one thing for my baby; he was definitely conceived in a lot of love.

It wasn't just a lack of concern that made me turn my back on the whole question of pregnant or not? I was in university, pursuing a degree in pharmacy, in a class of 30 people, all of whom either attended the same schools or diploma colleges. I was the loner, the outsider and the outlander. Furthermore, I did not blend in; I have never blended in but there, it was a bad thing. So I was having a hard time of it. Anyone who's been to university will tell you; it's not about how much brains you have- it's about how much you can find out about what's coming in the exam that will save you. It's about study buddies and getting your hands on old test papers and how much the lecturers like you.

I wasn't sleeping at night for studying. My man thought I was overly panicky about the exams; but the truth is, I knew that all the studying in the world probably wouldn't be enough in the end. It depressed me to no end. I was used to being among the top dawgs in any academic institution I went to. I was used to doing well. I wasn't doing well; I was doing badly. I could tell no-one about it though. Who would understand? Still, it wasn't in me to quit. So I put my head down and kept

on slogging. I'll tell you this though; it doesn't do much for your self-esteem to realize that you're failing at the one thing you thought you were good at.

Six weeks later, it occurs to me that I've missed my period. I was going into the bathroom or possibly coming out of the bathroom when it just came to me – I'm pregnant. No doubt, no question. I counted back, just to be sure I was really late with my period, but really, it was just pro forma. With this knowledge, came an awareness; someone else is here. Another person; possibly missing most of his parts but still, a human being for all that. And I thought to myself,'ha! This one is a survivor. Barely there and already asserting his/her presence...' The child was never 'it' to me. He was too real. Right from the word, go.

Of course I thought about abortion. I was in my second year of a very difficult course, which I was already failing, I had a roller coaster for a boyfriend – who's feelings changed from undying devotion to perennial doubt from one minute to the next, I had NO MONEY to speak of, no means to support this child, I was an outlander in a strange and inhospitable land...really the pros for abortion outweighed the cons considerably. However, there was one thing they couldn't beat.

They say that babies develop personalities as they grow and have experiences. That has not been my experience at all. What I have seen, is that people are who they are, right from the word, go, and who my child was, was a stubborn, clingly, needy, survivor who would not be thwarted. That child wanted to be born, and he made sure I did not see him as 'the foetus', or even, 'the child'. No, that child was my baby right from the moment I became aware of its existence and you might as well have asked

me to take a knife and stab a babe through the heart in its cradle as abort it.

Still, that was my business, and I told no-one about how I felt. Especially since supportive people were rather thin on the ground. The father of the child was disbelieving at first, he promptly broke up with me, and told me he'd realized he was in love with someone else, and he wasn't ready to lose her. Of course I saw through that one at once. Cynical me was not surprised at all, but Little Girl me was rather hurt that he would take that cowardly route. I think I lost all respect for him on the spot. And Cynical me was rather glad though, that this had happened now, and not two years into married life with a kid in hand and another on the way. I wasn't afraid to be a single mom, far better that than have to deal with a lot of crap in the name of having a husband. Clearly, I shared these views with no-one but God.

I did have a relative studying in the same college as me, so in theory I should have had a go-to guy to discuss my predicament with. Sadly, she was the third party we'd been in an altercation about; so clearly not someone I wanted to be discussing him, or our baby, with. Friends, you ask? Yes, I did have friends. But not at college. I had become close with a Tanzanian girl in my first year, but she'd finished her degree and left for America. I did have two gorgeous guy friends still in college, but we'd drifted apart as our courses moved in different directions and I got into this relationship. My classmates thought I was strange, in a Lindsay Lohan type of way (I'm not), and my housemates were baby daddy's classmates. It was a rather lonely time for me.

As soon as I knew I was pregnant, I began to throw up after every meal. No, sorry, it was during every meal. I'd take two

spoonfuls of anything, run off to the bathroom and threw up. Afterwards, I was good to finish the rest of the meal with no problem. If I didn't eat for more than two hours at a time, I began to feel dizzy. Three hours and I would eat a table if that was all that was available. It's called hypoglycemia. Little baby Eatsalot depletes the blood of glucose, which is the form in which nutrients are delivered to your cells, leaving you with nothing. In my first month of pregnancy, I dropped ten kilos. I have never been hotter than I was when I was pregnant. Sigh. Good times. The nurse at the clinic explained to me that because of all the vomiting, and increased sensitivity to smell limiting the types of food one can be around, and the actual amount that one can consume, well, you lose weight. Ha! Bet you didn't know that did you? You thought pregnancy was all about getting fat? Think again. Most effective weight loss program I've ever been on.

Then there is your skin. I have a picture I took when I was about two months gone, and I stare at it, like its Bon Jovi I'm looking at. I swear, I have never seen such good looking skin as I had during my pregnancy – it was all smooth and glowing...amazing. Of course my hair and my nails were growing at a rate that my perm could hardly keep up with. I did contemplate cutting it all off, but I couldn't afford a professional job, and I was a little reluctant to cut it myself- not being Britney Spears or anything.

Another thing about being pregnant, my metabolism speeded up to such an extent that I never ever felt cold. I think I was channeling my son's metabolism because to this day he claims never to feel cold; to get him into a sweater is a feat requiring huge amounts of energy and determination. More

than I can manage on an average day...My speeded up metabolism also probably had something to do with my continued weight loss throughout my pregnancy. Not that the baby did not grow; he did, but only him. At nine months pregnant, I looked about two months gone. This did not make me happy. If I was going to be pregnant, I wanted the full experience – having people give you seats on buses and everywhere else, going first in line, duck walking with your hand in the small of your back because you're too heavy to walk straight...I wanted all of it. Given my situation, you would think I would be happy not to be showing, but no.

The baby's father continued to fluctuate in his views on the pregnancy. One day he'd be telling me how much I was on my own and if I was wise, I'd get rid of the child. The next day he'd be giving me CD'S labeled New Life and saying how exciting it all was. It was confusing. And depressing. I didn't know from one minute to the next where we stood. He pulled me this way and that like a puppet on a string. Alternately loving and cruel. If it wasn't for his friends, I'm not sure I would have survived it. It's not only drunks and children that God takes care of though. When I needed someone, He provided me with this alternative family. They lived downstairs from me, and we used to hang out as a group in happier days. When they learned I was pregnant, and realized how dodgy my diet was; I was ordered to be reporting for meals daily to their apartment. They made sure I ate – healthy food, not junk. They took me for walks to clear that breathless feeling you get like you're an overpacked rucksack. They made me laugh; and they never talked about what a pickle I was in. Angels come in all shapes and sizes.

The thing with miracles is, sometimes they're so subtle that you hardly credit them, others are so glaring that you can't help but be humbled by them. My pregnancy was open season on the second type. I did mention I had no money right? Oh sure, my parents did send a living wage but nowhere near enough for ante-natal care. The first miracle I experienced is that in spite of all the waffling and mind games, baby daddy paid my ante-natal expenses with no demur. I was able to have all the tests I needed and attend my monthly visit with a doctor with no problem. Oh, he never came with me for those visits, and I was very surprised when he asked to keep a copy of the ultrasound, but it was no more than I expected so I could deal.

Amidst my mood swings from insanely happy to be growing a person to sunk in depression at how I was to sustain this person I was growing; I thought a lot about how disadvantaged this child would start out in life. As if life isn't hard enough, he starts off with a penniless parent, no fixed abode, no prospects...I felt really sad for the child, I wished I could do better by it. Then, my uncle by marriage, who was an expatriate worker in the country, made available to me his club membership to a facility that had a swimming pool, spa and sauna, massage and general languid luxury. I could have lunch and drinks on his account; and it was five minutes from my apartment.

So I was eating well, swimming and getting massages every other day, lounging languidly by the pool as I contemplated the wilderness that I viewed as my life, and I was able to see an obstetrician once a month, get ultrasounds done, buy vitamins to sustain my nausea ravaged body, all without a cent in my pocket...miracles indeed.

Still, it wasn't all fun and games; I hadn't announced to my parents that I was now, plus one. All my years growing up, I'd lived with the threat ringing in my ears, spoken in my dad's sternest tones...'if you get pregnant in my house, I'll throw you out!' So I was expecting to be thrown out, possibly disowned and never spoken of again. Baby daddy had already for all intents and purposes rejected me, and the university would too; given time. So, what was left? Living on the street perhaps? I contemplated it seriously and asked myself,' what will you do to eat, if you live in the street? There are only two options for you that I can see; thievery or prostitution.' Well, prostitution didn't work for me, so I figured I'd go with stealing. We could eat out of dustbins and maybe beg too; though my pride shrunk at the thought. Still, I was ready to do whatever was necessary to keep my child. I think that determination, and the decision not to abort gave me extraordinary peace of mind- and I lived in a state of Grace never seen before or since.

I spent a lot of time in church, in front of the statue of Mary holding her baby son; just talking to her. Yes, out loud. I told her that I was putting my child in her care, hers and her son's. That my child was now hers, and I would trust her to take care of it. His father would be Our Father, who never turns away from any child of his – and I said that I knew that we would be fine. I expected bare survival – I got so much more.

This one time, I asked if having given thought to aborting the child, as I had, due to fear, and pressure...if the child would feel it as rejection somehow, or if it mattered more that I had decided to keep it. The next day, I get a visit from a mate. His friend and I apparently used to go out; (I didn't know we were going out because we only used to talk-albeit about very per-

sonal stuff- and hold hands sometimes. I found out we were, when he broke up with me because I was an outlander and I would apparently go home and leave him; and – I paraphrase here- he couldn't bear that). I liked him though. A lot. And his friend; even though they were devoutly saved protestants and I was resolutely Catholic- we got along. So said friend comes to see me, one year later, out of the blue. He says to me, 'you know, it's not what we think that is important, it's what we do with what we think.' I stared at him nonplussed, waiting for him to tell me that the Virgin says hi or something. He just said goodbye and left. I'm not sure if I answered or not. My mind was too busy boggling.

I began to think that the baby I carried was special. Yeah, I know, all mothers think that. But if you'd had as many barriers as I had blasted out of your way, without so much as lifting a finger, you'd begin to think your baby was special too. The thing that settled this in my mind once and for all was my parents' reaction to my announcement.

I went home for Christmas, leaving things quite up in the air with baby daddy, and with lots of gratuitous advice from busybody relative. I have this cousin see, who became pregnant and hid it for nine months. She gave birth all alone, in her room and her mother heard her keening and later said she'd hoped it was a cat mewling. Apparently she hadn't noticed that her daughter was pregnant. Well, I was half-hoping my mother wouldn't notice either, but I'd barely stepped in the door before she asked me if something had happened to me. I ruefully reflected that I guess I wasn't going to be able to hide this. Well, we had an uncharacteristically cordial evening, and I even told her about all the problems I was having with school. No-

one else was home, just me and her. The stars were aligning. She was very understanding about my troubles and said we'd just have to wait and see what happened. Things were going so well, that I decided to show her the ultrasound when she came home from work the next day. So I placed it on her vanity before she came home, and went to my room to await the explosion. It never came. Instead, I get a polite knock on the door, and an invitation to discuss the ultrasound. My mother listened to everything I had to say. She told me everything would be alright. She asked that I try to speak to baby daddy here at home, with his family present and see if we couldn't come to some sort of resolution. I agreed, and the next day, his sister in law called me in for a meeting. Essentially, she wanted me to tell no-one, get an abortion immediately, and forget about her brother in law because he had no feelings for me; furthermore, he had a girlfriend, with whom he was in love; they'd been out just the night before. I should wait until I meet a man who loves me. Furthermore, I was still in school, there's no way I could do both – raise a child and study...

Have you ever been hit by a two-ton truck, smashed into a tractor then hit by a tree? That's about how I felt, only worse. I had thought that this woman was a friend. I had known her long before her marriage to baby daddy's brother. We grew up together. I couldn't understand the words that were coming out of her mouth. They belonged to a cold-hearted witch I didn't know. Still, I am Bukusu, and nobody has more pride than we do; not the Spaniards, not the Sephardim, no-one. So I kept my dignity, and I explained to her that abortion was not an option, if I had to do it alone, I would. She was very impressed by my resolve. I was very horrified by her true col-

ors. We parted with polite goodbyes, and I erased her from my heart.

My family however, was stupefyingly supportive. They circled the wagons and held me within them with a love and care that convinced me completely that I was right about my baby. He/she was special. He/she was also extremely late.

lessons: life throws you curveballs you're maybe not prepared for. it makes you wonder how you could possibly ever cope. sometimes you just have to realize that you can't cope, and yet, you haven't died. when we can't cope with a situation, it does not mean that it's over for us. someone else is watching over us, helping us, carrying us through these patches of difficulty that assail us. we are never alone, we don't have to do it alone; allow for the possibility that help is at hand, and it will be.

Chapter Three: Birth and Bonding; Well Hello! There You Are...

I HAD THREE ULTRASOUNDS DURING the nine months of my pregnancy. The first one was at twelve weeks, to suss out possible problems that would be causing my non-stop vomiting. Nothing out of the ordinary was found. The baby in fact seemed to be having rather a good time, dancing. I was enthralled. The second one I had when I returned home, since I had to get a new obstetrician, who wanted to do his own tests. The third one, was because I had conflicting EDD's (expected date of delivery); first in late November, then early December, then Christmas Eve. All three ultrasounds indicated that I was having a girl child.

I was a little excited at the thought of having an almost millennium baby, born the day before Christ. It correlated with my belief in the utter specialness of this child. By the time I was eight months gone though, I just wanted it out. She was very restless, and moved constantly. It was like I was incubating one of those aliens you see on TV, where you actually see them turn on the surface of the unfortunate mother's skin. My baby was like that, constantly pushing out limbs and elbows and whatnot; my stomach was constantly undulating. Night time was worse. That was when 'she' really went to town. I couldn't sleep for all the movement. Of course there was no position that was

even remotely comfortable. Terrified as I was of the process of removing this child from my body, I was so fed up by then I'd have submitted to being cut open without anesthesia just to get it out.

Still, the thought of having unknown strangers poking in my privates for whatever reason; and maybe my bowels loosening in the process filled me with horror. I tried not to think too much about the process of birthing because it was just so undignified and invasive and...horrifying. When my due dates came and went, I began to fear that my fear of labor was causing my body to just not go into it. I felt it was my fault that it wasn't happening, and by the time New Year's came and went, the doctor was worried too. He said,' we'll give it five days. If nothing gives, we'll have to induce.'

Well that didn't sound like fun, but what was a girl to do? So I check myself into the hospital and the nurse looks at me quizzically like, 'Yes? Can I help you?' and I said," I'm here to check in." She looks me up and down in my tracks and T and asks, "In six months?" Seriously. She really did. I said, "No. I'm here to give birth". So she checked me in with an extremely dubious look on her face and I settled in and waited for the doctor to come and induce me. It was four p.m. in the afternoon, January 4th of the year 2000.

Well, the process of being induced wasn't too bad in itself, the forceps were freezing cold, and like I said, I hated having hands and pieces of metal inserted into me; but it was over soon, then they broke my water for me – not as messy as I'd thought it would be – and then the waiting began. I was expecting excruciating pain when the labor pains started, but it was more like a middling cramp. I had suffered from extremely

painful cramps for most of my life; so really, a middling cramp did not even keep me awake. I slept fitfully through the night, the pain did not come in waves; it was just a constant dull ache. The nurses woke me now and then to see if there was any progress and sometime in the night hours, the doctor came to check me too. I was rather impressed by that – him being a rather big shot sort of doctor, I figured he'd have his minions check on me until he was needed to pull the baby out. But he himself had a look at me twice during the night. I'm not given to hero worship, but that doctor has remained on the top of my list of People I most Admire ever since.

Morning came, but baby had not. The nurses were checking me every thirty minutes or so, but it seemed I was stuck at 3cm dilation. This could maybe have had something to do with the sight I'd seen during the night, when a woman came in, apparently already in labor. In the midst of the nurse scolding her about waiting for so long to come in, and her protesting that the pain just came on suddenly two hours before, and she had to catch a bus to the hospital...well, they had no time to take her to the labor room, or even draw the curtains round her bed that was... Right. Opposite. Me. So I had a bird's eye view of her v-jay-jay stretched impossibly wide, with a bit of yellow stuff peeking out that I assume was the baby's head...words cannot describe the feelings I had when I saw that; but let's just say if I was the type, I'd have swooned dead away.

Thirteen hours and counting...dilation still at 4cm, every member of my family and clan had been, stayed and left. It was my mother, my cousin thrice removed; her friend, and the doctor in the room He listened with the baby stethoscope, and couldn't hear the baby's heartbeat. Mother, cousin and doctor

leave the room to have a whispered conference. Doctor comes back in and says, 'look, your baby's heart is failing. We have to get it out now. We shall have to do a Caesarian section. Do you agree?'

Well, duh. Silly question if I ever heard one. Go on, get it out, now. So I was wheeled to surgery. By now I was contracting continuously like I had tetanus or something so I wasn't really in touch with everything, but it seemed to me that everyone was bloody taking their time about getting me to surgery and prepping and what not. The doctor's were arguing about politics for crying out loud! I would have written a strongly worded letter to someone if I had the strength. In my head though, I was screaming at them to get on with it already!!

The next thing I know is, I wake up and I'm being wheeled somewhere. I can't open my eyes or move my limbs. I tried to ask after my baby but all that came out was mmmbli? The nurse seemed to understand though, and told me that 'my son' was fine, and he was in the neonatal ICU. At that point, I knew that my child must be dead, because for one thing, I was expecting a daughter – so the nurse must have lied to me. Still, I couldn't move or speak, and I drifted back to sleep or slipped back into unconsciousness before I could attempt anything else.

When I woke for the second time, I was lying in a bed in a ward of some kind, I still couldn't open my eyes, or else I was blind, I was still paralyzed(I loathe anesthesia to this day), and there was a woman wailing somewhere in the room and praying tearfully for her child. This totally confirmed my suspicion that my child was dead, and now I'd been put in the mothers-with-dead-babies ward. I knew from the angle in which I was lying that I wasn't in the same bed I'd been in before.The nurse came

to check on me and when I again tried to speak to her, and failed, she informed me that the doctor would be by to see me. By this I deduced that it was he who would break the news to me. I tried to brace myself for the worst but I fell asleep again.

The third time I woke up, I could talk again, and move (Thank God), and I insisted on knowing where my child was. The nurse reluctantly informed me that he was in the neonatal ICU and that I would see him later. I didn't believe her, seeing as three ultrasounds said daughter, but decided to wait anyway. Time would tell after all. I tried to decide how I felt about the possibility of my child being dead but I couldn't quite decide. The pros were just as many as the cons – yes I know, a very cold-blooded way to look at it. My emotions however, were not manifesting at the time, so it was all I had to go with.

I needed the little girls' room, and I looked around for my slippers but couldn't find them. So I thought maybe they'd been left beside my former bed. Well, I really needed to go, so I got up and using my I.V. stand as a crutch, made my way slowly out of the ward and into the corridor. My former bed was in the next ward so it wasn't far to go. At the reception desk though was sitting my doctor, apparently talking to my mother because he said, 'she's right here walking past me, perfectly alright'. And then a lot of quacking sounds on the line then he says, "oh no, it's good for her to exercise, she'll heal faster. Do you want to speak to her?" Apparently she said no because he didn't hand me the phone. He was quite impressed by my ability to be walking around the morning after a C-section, but what I wanted to know, was what happened to the baby.

He was surprised that I hadn't seen 'him' yet, and asked the nurse to fetch him. At last I got to see my son at about 9'o th'

clock on the 6th of January. He was the spit of his father and I worried that I would not be able to love him fully because he would be a constant reminder. Especially since, when they put him in my arms, all I felt was...nothing. No euphoria, no tears in my eyes. I was maybe curious about him. He was so light skinned; I didn't know babies were born so light, and his nails were long and quite sharp, his grip was strong and his eyes stayed closed the whole time. I guess he was drugged with all the anesthesia too. He seemed small, but everyone said he was a large baby. Almost four kilos. I stared at him in fascination, wondering if he was someone else's even as I acknowledged that that mouth was his father's to the life.

The pediatrician took him back from me, to check his AGPAR signs I guess, though you'd think she'd have already done that. His pupils dilated well in the light and everything else was hunky dory as well. She asked me what I do, and I said nothing at the moment. This seemed pleasing to her, and she told me to feed him exclusively on breast milk for the first six months of his life. Nothing else, not even water. Since I apparently had no impediments to doing so – by this statement I took it that my HIV test was negative (they didn't inform you that they did one then, but I knew that they did). I stole a peek at my son's chart and discovered that he had not cried when he was born, and wasn't breathing. Hence the reason for neonatal ICU and all the evasiveness earlier. Probably also why the pediatrician was so happy; maybe she'd pulled him back from the brink. Either way, I guessed I was glad to meet him. He seemed a docile type of baby; not too much trouble. He slept with me that first night and hardly waked. A far cry from the mother next to me, who ran out of milk, had a wailing child and nurses totally ig-

noring her pleas for help; though to be fair, I don't really know what they could have done. So I was feeling very smug about my quiet baby. Little did I know it was the drugs talking or rather, causing all the sleep.

My mother went shopping as soon as she heard that the child was safely delivered. Apparently it's a Luhya tradition that you don't buy your baby anything before they're born: bad luck. I thought the whole thing totally superstitious but since it wasn't my money...I couldn't exactly complain. We went from having no baby things to an explosion of baby stuff in like three hours. Not just my mother but my aunts and cousins all brought something. I thanked God in my heart over and over. My worry over how I would clothe him was pretty much taken care of right there and then. As for feeding, well, my breasts were full and heavy and ready for action, so again, I was good.

I was well enough to go home the next day, which was just as well, because it was a Friday, and they didn't discharge on weekends so it was stay in hospital all weekend or go home then. I was heartily sick of the place by then so I was quite happy to see the back of it. To my surprise I was worn out just walking to the car. Physically, I had no pain or discomfort, but was still weak I found, much to my chagrin. I don't do weak well. When we got home I was sent straight to bed, which I found strange. I was expecting to be given baby related chores to do right away. Instead I was told to go rest. It made me feel kind of guilty, everyone was waiting on me and I wasn't feeling that bad. I could definitely get up and fetch my own food, but my mother herself brought it to me.

Furthermore, all the neighbors came to visit too. They were young men, high spirited with the usual short attention spans

and nothing to gain by visiting me; but they came and stayed all afternoon anyway! I was living in a perpetually surprised state. I think I still am.

Well, the first week was quiet. The baby didn't cry much, unless there was some delay in feeding, or changing; possibly when bathing – such a typical boy, he hated baths – still does. I performed these tasks like an automaton though. Maybe because he gave little trouble, he was scarcely real to me. I kept waiting for that outpouring of love you read so much about and see in all those movies; but, nothing. No joy, no love, no tenderness. Just,' ooh, time to change that nappy again'; or 'ouch! Time to feed it again." Breastfeeding is painful! The child clamps down on your nipple and just grinds it to nothingness in the name of suckling. It hurt so much I became depressed thinking about doing it for six months non-stop. It seemed endless when it was going on; my breasts hurt, my back hurt, my neck ached; I was screaming in my mind the whole time. When I couldn't take it anymore, I practically pulled my nipple out of his mouth. Mostly the one on the right side. This was a mistake. Since I was pulling and he was resisting, the nipple underwent a lot of wear and tear. By week's end it was open, sore and bleeding.

Still, it kept filling with milk, but the baby wouldn't touch it because of the iron taste of blood. So he drained the other side to the last drop, unfortunately he was still hungry. He started to cry; really cry – you know that wailing babies do that by-passes your ears and goes straight to your brain until you feel like you're being hammered by a woodpecker? That's how he cried. It made me feel like screaming and wailing too, and it brought my mother out of bed. We tried to feed him water, but

he rejected it, so we got some formula and tried to make him drink that. No cigar. All the time, his wails seemed to be getting louder and louder until I wondered how *anyone* could sleep. Eventually, I offered to try to give him my wounded breast. It was painful when not being clamped by his strong gums. I was dreading having them actually on me. But I was ready to endure that, if he could drink.

It was at that point that I stopped worrying about whether I loved him or not. Clearly nothing but love would make me subject myself to this torture. In any case, the sacrifice was not required of me. He would not drink of my breast. I guess the taste of blood was too strong, although we had tried to clean it up first. So we changed strategy from trying to get him to eat something, to trying to hasten the production of milk in my other breast. This included drinking a lot of porridge and water. By morning, there was enough in the left breast to feed the little beast and afterwards, we all managed a little rest. I thought that would be like the worst night of my life. I had so much to learn.

It's not the crying that wears you out, though God knows it makes you feel like throwing your kid away, or even the feeding, once you get the knack of reducing the pain to the bare minimum by controlling how tight he clamps on to you. No, the thing that wears you out is how often you have to change his nappy. No sooner have you finished removing, cleaning, wiping dry and fitting on a new nappy...than he poops again. If you leave the nappy on for too long, he'll get nappy rash. If you leave it off altogether, you'll be cleaning poop off everything else. It's exhausting and demoralizing and makes you wish that

you weren't born. I don't understand how anyone would deliberately do it more than once.

lesson learned? motherhood is not about being in a 'shiny happy people' video; being happy all the time, and mushy and feeling like 'ooh, i love my baby soooo much!' although this is undoubtedly true, it's not what it's about. no, motherhood is about hard slog, and pain, and keeping going when you want to throw in the towel. because this baby is helpless, and IT'S relying on you to take care of it, until it can take care of itself. if you don't do it, then the baby will die, or fail to thrive, which comes to the same thing. so if you don't feel the urge to burst into song because you have a child, then don't sweat it. because you are sweating; from all the feeding and bathing and clothing, staying up at night when they're crying their lungs out, then waking up and doing it all the next day. that's love. that's parenthood.

Chapter Four: Who Am I? Why Am I?

BY NOW YOU MUST BE wondering about me? Or not, but either way, I like to talk about myself... I daresay you find my thought processes a trifle strange. So I am going to let you in to the person that is Me, and how I came to be, who I am.

I told you about my first brush with the dark side of sexuality right? Well, unfortunately, it wasn't the last. Just a year after my experience with my neighbour, I was raped. By a person who I thought was a friend. He was the son of a VIP who lived not far from us, and we talked now and then. Very exciting stuff for a thirteen year old girl; to be noticed and spoken to by a 17-year old, good looking, son of a diplomat – very heady.

So one day, he told me that his dad's tour was up, and they would be going home; and he wanted me to visit him at his house at least once before that happened. Well, they lived in a mansion that I'd only seen from the outside, so the thought of going inside...well, I agreed at once. First though, I went home to tell our house help where I was going, because I was a good girl and I always let people know where I was because Mummy said we must. So I told her; and to my surprise, she was very unwilling for me to go. She said I should go with someone – but no-one else was home. She said I should stay and play a game with her – I looked at her like she was mad. Finally, she insisted

on escorting me to the house. I didn't really see the need, but I agreed because clearly, she was crazy. She dragged her feet a lot, and kept trying to stall us, so I got impatient and left her behind.

I was let in to the house, and given the tour. His brothers and sisters were home, so I thought nothing of it, when he said we should go see his room. Honestly, sex is not something which crossed my mind at any time at that age; inappropriate advances notwithstanding. The next thing I know, my trousers are around my ankles, I'm flat on my back on his bed, and he's on top of me.

To be honest, I didn't even know what was happening. I had no parameters to compare this with. All I knew was that it hurt, it was invasive, and it hurt. It hurt so much that my spirit left my body. It was somewhere up on the ceiling, looking down at the shell-shocked body on the bed and wondering; hmm, is this really what I think it is?

I did try to resist when he pushed me down; but I was so not expecting it, and I so had no clue what to do, that I just...lay there, and prayed for it to be over soon. And prayed that it wasn't actually sex, just something else that really hurt a lot. And I prayed that God would forgive me for allowing this to happen. Let's just say that none of my prayers were heard that day. When it was finally over, and he got off me, I looked at the spot where I was lying, to see if there was blood. That was the only way I knew to tell if my virginity was broken. Well, there was blood – a dark red stain in the shape of Africa; oxygenated blood. I stared at it and despaired. So I had been 'fucking'. I was officially damned. Fornication was a mortal sin. While I was reeling under my new status as Satan's future stooge, he was

telling me something about not worrying about getting pregnant because he took care of it, blah blah blah. Like it was even on my radar yet that I could possibly be pregnant! I was still all over numb, and my spirit was still kind of not in my body yet, so I don't really know how I got out of there. I do remember he wanted to see me again; which scared the pants out of me...

As I walked home, I felt as if everyone could tell that I wasn't a virgin anymore. An Israeli boy I used to wave to, passed by and actually said hi to me, and I turned my head away in shame. When I got home, I went to have a pee, and there was frank blood in my urine. I stared at it like it belonged to someone else, and went to change my underwear. I told no-one, but the house help looked at me with knowledge in her eyes. I knew she knew what had happened. She said nothing though, and neither did I. Clearly, what happened had been my fault; she tried to stop me and I wouldn't listen. Probably there was a code that everyone else knew, and I didn't; about not going to a guy's house unless you intended for something to happen. I felt stupid and blind. Why was I the only one who hadn't seen this coming? After all, my neighbor had attempted to jump me just last year; I should have had a higher awareness of the possibility of this happening should I ever be alone with a guy. But I hadn't seen it coming – I never saw these things coming. I was surprised EVERY TIME! It pissed the hell out of me.

The physical pain only lasted a few days. It hurt to walk straight for a while, but I did it anyway – I wasn't about to give myself away by limping. That first evening, my mother caught me staring off into space in the middle of the living room. I started out of it; and was careful never to do anything like that again; she always was far too observant. I was going to hide

what happened to me from everyone if it killed me. I was so ashamed. The boy who did it did not leave me alone, he did not avoid me; in fact, he hung around waiting for me to show up on the road to the shops; he made a point of talking me if he found me on the road; once, he even came up to my gate to ask for me. He asked me why I didn't go visit him again. It terrified me. I took to hiding out in my room; praying for the day when they left the country. It couldn't come soon enough for me. While all this was going on, I was still trying to behave like everything was normal with me – that my life wasn't falling apart around my ears and me helpless to stop it.

The emotional pain never left. I took all the crapola associated with what happened and stored it in a section of my heart; then I cemented it over, and covered it with camouflage; and then I turned my back on it and pretended it wasn't there. The problem with doing this is; you don't deal with this stuff, if festers and grows, and turns everything around it cold and numb. To feel at all, is to risk a breach in those walls. So I wrapped my heart in an icebox and lived exclusively in my head from then on.

Well, my head wasn't a bad place to be; I'm an intelligent person, with a lively imagination and a creative mind. Who needed emotions when I had TV? I didn't connect with people emotionally – I equated them to the nearest TV character that corresponded with their personality, and then responded to them accordingly. So if your designated alter ego was witty for example; then I responded in kind. I didn't understand why some people's feelings were hurt by what I said. It was all banter right? Just go ahead and say your lines already! I did not recognize that I had the power to hurt with my words, until my

son cried the other day because I said his feet smell. I didn't get what the big deal was; but I understood that it wasn't academic to him.

When I grew up and began to have relationships; mostly with guys who bothered enough to do ALL the chasing and didn't demand too much from me, beyond making out and intelligent witty conversation. Once feelings came into the equation, I was out. Yes, so now you know. If I ever broke up with you just when it looked like we might be going somewhere; that's why. Of course there was the other type of guy. The ones who wanted to cheat, or lie or whatever. I assume other women tolerate these things, since they are emotionally invested in the relationship. In my head, I always put a deadline on any relationship I began. Oh, I did visualize being married and starting a family with every guy I got with like any other female of a certain age; but at the same time, I'm waiting for the guy to use up his three strikes. The mistake, the bad decision; and then now it's a habit. An example perhaps? In the beginning of any relationship, I always gave terms and conditions failure to comply with would immediately result in termination of relationship. Cheating for example was an automatic three strikes. The only one to whom I did not immediately apply this rule was my son's father (and look where that got me.). Continuous lying also followed the three strikes warning. You got two warnings and then you were out.

It wasn't just getting raped that made me so ruthless. It was seeing so much of the ugly side of being a man. Having my father's friend offer me money to go out with me, being kissed by a close relative, being jumped on, and being raped; meeting a friend's boyfriend and having him make eyes at me behind her

back...it was too much – at an age where I'd just barely stopped believing in Santa Claus; I couldn't hack it. Men became to me creatures lower than the mucus on the bacteria living on the fungus in a sewage pond. And while it's true that I was cold and unfeeling with most of my boyfriends, it's also fair to say that hardly any of them noticed, as long as my breasts were available to be touched and my lips to be kissed. So I gave them my breasts, and my lips, and the rest of my body; my mind, my heart and my soul? Those I retained.

Ironically, some of the best friends I made over the years were male. A number of them wanted to take our friendship further, but I never dated men I actually liked. For one thing, I wasn't ready to be emotionally involved with anyone, and for another, I did not want to be disillusioned by my friend – if he was exactly like all those other mucus out there, I did not want to know. Worse yet, if he wasn't – then the wall would be breached, and all the ugliness hidden behind would be revealed. I couldn't hack it.

That's why I said love crept up on me. My son's father was the furthest thing from a candidate of either a relationship or a friendship. My relationships tended to be with good looking, intelligent bad boys – in which area he scored one out of three. My friendships tended to be with good looking, funny, fun, intelligent,bad boys. Well, I guess one out of four ain't bad.

The first time I saw him I thought, "Whoa...! Well, that's an unfortunate face." To make matters worse, his conversation was just this side of sleazy. But because he was absolutely not on my radar as a potential...anything, my guard was all the way down. And the 'one' that he had, was intelligence. Plus he's something of a sociopath so he knows how to manipulate people. By the

time he informed me that I was in love with him, it was too late to get out. Furthermore, I was essentially alone, in a foreign country, flunking out of school, lonely and depressed out of my mind. No excuses; but that was the situation on the ground.

You can run, but you can't hide. sooner or later, all your baggage is going to catch up to you. the longer it takes, the worse the fallout is. turn round, and face it. it's never as bad as you thought it would be.

Chapter Five: Mother Grandmother; Setting Boundaries Can Be Troublesome.

YOU CAN'T WALK AWAY from your baby. Troublesome emotion or not; you're stuck with them forever. I had let my guard down to a certain extent with his father; enough to 'fall in love' with him, not enough to open my heart. You see, the problem with being sexually abused as a child (and I did a thesis on this for my higher diploma so I know) is that while your self-confidence might be high, your self-esteem is almost non-existent. I didn't know this until I did that thesis – it's easy to confuse one with the other. I saw that I chose men who I felt would demand nothing from me, because I felt I was not worth more than them. Although I walked tall, spoke in a confident tone, and went about my business like I was the best thing that happened to the world; inside was a little girl hiding in a dark corner, fearful of coming out because she was sure nobody liked her anyway. So, although I told myself I was being ruthless by giving three strikes and then walking away; I was leaving before I could be left. After all, if they were cheating on me, it must mean that they'd lost interest. I became so good at running away; I didn't even know I was doing it. So when baby daddy invented another girl to be in love with rather than stand

by me – well, part of me was relieved. There are no such escape hatches with motherhood.

That's why it changed me. By its very nature, it was forever; so I could let myself be needed by this little bundle of joys and sorrows, without feeling exposed and vulnerable. After all, clearly, he needed me more than I needed him. I couldn't get rid of him if I tried. So I could love him. It was okay. I tried very hard not to think about him dying. My son taught me to love.

After I came home to give birth, at eight months gone, I did not communicate directly with baby daddy again for some time. I did email his friends, and they me – they were my friends too after all; but I never asked after him, or he me I guess. A friend of his back here in Nairobi did deal with the issue of my medical bills on his behalf; but after that was taken care of, there was total silence from that end. It hurt to imagine he had not enough feeling for his son to find out whether or not he'd been born...I hurt more on my son's behalf than my own. In the months of my pregnancy I'd observed his true colors, and I knew he was not the man I had thought him. Still, even snakes have a care for their offspring. Was mine not to have even that? He did learn of his son's birth; from our mutual friends who did bother to inquire. I hear they went out to celebrate and toast to this new life. I wasn't impressed.

Still, I had my mother. She was a rock that I leaned heavily on, especially those first months. She'd forgotten much about babies, and I knew hardly anything- but between us, we figured it out. I couldn't imagine that having a husband would have been more helpful – so I was glad of my situation. In fact I felt sorry for all those married mothers who did not have the benefit of their mummies on hand to stay up with them all night

when the babe is ill, or even notice when that fever's getting dangerous when you hadn't a clue it was that bad, or even quieting the kid down when no-one else can.

Thanks to his paternal genes, my son was prone to chest infections and in that first year, we were in and out of hospital so much that I could readily predict what medication they would give him on each trip; Always Amoxil, or Ampiclox, with a cough medication and Paracetamol for fever. It got so; these seemed to have absolutely no effect on him. My heart sunk every time I heard that hacking cough because it meant another sleepless night wiping him down with a lukewarm cloth, trying to keep the fever down; and waiting hopelessly for a change in the severity of the cough. My heart also sunk because illness meant I had to ask for money from my mother to take him to the clinic. Asking my mother for money has always been difficult. My parents did not encourage the practice, from a very early age; and it was usually inviting trouble to do so. So I'd rather tended to avoid doing it, unless I was out of options; i.e. no old newspapers to sell, or whatever other hustle I happened to be conducting. Well, for the first six months, I only left the house to go for doctor's visits, so no hustles, and certainly, no money. I had a kind of anxiety disorder about asking my mum for cash; but it couldn't be helped if the babe was sick. Even if she never said anything, there was always this look on her face... Well, that's motherhood – you suck it up and keep going.

So when he was about six months old, I saw this ad in the papers for telemarketers at a five star hotel in the city. No experience required. A godsend indeed. I passed the interview, and was invited for the training. However, I was cut at the end of training because, the manager told me later, I failed to keep my

energy up all afternoon. That had something to do with the air conditioning set at cold that gave me a bit of a flu as the day progressed, plus I felt I had answered practically every question in the morning, I thought I could afford to relax a bit after lunch. Apparently you can't. I was very disappointed in not getting it; and telling my mother that had failed at that as well rankled.

Two weeks later, the manager called me to offer me the job. The man they'd picked instead of me was bollocks at the job, and she told me, if I could keep my energy up, the job was mine. Well, the energizer bunny had nothing on me during the next training; and I was offered the job on the spot. It was a rather challenging position, with very little job security. If you didn't manage to sell a single membership in the course of a week, you were out. I loved it; it gave me a chance to be charming and witty to strangers (within the confines of the script of course) without creating any follow-up obligations and I did sell memberships. I lasted for the duration of the assignment – which due to my late entry was unfortunately not very long. Still, it was good to be good at something again.

My life was rather confining at the time; what with my inability to leave the house even to go to the shops for fear of leaving the baby alone with a house help who showed very little interest in him. A friend of a friend passed away during those months. I was saddened by it; as I suspected he'd killed himself – or at least let himself die due to the pain he'd been suffering over the deaths of his son and wife. They'd followed each other in a matter of months, and I know he was having a hard time with it; he didn't have anyone he could talk to either – but

once, he had talked to me. I wanted to attend his funeral, but I couldn't leave the baby all day. I feel bad about it.

Apart from the doctor's office to deal with the baby's illnesses, there was somewhere else that I did go during that time; admissions offices. First, I travelled to Uganda with my son, only three months old, to see if I could get my transcript. A nightmare trip if I ever saw one. Travelling by bus, with a baby is really the worst type of torture you can subject yourself to. But I couldn't leave him – he was breastfeeding, and I didn't want him to think I'd abandoned him. Not even for a few days. I never wanted my child to ever feel alone. I knew too well how much that sucked. I was unsuccessful in my attempt to obtain my transcript as it required more wheeler dealing than I had time or experience for; furthermore I was staying with my uncle by marriage; and his wife was behaving strangely like perhaps I was a potential rival or something. I decided to get out of there before it became a bad scene for us. I did go back later, without the baby, to follow-up on my transcript visit, but I spent as little time as possible in the house. I did see baby daddy on that visit, but kept our mutual friends close, as a buffer, and we hardly spoke. Did I point out that my post baby body was smokin? Well, I did notice that he noticed, and he did say something about how the good thing with the whole baby situation was that, he could always change his mind... and I was just thinking, "eat your heart out buddy, you'll never have all this, ever again."

My parents did try to get me back into medical school back home, but there was some student unrest over the inclusion of parallel students in the system and the principal was afraid that my inclusion as a regular student would smack of favoritism;

my parents however, were not ready to pay the fees for a parallel degree. So I was admitted to the medical college to do a diploma in pharmacy; first term to begin in September.

This was the next source of conflict between mother and me. She wanted me to leave the baby and become a boarder in school. I said over my dead body. There was some argument back and forth, reinforcements were called in; all on her side; it hurt that nobody believed I knew what I was doing when I said I had to stay home – you'd think I'd be used to it by now. But I wasn't called a stubborn, arrogant girl for nothing. I stood my ground and would not be persuaded. Dire predictions of my failure were made by all and sundry. I ignored them all, and determined to be top of the class from the word go. Nothing motivates me like adversary – tell me I can't and move aside so I can show you just how much Yes I Can.

College was all the way on the other side of town, so I had to be up by five am to have a fighting chance of arriving by eight. I am not a morning person, and I was still waking up three times a night to feed the little bugger. Furthermore, if he decided that he wasn't going back to sleep, then I had to stay up with him. But I did it anyway; every day without fail. I'd attend classes during the day, and then catch the first transport home, to be in time for the baby's first evening feed, which took from when I walked in the door to between two to three hours later. Sometimes, someone brought me food. I took to studying while the kid fed; sort of kill two birds with one stone since I was sitting down anyway.

I felt very remote from my classmates. I was living in a zone that had room for me, one baby, and my books. Everything else was extraneous. Naturally, this made me the most visible

person in class. The more I kept to myself, the more everyone wanted to know who I was. Like I said, people have always noticed me. It's not a good thing honestly; I don't know why some crave it so. Anonymity has its uses- Especially for one with no use and no talent for small talk. I felt that my story was so complicated that I wouldn't know where to start if someone wanted to know how I'd come to be there. Of course that created a lot of mystery about me, and people were more intrigued. Still, I did my work, did it well, and kept to myself. I passed all my exams seemingly without too much effort (after all, who could see me studying as I breastfed?) and even came top in my first year. This caused some teachers to dislike me, or like me according to what type of personalities they had. Others were wary of me. I am not like other people, and sometimes certain types of people just don't know what to do with that. If you don't conform, you're strange and weird and people don't understand you so they either want to burn you at the stake or make you king. (I speak metaphorically here of course). It doesn't help if you're too unconcerned to care which they do. It wasn't so much unconcern as...I'd been through a lot in my life, and the petty politics of social life just couldn't excite enough interest in me, to enable me to participate in it. I had not the energy.

Even though I was home every night, I still felt neglectful as a parent. I didn't know if my son was eating during the day, or how he fared. If it wasn't that my mother worked really close and came home for the midday meal I would have been very worried indeed. Still, knowing how not bright the house help was, and what a poor eater my child was of anything that wasn't breast milk, I worried about his nutrition. And how much attention he was being paid. He is rather an attention seeker, and

I was afraid that if no-one was taking any notice of him during the day, he'd wither away with loneliness. Although he and I were complete opposites in temperament; I, self-sufficient; he, needy; I totally felt his pain. It's the eternal conflict between motherhood and livelihood. One must go out to find a means to earn a living; when all one's instincts are saying,' you should be home with your child'. I thought I was a feminist before I had a child; but now I'd be perfectly happy to be a stay-at-home mom and let someone else bring home the bacon. However, since it's not an option; we both just have to suck it up.

The baby still got sick at night, and I still had to stay up with him sometimes; still wake up at 5am and take myself to school...I knew I was on my last chance, and now I had someone depending on me. I made sure I never missed a day of school. On the final day of exams, I woke with a bad case of stomach trouble. I couldn't walk, and I was sweating like a pig, I was dizzier than Gillespie, and the pain! I dressed up slowly and made my way out of the house practically on my hands and knees, and went to school. When I arrived, I went directly to the principal and asked for a deferral of my exam because I was sick. He was reluctant because a case of food poisoning or whatever it was is hardly provable and should the sick bay not find any bacteria in my stool I would not be allowed to sit for the re-sit. However, he said I could request the lecturer for the extension and see if he would give it to me. So I did. The lecturer gave me a bollocking about how I wanted to avoid doing the exam because I hadn't studied. He made me sit right on his table to do the paper. So I did it. In thirty minutes. Then I went to the sick bay and collapsed. From that day, that lecturer hated

my guts to an extent that I began to doubt his sanity. It didn't help that I scored a C on that paper.

During the Christmas break, we, as a family, travelled upcountry to our rural home. I've always hated Christmas; it's always been merry freaking Christmas to me. So much so called family time, full of tensions and undercurrents and bad temper and cliques all of which I'm not good at. Given a choice, I would rather have stayed in the city with my son, and just had some time to myself to chill out and relax. Instead, I was washing nappies upcountry, just to have a minute away from everything. The baby got sick. He started to burn up and his stool was very loose. He lost weight at a frightening rate. The local 'pediatrician' said it was malaria, despite the fact that the incompetently done test was negative. He gave him medicine. It didn't help. My son was practically disappearing before my eyes. It got so bad someone started talking about curses much to my unexpressed disgust. My mother and big sister took over the decision-making about what to do next for the baby like I had ceased to exist or something. I was 'allowed' to wipe him down, change his nappy and breastfeed him, but I found myself being informed about what 'they had decided' to do about my son's illness.

My problem is that I don't talk. Whatever I'm thinking usually stays between me and God. But honestly this was too much...what could I do though? It was their money treating his illness. I was helpless on my own. So I had to grin and bear their patronizing. Eventually, we left for the city, and the child got better – though a few hairs of mine did turn grey. I felt I had to say something though, about how they just took over like I wasn't there. So I wrote my mother a note, reminding her who

my baby's mother was and reminding her that she'd had seven chances to bring up children, so she should let me have this one. I thought it was well-written, no rancor or bitterness, polite. But apparently it was very upsetting; and my mother was very upset. She stopped speaking to me, and to add novelty to bizarreness, my father got to act as intermediary.

It was a very emotionally charged meeting, with my mother accusing me of all sorts of ridiculous things and me trying my best not to start shouting back. I was through with the shouting matches that characterized my adolescence. I guess she hadn't gotten the memo. I explained rationally to my dad what exactly I'd meant by the note and he saw my point. This upset my mother even more as she later explained because my father hadn't been a very active participant in the upbringing of my son, (what with him living upcountry and not knowing what to do with a single mother in his house), and so he telling her what she was doing wrong rather rankled. Of course, they also had their own personal issues that probably didn't help matters.

Eventually we did sort it out; but my mother was not one to forgive and forget easily. Guaranteed it would come up at some future altercation. Still, she remained the rock on which I leaned at this time. She stayed up with me when the babe was sick, spelling me so I could get some sleep – I'd still have to wake up to get to school in the morning after all. On that point, there was no compromise.

when you are dependent upon others to feed your child, conflict is almost inevitable. once a person has invested in the child, both financially and emotionally, they feel more than entitled to an opinion on how the babe's future should be shaped.

this is just one of the pitfalls of being a dependent. difficult as it is, you have to find a way to deal with this and hopefully come to some acceptable compromise that takes the best interests of the child into consideration but doesn't leave everyone else totally miserable. god knows living with totally miserable people cannot be good for anyone's health.

Chapter Six: Guiding Your Child; When You Have No Clue Where the Right Track Is.

MY SECOND YEAR BEGAN on a high note. I had completed the first year at the top of my class, and in spite of my best efforts, I'd made friends. I looked forward with anticipation to completing my course, as I regarded it as simply an obstacle on my way to independence. Then my world changed again.

On the 1st of November 2001, at 11:15am, my mother died. It was very sudden. A massive hemorrhage in her brain. About six months before, a friend of hers had died. Of a stroke. My mother was very affected by the death, and she told me that she could imagine herself dying like that. She was very philosophical about how suddenly, one's life could be taken away and said that she'd always wished to eat in a five star hotel before she died and hoped that she'd get to do it. I hope that she did. After that time, my mother changed a bit; she was more inward looking and seemed to lose some of her boundless energy. Conversely, she seemed at the happiest I had ever seen her. My nephew was born that year and she went to see him and stayed with my sister for a week or so. She came back happy, relaxed and smiling. Her grandchildren really made her happy.

The night before her death, she came home early from work, I found her already in her night clothes when I came home from school. I thought it unusual but not so strange as to warrant comment. That night, she did not play with the baby, and that should have been a clue to me, if I was paying attention – but I had homework, and breastfeeding and what not to do, so I missed it. At some time during the night, I woke to see that all the lights in the main house were ablaze. There were some voices raised, and I wondered what was going on. I thought about getting up to go see, but I figured if they needed me, they'd call, and I really needed my sleep. I regretted not following my first impulse for a really long time.

In the morning, when I awoke, everyone was acting kind of strange, but no-one said a word to me. I went to my mother's room to get something, and found that she was not there; I thought it strange that she'd left so early, but I thought nothing of it, until I saw my sister coming back from my mother's office with her driver. Their air was grave. So I asked the driver what gives, and he told me that my mother had been taken to the hospital in the night.

So I debated; go to the hospital, or go to school? I could just hear my mother's voice in my head, asking me with a frown on her brow, what I was doing missing class by coming to see her. So I elected to go to school; and lost the chance to see her alive one more time.

My son is like me; he generally does what he's told. I'm trying to cure him of that. I mean, it's great for the teller to have their instructions followed without question – but sometimes it is the wrong thing to do. My instincts said 'go to the hospital'; but long experience said 'mother will be mad if you do.'

So I chose not to make her mad. I felt guilty about that for a long time, and about not waking up the night before. Eventually, I did forgive myself, accepted that even if I had gone, I couldn't have saved her. The thing they don't tell you about the stages of grief is that they're more like the circles of grief. You go through them, you think you've put it behind you; then one day, you're suddenly back at anger, or bargaining...hmm, maybe not so much, or guilt, or acceptance. It's like the never-ending quiz. You might stop doing it for a while and move on to something else- but it's still right there waiting for you should you choose to visit the webpage.

The funeral was horrible. During Luhya wakes you see, friends and relatives are not to leave the family alone. They practically move in with you. So the house is crowded with all sorts of people, three-quarters of whom you've never met, or barely know; giving you their condolences and expecting you to burst into tears for them so they can hug you and therefore feel useful. At the time of course, you are totally in denial and can barely believe your mother is dead let alone...furthermore, you refused point blank to view the body for fear of being unable to survive the experience, and therefore are not really interested in discussing the alleged deadness of your mother. Still, one must be polite, even if one's son is perpetually upset and will not stop screaming and the very person with the knack for making him stop screaming is no more; this fact being driven home with every hour that he continues to scream.

A nightmare you say? Yes, I agree. The nightmare quality of the experience was further amplified by the fact that the house we were living in was provided by the government for the housing of its employee, now deceased. So, we were soon

to be homeless as well as orphaned, with our house in the city occupied by tenants, and really, nowhere to go. We could have moved upcountry with my dad I suppose, except that I was in school, and so were my siblings.

During the day of the funeral itself, I spent most of the time outside, trying to calm the baby down enough to sit through the service. That means, I missed most of it. This was very upsetting for me, and I suspect my upset was upsetting the baby, so neither of us made any progress. My friend persuaded me to leave the kid with her and go in; I knew it was a bad idea since he didn't play well with others, but needs must. I was just in time to be introduced to the congregation with the rest of my siblings as the deceased's kids. We tried to sing her favorite song but choked halfway – literally- and were escorted away by a bevy of concerned uncles. I still can't hear that song without going over all misty-eyed.

In the movies, when someone dies, the whole family rallies together and supports each other, they all cry on each other's shoulders and try to move on as a unit. Well, at least they do on the family dramas, and even the comedies starring Chris Rock have happy endings. With our family, not so much. A lot of blame was thrown around as to whose fault it was that she died, and rifts were created that haven't completely healed to this day. You know the way some people are mean drunks? Others are mean with grief; and they hit out at the nearest vulnerable target too. Add to that mix family politics and the fact that my mother was matriarch of her own maiden family as well as the glue that stuck our family together and what you get is...ugly.

It was a bad time, made worse by the fact that I had nowhere to escape to; and a very vulnerable target in my hands.

I had no clue what would become of us and I was scared to death. My father was talking about me boarding and my son going upcountry to live with him. He was leaving no room for negotiation, and I had no-one to negotiate for me. I imagined how traumatized my son would be. First, his grandmother disappears without a word, and then his mother is gone too...just like that. How would that affect him in the future? I felt like he was so clingy because he sensed what a runner I was in my relationships and he didn't want to give me any room to even try it with him. It made me feel quite guilty that he should be even so subliminally insecure. So I knew, there was no way separating us was going to work. I contemplated moving out and living on the street- like I'd planned before.

However, I did mention the kid was screaming? Well, thankfully, my dad wasn't prepared to deal with that on his own, so he allowed us to stay together, and so we came back to the city after the funeral; and began the search for suitable accommodation for three grown-up kids, and one baby. And a house help. Working with an extremely limited budget, and on a deadline to move out of our current accommodation. Good times.

extreme crisis brings out the best in some people, and the worst in others. or should I say, true colors emerge; unplugged. dealing with people in times of extreme emotional distress can be hell, and that is why god invented forgiveness. without it, we cannot go on; we'll be stuck in that moment, festering in bitterness and letting it eat away at our lives and our souls. however, it's difficult to see that while going through it. thankfully, the cliché, 'this too shall pass' became a cliché because it's true. once it passes...then let it go. or it will hold you captive as well,

and you will not be free. and who suffers for it? why the weak and the vulnerable...your children.

Chapter Seven: The Aftermath.

WE DID FIND A HOUSE, and the house help was very good, very reliable and very clean. Everyone resumed school, and went about their business as usual. I still woke up, fed the bairn, had breakfast and left for school. The thing was, I couldn't understand anything. The teachers talked, and I listened intently, it sounded like English what they said, just one whose dialect I wasn't quite familiar with. I wrote notes as well, but stared at them uncomprehendingly each evening, purporting to study. I stared into space a lot. Clung on to my son for dear life...my anchor was gone and I was drifting and lost. It's so funny how one does not realize how central a figure one's mother is to one's life until they are gone. My son does, but then again, he is the only child of a single parent – it could hardly escape his notice.

While she was alive, my mother pretty much took care of the little things my son needed. Now she was gone, I needed a hustle and fast. God was still listening thankfully, and a pharmacy student at the university approached me about the possibility of renting out my college room, seeing as I wasn't using it. This was, of course, illegal but, again, needs must. Also, I'd joined Kenya Aids Vaccine Initiative (KAVI) as a Peer Leader, and there was an allowance pegged on how much work you were able to do. So I did have some money coming in, and

that's what I used to get the things I needed. Not that my father abandoned us or anything; but he was paying for our accommodation and basics like electricity, water, food and transport; and paying the help. He figured that would suffice.

Even with my inability to understand anything, I still managed to just pass my exams. No head of the class this time, but no supplementary either; much to my surprise. There was a lot of sympathy for me among the staff I think. I see my sad face on my son and I just want to become super woman and fix whatever's disturbing him, so I guess that face worked in my favor in this case. Or maybe I just internalized a lot more than I realized during those staring sessions.

My son was going on three years old, he would have to join a nursery school soon I thought. I seriously did not know how I was going to manage that but I carried on as if I had a clue. I find that that's my parenting staple- proceed as if I know what I'm doing and hope for the best. Well, I haven't killed anyone yet so I guess it's working.

Still, the income wasn't regular and I worried sometimes how I would manage. I don't know how I did, but I got my son in a nursery school, paid his fees, bought his uniform- I got the shoes second hand from the market, but with a bit of polishing they were fine. There is nothing worse though than not being able to give your kid what you think he needs. I didn't want my son to be the odd one out, or the one without anything so I bent over backward to make sure he got everything the school required of him (I still do that I guess). Funnily enough, I came to see in time that even those kids from so-called conventional nuclear families, with both parents present and accounted for, still went without a lot of things. I found it profoundly ironic

that here I was trying to keep up with these joneses when they were doing just as badly as me! Conversely, I was proud of myself for being able to provide for my child's needs from the little income I had when more 'well-off' parents were apparently being 'negligent' of theirs.

The difference I suppose was that this was a huge deal to me. Having my son be able to go to school, was a major milestone in the mummy business for me. Nothing is more important than that your child is able to access a good education. There are so many examples on the news, and in life of people whose parents were unable to provide them with this basic right; and it was a huge fear of mine that my son would be one of those statistics because I was a single mum, with little or no money of my own and without a certificate that would enable me to get a job with significant income. My life was so unstable I felt I might not be able to manage; and so the fact that I did manage...well. You can imagine. And of course, those other parents with jobs and what not were not laboring under these same circumstances and so they took their children's education very much for granted, and thus were more, 'negligent.'

Men you say? Well yes, apparently there is something very appealing about a young woman with a baby. I think we're supposed to be an easy target or something. Maybe desperate for a man? Any man?? I don't know. But contrary to my expectations, single mummyhood did not drive the menfolk away from me; just the opposite in fact.

Oh, KAVI knew I was a single mum, and so did the administration at school, but I hadn't said anything to my classmates. Even the ones I hung out with. It wasn't shame so much as, okay well at what point in a conversation do you bring up

the fact that you have a child? Nowadays I mean, it just flows. I talk about him a lot and it's very difficult to be in my company for more than five minutes without hearing chapter and verse about My Son. But in the beginning, you hardly know how to bring it up... you figure it's a bit awkward for people, they won't know what to say, you won't know what to say...and then you'll have that dead air that is difficult to recover from. Ten years later though, the number of single parents outnumber the other kind I think so it's almost expected that there's a random child somewhere in the offing when you meet someone new.

Still, I did manage the odd relationship or two over the years. Very discreetly though. For one thing, I will admit to being a bit of a commitment-phobe due to the nature of my introduction and subsequent dealings with the opposite sex, and my own personality and attitude. Therefore, having a boyfriend in my mind, is usually a temporary thing that is bound to end sooner or later, and therefore considering the inevitability of separation, why bring this guy to the attention of my son or the rest of my family? Seems rather a waste of time and energy no? The irony of the situation is that my son is very encouraging of me seeing someone; he does not get territorial or become the kid from hell; just the opposite. Sometimes he tries to set me up with men he likes. It's embarrassing. One time, we were looking for a house to live in, and he developed a liking for the realtor. So he starts nudging me, and tilting his head at this guy. I'm like, dude! Cut it out! And the more I glare, the more he nudges. That guy must have thought we were both crazy. But he was very nice regardless.

Once, though, I did get serious enough to introduce a guy to my son. After trying my damndest for the best part of a year

to push this guy away, and not succeeding, I figured he was in it for the long haul and it was time for he and my son to have a meet and greet. Well, he lived in another town, so it became necessary to make a weekend of it. We had a good time, I thought, and they got on like a house on fire, I thought. He and I did get robbed after taking a foolhardy walk on the beach at sunset but all in all; a very successful weekend was my verdict.

That is, until I got his email the next week detailing all our faults and failings as human beings, parents and children. Now I'm not one to shrink from criticism,(because if I did, I'd be really tiny by now...you know, shrink...? No? okay); but let it at least be true. Now when you tell me that I let my son do whatever he wants, and call him spoilt as well, I'm sorry man you're not just barking up the wrong tree. You're in the wrong forest. I took it as a Warning Sign of a potentially abusive step-parent and broke it off at once. Oh he begged and pleaded, backtracked and tried to make amends but if there is one thing I don't play around with, it's my child's safety and well-being. I could maybe overlook anything else, at least once, but not that. And a man who looks on a child who is simply happy, and uninhibited and labels that as spoilt, is a man who thinks children should be cowed, silent and afraid to be thought of as well-behaved. Exactly what I was trying to avoid provoking in my child. Clearly, we could not work.

Chapter Eight: Letting Go, and Letting God.

I DID COMPLETE MY STUDIES in the requisite three years. They gave us letters stating that our exams were completed and we could go out into the world and seek employment as we waited for the final results to be released.

It took me exactly one week to find work. A chemist, evening shift, quite well paying. I started at six and finished at midnight. Every day of the week, except Sundays when I worked the day shift. The work was interesting and a lot of government ministers used that chemist so I knew what a lot of important people were suffering from. But I never saw my son. He'd be just coming in from school when I was leaving for work and fast asleep when I got back. In the mornings I had maybe 30 minutes with him while I prepared him for school. It didn't take long for me to see that this would not work for me, and I began to look for something else. It didn't help that at the end of the month, the owner added up all the shorts that she'd got for the month and deducted it from my wages so she ended up paying me half the salary promised. Which I had to follow her to her house to get; having obtained another gig out of town and needing the money to travel.

I thought that with this new job, I was finally on my feet but it turned out to be the most stressful, unhealthful, depress-

ing job I have ever had the misfortune to have. See, apparently, when you're hired to work in another town, the company usually gives you a hardship allowance for you to move. Being of a green and naïve nature, I did not know that and so I ended up starting my new job with a 'loan' from the company to help me move, find a house, pay rent etc. I was surprised at how easily they agreed to give me one, not knowing what a huge favor I was doing them. I mean I felt wicked lucky that they paid my bus ticket and my son's to the town – since the bus was very newfangled offering meals and toilet on board and what not. Exciting stuff!

My maid refused to move with us, so it was just me and my son on board. I had no idea how I would manage but assumed that the company would help me until I got on my feet. I did have two sisters living in the town, but I was reluctant to rely on them seeing as we'd kind of drifted apart and I wasn't sure even if we were speaking or not.

The company had asked the doctor in charge of the clinic to find a house for me and he did. Horrible house I must say, on the top floor of a block of flats and no running water. The electricity was also cut and when I went to have it reconnected, the power and lighting company informed me that the previous tenant had a bill that I would have to clear if I wanted to get my power reconnected. Yes, they were perfectly aware of the unfairness of this edict but that's how the cookie crumbled. Luckily for me, I had my own people; my aunt was a manager of something or other in the company and once I'd found her office and explained the situation she cleared that all up and got my electricity back on.

As for the water, apparently 'any minute now' it'd be reconnected meanwhile there were plenty of water sellers. I tell you, till the day I left, we had no running water. My son adapted pretty fast to the place though. The kids next door came to get him at once when we brought our things. He was out playing even as I unpacked. By the end of the day, he was copying their accents and by month's end, he was speaking like a native. Its true what they say about young children being able to learn anything pretty fast. He was four. Like any small town, the neighbors were very friendly. We lived next to this mixed race family and on the first day as we moved in, we discovered that our toilet was locked. On inquiring about that, the caretaker stated that the person who had the key would come the next day meanwhile, we'd just have to wait. The lady wife next door wasn't having that. She berated them for expecting us to live without toilet facilities for a whole day, and she actually got them to break the lock. From then, we were presumably fast friends.

At work, they had been without any pharmacy staff for the better part of three months. So there were pending prescriptions waiting to be entered into the computer for that period, as well as invoices. I was alone in the pharmacy and the clinic was extremely busy but somehow I was expected to find time to enter these invoices and prescriptions before month's end as well as keep up with the current workload. Can anyone say impossible?

There were constant threats from head office of dismissal. The official policy of the company was terrorize the workers into submission and if they dare to try to put their heads up, shoot them down and sack them. So everyone tried to keep

their heads down and blame someone else when something goes wrong. As the newbie, I got blamed for a lot of things that happened long before I joined the company. Me, being me, I couldn't take that lying down; I fought back. I wasn't very popular in the office as a result. Oh, day to day everyone was friendly and what not, but when it came to monthly meetings...all the claws came out. I don't do office politics well. I'm not a wheeler dealer. I call it as I see it and expect everyone to be as straightforward as I am, evidence to the contrary notwithstanding. Stressful doesn't begin to describe my sojourn with this company.

I began to suffer from a constant stomach pain within two months of joining. It was unrelieved by pain killers and the doctors had no clue what was causing it. One day, a couple of days to month end, the head doctor announced that no-one was going home that evening until we'd closed the month. We thought he was joking, but after the last patient left, he closed the door and locked it. We were locked in for the night.

I could imagine how much my son was freaking out. They didn't know where I was, and there was no phone at home to call them anyway. Luckily, the house-help was a responsible sort, if a bit dour, so I wasn't worried about him being left on his own or anything; but how scared was he, with his mummy not showing up all night!? Thinking about him freaking out was freaking me out and I tried to plead with the doctor to let me go home and check on him and then come back but he refused point blank. Much to my continuing disbelief, we were made to work all night, entering invoices. In the morning, we were allowed to go home but were expected back at work as soon as possible. I went home and slept until late afternoon,

when the office manager called to say she was sending a car for me. The new office manager that is. Apparently the old one was sacked that morning for first, allowing us to be locked in all night, and second, for not staying with us.

Having been elevated from sales and marketing to office manager, the new lady adopted Gestapo tactics out of fear of being sacked herself. She was the breadwinner in her family with her husband liable to buy six figure leather furniture he couldn't afford to pay for. As a result, being fifteen minutes late for work was liable to get you a warning letter. I guess that's what happens when you give someone a job they feel ill-equipped to do. Unfortunately, it's the underlings who suffer for it. And who do the underlings take it out on? Why, those who are in their power...

I'm not proud of myself for it, but as we're being honest, I have to say that my son suffered for my unhappiness. Have you seen that poster which says, " When mummy's unhappy, nobody's happy."? I have cause to know that this is true; from both points of view.

See I finally freed up enough money to take him to school, when I moved out to the horrendous flat and got myself a nicer, cooler cheaper house. The school was nearby and it was the best to be had in the vicinity. So he'd come home with homework and seem unable to do it. I didn't understand why he couldn't do it; I knew he was intelligent, and the work was simple- at least to me. In the right frame of mind, I might have deduced that maybe the school was no good; but in my stressed and heightened adrenaline state, I simply thought he was just trying to drive me crazy with his perceived intransigence. I did slap him more than once in an effort to get him to talk. He

didn't cry, he just shrank into himself and kept even more quiet. Which maddened me even more. When my rage cooled, I'd feel so bad about the shouting and screaming that I'd try to make amends. But then I'd find it was forgotten already. I was already forgiven; and that make me feel like someone'd run me through with a sword. I truly did not deserve this kid.

It wasn't all misery though (just most of it); we did go to the beach now and then(although he was afraid of the sea – all those creatures and what not), and he had his friends who he played with daily. Also, he and my sister's kids became fast friends, and this helped to heal the breach between my sister and I; although to this day I can't tell you what caused it. Also we visited the occasional touristy site like the Mamba Village- turns out he's terrified of crocodiles; has been ever since.

Because the 'loan' ate into a good third of my salary, we did not have money for luxuries; or even emergencies and this worried the hell out of me. I thought of a dozen business ideas to supplement my income; but they all required capital. I did not want to borrow from the bank what with all the instability at work, and I had no other sources I felt I could ask.

So my life was worry, misery, overwork and bad parenting. I lost so much weight in such a short time it wasn't even amusing. Oh, and my stomach continued to hurt. To add more joy to my already overflowing cup, my results came out, and the deputy principle informed me that I had a supplementary. I said impossible. He said, sorry, you do. I said, in what subject? He says, pharmaceutics. I say, "ah". I don't know if I told you this but the pharmaceutics lecturer did not like me – or perhaps liked me a little too much. A little of both I suspect. See,

he was the lecturer whose exam I'd passed when I was sick. I guessed that this was revenge.

Well, me being me, I fought back. I asked for a re-mark. The deputy tried to dissuade me; he told me it'd take forever. I'd probably not pass anyway. But I felt that this was something I had to do. Just to prove to myself that I wasn't a failure. That something could, might go right for me just this once. I knew I'd passed the paper- the deputy told me in confidence that I'd got a 49 on the written; I'd aced my viva I knew, so that should take me comfortably over the 50 pass mark. So?

Well, the deputy was right; it took forever, and they failed me again anyway. By which time, supplementaries had been done, so I had to wait a full year to do them again. Which meant, I wasn't qualified yet. Joy.

Nevertheless, I dug out my books and began to look through them again, in preparation for the exam. See, on the surface, of my mind I was raging against the world, asking WHY?? WHY?? Can't I catch a break?? On the subconscious level, my mental administrator was already laying out plans to remedy this situation and take me to where I needed to be. I need to qualify, and for that, I need to study and pass. *Take out your books, and read. This time, you're leaving no room for doubt.*

I wasn't the only one suffering a chronic problem. My son had a cough that just wouldn't quit. It responded to nothing- not antibiotics, not antihistamines, not cough suppressants. Every time he coughed, my heart sunk; because there was not a thing on God's green earth I could do about it. He was tested for everything and treated for everything; but nothing was found and nothing was resolved. Eventually, we were referred to an ear, nose and throat specialist who finally found a prob-

lem. His tonsils were so enlarged apparently it was a wonder he could eat, let alone breath. The doctor informed me that the tonsils would have to go; and when they did, he'd never cough again...

Well, my son was supposed to go under the knife, at a branch of the same hospital that had killed my mother. I didn't know if I could even get time off for it; and I couldn't afford to lose this job by going AWOL. My mind was screaming even as I typed out prescriptions and gave instructions, took the bus home, packed his clothes for the hospital and tried to smile at him and pretend everything was great!

I had informed the office about the operation, since they were in fact, paying for it. It was to be done early in the morning and so I just told them I'd be slightly late for work that day. I did intend to stay for the operation then head to work once my son was out of the OR. It didn't work out like that. When he did eventually come out of the operating theatre, he was very very disoriented and very much in pain. He'd gone in happy and smiling but came out screaming. I was relieved. Screaming meant he was alive. I was a trifle upset myself though; with a tendency to join him in bursting into tears. I felt for the first time, the lack of a partner to share this with. Happily, my sister chose this time to show up. She quieted us both down and left only when my son went to sleep. By this time, it was late afternoon so I didn't see the point of going in to work. One of the doctors from work came to see us, which I thought very kind until I found out she was coming to verify that I was actually at the hospital and not taking advantage of my son's surgery to go frolic at the beach perhaps. That doctor was one humongous bitch. Only the fact that I knew that the fellow doctor she was

in a relationship with was having an affair with the receptionist made me believe in divine retribution. I hear they're married now. He's probably still seeing the receptionist though – they all moved to the city after all.

Not two weeks after my son was discharged from hospital I was admitted in the same hospital. The pain in my stomach turned out to be appendicitis. Bitch doctor finally caught it. I wasn't half so scared for myself as I was when it was my son going under the knife. I asked one sister to move in with him, so his schedule wasn't too disrupted. I was supposed to be in hospital for not more than two days, and I spent the time before I went in constantly reassuring him that I would be back soon, not to worry, I would come back. I always did that, if I was to leave him for any length of time. I did not want the thought to ever enter his head that he had maybe been abandoned.

I wasn't looking forward to the anesthesia; the memories of what happened after my C-section being relatively fresh. Also, a prominent cartoonist had just died while having an operation to remove a small growth from his neck. Turns out the anesthesiologist was drunk. So I did insist on meeting mine in advance just to judge his level of possible inebriation. He looked sober, so that was fine.

Surprisingly, (at least to me) my family was very worried for me. While my son's operation had passed without comment except for my sister who came to see us, while I was in hospital my dad was constantly on the phone with her monitoring my condition. It's the first time I've been admitted to hospital for an illness though, I guess that would account for all the freaking out.

I was actually discharged after one day. The doctor gave me a week of bed rest, but it was the nurse who wrote that on my chart. Since the handwriting was different than the doctor's, the office decided that I'd given myself a week of bed rest. Never mind that I've just had my abdomen cut open...I should have reported for duty immediately I was discharged!

In fact, the doctor in charge did call me on the third day of my bed rest to harangue me about being irresponsible by staying at home when I know I'm the only pharmacy staff at the clinic. She also informed me that I'd gotten myself a warning letter for 'having expired drugs on the shelf'. i.e. a suspension had expired while I was in hospital, and I was being warned for not removing it from the shelf. When I see this written down like this, it seems fantastic that any of this actually happened...but it did. So the next day, I woke early because there was a strike of transport vehicles, took my umbrella and used it as a walking stick to limp to the bus stop. It took me three hours, but I finally got to work. I did all my work sitting down, using the office chair like a wheelchair since it had wheels. The office manager could not look at me, and the doctor in charge avoided the pharmacy all day. I admit I quite reveled in their discomfiture. It would have been more fun though if I was only pretending to be still very ill instead of being in fact in quite a lot of pain. At the end of the day, the doctor in charge told me to stay home the next day.

Whilst we were recuperating, my son and I, he asked me about his father. I don't recall quite how the topic came up, but since he'd asked, I took out my album and showed him a picture of him. I then called my sister who was still in touch with my son's father's sister-in-law, so I could get her number and ask

her to ask him if we could get his number and call him. Well about two hours later, he called us.

See, about six months after the birth of our baby, my mother asked me if it would be possible to get some money from the baby's father for all the hospital bills and what not. So I went to the children's department to file some sort of claim. When they called him in for a meeting, he actually showed up, much to the officer's surprise. But not mine. I don't know why, but I was not surprised he showed up. Perhaps because I knew his aversion for us was actually fear, and that the love had been real? I don't know. The man's a sociopath.

Well, he showed up with his pay slip, and said you know what?, I don't earn enough to pay you anything. But. He wanted to acknowledge that the child was his. Bring his parents and what not. So I went home and told my mother what he said, and she was like good. And his parents came. I think my mother thought acknowledging the child was the first step to wedding bells. I knew it was more mind games, but I didn't have the words to explain him to my family. So I let them think what they wished. The meeting with his parents soon disabused them of any notions they might have had regarding his intentions – the apple doesn't fall far from the tree – however, they were at as much a loss to explain him as I was. In all the time they were in our house though, they never asked to see the child. Is it just me or is that just a trifle strange? They never ask to see me either so perhaps it's their custom.

After that most upsetting meeting of the parents (my mother was upset – I've never forgiven them for that), I didn't see him again until he came for my mother's wake. Where his brother, the one who's married to the family friend, tried to feel

me up in the guise of hugging me (divine retribution again) in consolation. Sleazy family. I didn't speak to him much that time, being otherwise occupied with an upset child and fresh grief.

After that, he called me the day before his wedding, to inform me of it. I offered him my sincere best wishes which seemed to disappoint him. I suppose I was supposed to start screaming bloody murder; maybe show up at the wedding and kill the bride – I bet he would have loved that. Psychopath.

A day before I left the city, to take up this post, I was being oriented at the main hospital pharmacy when he suddenly appeared at the window staring intently at me. I asked if he wanted anything (medicinal) and he said no, so I went about my business and left him to continue staring at me for a good fifteen minutes. I suppose he wasn't expecting to see me, and was rather in shock or something. I don't know. I was surprised to see him too mind; but my shock absorbers are very good, and I can continue to function quite normally even when I am literally collapsing with shock inside – courtesy of Mr. High Commissioner's spawn.

And now he called us, I told him that his son wanted to know who he was and would he speak to him? He did. The poor kid looked very disbelieving. He didn't really understand how phones worked then so I guess he wasn't sure about who he was talking to. He also doesn't say much about his feelings (typical male) so I didn't know how he felt about all this. I tried to emphasize to him that despite his apparent absence from his life, his father loved him dearly, but I don't think he could really relate to that. I couldn't blame him. How can you know what

you've never experienced? Well, all this left me feeling very low; on his behalf. Poor kid.

The next week, I was back at work to find the atmosphere had passed toxic and gone into strange. No sooner had I arrived than I was given another warning letter for giving myself sick leave. Personally, I thought the whole place was sick but no-one wanted to listen to my explanation. I guess that's what terror does; turns everyone into the worst example of themselves. Well, I hadn't been at work three days when I get this phone call, from him, asking me the location of my office. I frowned in puzzlement and asked him if he knew that I was in a different town from the city. He said yeah, and he was in town, so where was my office?

Well, I told him, and he showed up to pick me up at home time. Of course I asked him right away what he was doing there. He avoided the question and asked me where I lived so he could drop me home. However, persistence is a skill I learned young, and eventually he said I had called, and he'd come. Then he went on to tell me how much he'd missed me, and how his life seemed to go further to hell every day and how much he looks back and longs for happier days. More mind games in other words.

He said he wanted to see his son, but when we got home, his eyes stayed on me. My eyes though, were looking at his son, whose hands were trembling and whose eyes were three times their normal size at the sight of this man, his father. And I regretted bitterly the choice of this father, for this son, who deserved so much better. Yet. It is this father's genes that half make this son; and being strictly honest – the gentleman in him is a legacy from his father as is his love of school. They sat

and talked, I left them to it – going off to take a shower. I'm sorry to say his eyes still followed me. To the shower, out the shower, and finally as I emerged from my room. Only then did they fall because I was wearing a 'kanga' and t-shirt. Clearly I hadn't dressed up for him. He was under the impression that we would go out for some reason. Clearly one of us hadn't got the memo.

He stayed for supper and put the child to bed. Then he said he was leaving and my son began to cry. Not tears of upset, those of absolute heartbreak; I know *my* heart broke... that made him stay until his son fell asleep, but his son fell asleep with a frown on his face because he knew when he woke, his father would be gone. I have scarcely ever felt so wretched. It would have been better if he never came I thought.

After he'd fallen asleep, his father said he needed to talk to me. Could I maybe get dressed so we could go somewhere? And talk? I thought on it for a minute but could see no harm in a little conversation, so I put some trousers on and we were off. Turns out, it was a date. I got wined, I got danced, but not much actual talking took place. And that that did was in the nature of how much he'd missed me and what not. I was seriously unimpressed and at midnight I asked to go home; not being used to being out late and all that. Well he did agree to leave, but instead of turning right towards home, he turned left, toward this park that borders the sea. Its notorious as a lovers' tryst being considered romantic with sufficient nooks and crannies to be cozy in, and a car park facing the sea for the more financially able romantics. I'd never even heard of it before that night.

Well, we got there and I'm like, 'well? So what are we doing here?'. I'm very dim sometimes as I think I've mentioned. And he says " I want to kiss you – so either give me your lips, or your toes." Did I mention that this guy does mind games? Well, unfortunately my toes were all clean from the shower and all, but they probably smelled more than my lips so I console myself that way. Plus, he had no ketch up or anything; but he did do a thorough job of kissing them; my toes that is, for those who may be in some doubt (I reserve my lips for people who haven't abandoned their children). Then he put them on his lap and began to massage them while he told me how dangerously close he was to falling in love with me again. Hmmph! Like he ever stopped. Love is like a cold, you really can't hide it; however psychopathic you are.

He told me a lot of stuff that night; how his wife said if she ever caught him cheating, she'd leave him so it really had to be worth it (by which I suppose I was to infer that cheating with me was worth it...too bad I don't do married men; or women for that matter). I waited for some discussion of our child, maybe a question on how he fared or how we fared or if we were managing alright; but all I got was sexual innuendo and ridiculous declarations. Finally at one o'clock I had to put my foot down (yes, pun intended) and insist on going home.

He did take me, and walk me to my door (it's a perfectly safe neighborhood...the only disturbance we ever had there was from a ghost), and looked like he was hoping to be invited in. Had to put my foot down again and say goodbye outside. I tried to shake his hand but he grabbed at my neck and pulled me to him. I resisted for a minute; making him look at me like...what? But then I decided to let him and see if I felt any-

thing anymore. He did kiss me, for about 30 seconds; breathing like a locomotive the whole time, and I think his hands were trembling. All I felt were spit and tongue and flesh. Nothing more. Heart rate; normal, pulse rate; slow; brain activity; normal. If I was to venture a guess I'd have to say the magic was gone. I guess child abandonment is the deal breaker for me. Because I do love him in a I-know-you-could-have-been-the-one-if-you-had-a-stronger-character type way – though I suppose that sort of conditional love is not the real thing? Again, I don't know. He was out there for maybe half an hour after I went in; recovering I suppose.

He came back the next day, in the evening, when I was home. I'd told him his son was home all day; it being holidays and all, and he was welcome to go see him. But he waited until I was home. He told me how he'd swapped assignments with some other hapless dude so he'd be in town now and then from then on; I mean, he had to go home for Easter but directly after, he'd be back and we could spend some time together, "as a family". Then his wife called and he went out to answer it; his son followed him, to show him something and was calling him, daddy! I suppose the Mrs. asked who that was calling him daddy and he said, 'oh it's just the neighbor.' Of course my son heard him say that, and so did I. I've rarely experienced such rage. Why should she not know who was calling him daddy? He said he'd told her about us; that he had a son prior to his marriage. Why the secrecy then? Was he intending to establish us as his second secret family? Well I wasn't having it. My son wasn't a dirty little secret, and nobody was going to treat him like one. Especially not his good-for-naught psychopathic fa-

ther; who apparently was using him to try to get back into my pants! Hah! Fat chance of that happening...ever.

Well, he came back in and declared he had to go, but he'd be back soon. He gave me some money and tried to kiss me again but I dodged him this time. After he'd left, I thought things over and came to some conclusions. The only way to sidestep any funny business on his part was to let people know that he had been and intended to return to see his son. If it was all out in the open, then there'd be no problem. I texted him to let him know I thought this was the sensible plan, but he tried to shut me down completely. It was like déjà vu to back when I was pregnant. I even felt the same oppression in my chest as he asserted that no, we should tell no-one until God knows when and I should shut my mouth until he got back.

Having had to grow up a bit since last he was telling me what to do, I was in no mood to listen to his psychotic fancies. So I wrote an email, to the members of my family who had email, telling them that he'd been by and he'd left me some money for my son's fees. Two days later, I get a phone call from my sister asking me what I think I'm doing. I'm like, excuse me? Doing? To whom? Where? I've had a long stressful day at work, kindly come out and say what you're saying. So apparently, his sister-in-law had called my sister to say that I was trying to break up his marriage. I asked her how it was I was supposed to have done that, not being in the same town or anything...and not even having invited him to visit me. It made me quite mad though that my sister, who should know me better than that, would immediately believe such a story. I compared her unfavorably with my friend from school who would have immediately rubbished that story even without knowing the

facts. Many times those people who are 'closest' to you cannot see who you are at all.

Her overcompensating texts abusing the lot of them after I'd explained the facts, and even advising me not to give in to him because all he wanted was to sleep with me, didn't help. I was very very very upset though, and I let him have it on email. I told him what I really thought of him; which was that he was mentally ill, and I finished by informing him about how glad I was that my son would not grow up under his malignant influence. I meant every word.

The next day, I was fired. No reason given. Just, you're out. Here are your final dues. Please leave. I did. I went to the beach and just sat staring at the water. Some idiots tried to talk to me but I shot them down before they could get properly started. Then I just sat and stared at the horizon. Meanwhile, my mental administrator was whizzing around making internal adjustments, formulating plans, looking for the bright side. The only bright side that it came up with though, was that exams were coming up so it was good that I didn't have to make up an excuse to go to the city. Still, it was better than nothing.

My compensation was two and a half month's salary, so I was able to relocate to the city without too much hassle. I got my son enrolled in his former nursery, paid his fees, and proceeded to sleep through the rest of the month. Being back in my father's house was depressing, everything was depressing. Rather, I was depressed. My self-esteem was destroyed, my body was tired and my mind was exhausted. If it wasn't for my son, I don't know what would have happened to me. Probably not suicide though. The will to live is strong. But I had to get up every day to get him ready for school, feed him, get him on

the bus. And that was about all I was capable of at the time. My family wanted to know what my plans were, when I was getting another job...I just couldn't deal with them. So I closed the door of my room and slept. I spoke to no-one but my son.

Eventually I did get up. The self-confidence to apply for work was not there though, so I decided to intern for someone instead. I wasn't paying rent or buying food, so my cash could last a while. I went to this chemist where our family had been buying drugs for the past twenty years and asked the pharmacist if I could intern for her while I waited to do my supplementary. She was agreeable and I began to work for her. It was a long walk to the office every day, but manageable. And there is something healing about walking in the morning. The place was busy and I worked hard. No-one disapproved of me, and I was learning a lot from just watching her deal with her clients who came from far and wide just to buy from her. Her memory for names, family histories and ailments was phenomenal. She had truly mastered the personal touch. And her chemist was thriving because of it. She was generous with her knowledge and every day I was a little better. It was a big boost when they decided to pay me a small stipend at the end of the month because they were so happy with my work. A boost to my self-esteem and my pocket. I re-did my pharmaceutics exams, and I didn't have to wait for the results to know I'd passed- especially since that lecturer was not marking it.

After the exam, I knew it was time to look for paid employment. I wasn't yet up to writing application letters or beefing up CV's, though I was given a recommendation letter by the pharmacist and she made some phone calls for me. I did eventually find work in the neighborhood clinic of an elite lo-

cation. It was a mom-and-pop operation literally and I was in charge of running the pharmacy. Unfortunately the mom and son who ran day to day operations had no experience in running a business and their marketing strategy consisted of opening the gate wide. Business was very slow, which was just about the speed I could manage. The pay was insulting, but considering we weren't making any money...well. It paid my son's fees, and my bus fare to work which was about all I was capable of dealing with just then.

One day, as I'm preparing to go to work, I get a phone call...from the Mrs. baby daddy. She informs me of her identity and pauses for the shocked gasp that I'm supposed to give. However, due to my deadened nerves all I could manage was a ,'yes?'. So she inquires whether I knew of her existence; and I almost started laughing. It's like one of those Nigerian dramas you see on television where the wife calls the mistress to ask if she knew the man was married. Except I wasn't the mistress. And clearly she and her husband were not in the habit of telling each other everything. One more thing I really didn't need to know.

She asked to speak to me. In person. She offered to come to me. I wondered if I had any clothes that were bullet proof. Nevertheless, I agreed. I gave her directions, she came. I'd met her once, before the wedding; on a staircase in a shopping mall. They were going up, I was coming down. I saw him just as we came abreast and stopped. He hesitated a moment, then also stopped. I said hi, he said hi. Then he said, this is...I don't know, I didn't catch the name. she practically leapt on me, which freaked me out a little bit, and told me how much she'd heard

about me, etc etc. I raised my eyebrow...said goodbye, and left them to it.

So now I couldn't quite remember what she looked like, but I knew she was a small person. But apparently, she knew me.

We sat down in the cafeteria and she told me she knew what happened at the seaside town. Then she paused so I could fill in the blanks but I just continued to look at her. So she told me she'd read the virulent email I'd sent and she wanted to have things out in the open. I was like, okay, fire away. She went on a bit, but I guess the gist of it was, she wanted us (me and my son) to have a relationship with them (she and her family) that was out in the open. They'd help us with stuff that we needed help with and in return (unstated though) I would not have an affairé with her husband. Well, she certainly didn't have to pay me not to do that, but I wasn't about to say so. I may be dim on occasion but I'm not stupid.

Well, they did take over some of my son's expenses; the recurring ones like school bus and half the fees. A huge burden off my back. but an extremely stressful relationship. When he was choosing a marriage partner, my son's father went for a woman with whom he could relate. They were two peas in a pod. So instead of dealing with one psychotic sociopath, I was dealing with two. And trying to look like everything was beautiful for my son while doing it. Because as is his extremely beautiful nature, my son was as accepting of this new family as he was with everyone else in our lives. I worried sometimes, that his affections would be openly rebuffed. She did not like him visiting and made up excuses to keep the visits to a minimum. My son didn't understand why sometimes he could go to his

dad's house, and sometimes he couldn't. I am also banned from stepping in 'her' house. I don't know why, but I don't question it. I'd as sooner not see them at all. Weirdos.

Meanwhile, I continued to drift. From one semi-permanent employment to another. I couldn't seem to settle anywhere hard as I tried. However, I was never out of work for long. A week at most, maybe two. I was a good worker, and conscientious; I just couldn't deal with office politics and ended up as the weakest link as a result. Plus, I never did recover the self-confidence with which I'd obtained my second job.

However, I did manage to have time for my son, and bringing him up was one job I was doing very well. He was a happy, well-adjusted, intelligent, well-behaved little boy. I'd like to take all the credit for this, and I know I certainly worked hard to be there for him, and show him that he was *the* most important thing in the world to me. But it was also just his character and constitution to be happy, carefree and good. Oh we had problems; mostly financial...as we all finished college and got jobs, my dad's involvement in the financial affairs of the house dwindled. The jobs that we had though, were really not sufficient to maintain a house of that size, and the household bills alone were a huge burden. Plus feeding the entire household; it was really taxing. It really caused a strain in sibling relations especially when one sibling felt she was carrying more than her share.

On top of that, for some reason, since my mother died, my siblings expected me to look after them like I was their mother. Maybe because I was a mother...I don't know. But if there was something to be dealt with, they expected that I would do it. If there were any bullets to be bit, then I should do the biting. It

created a lot of resentment in me, and if my appendix wasn't already out, it surely would have burst. Ironically, while expecting me to deal with any and all problems, they treated me like I was a dead beat. The failure of the family. It's just one of the many ironies of my life. Thankfully, for me, other people's opinions just don't mean that much to me, and so I did not shrivel and die inside because of their perceived opinion of me.

Instead I went back to school. I got my higher diploma in Counseling Studies. Mostly for me, because I had wounds, I needed help to heal them. Why not get a certificate while I was at it? With the higher diploma I could apply for a Masters in Counseling Psychology at Manchester University and for a while, that was the plan.

My internal administrator was on the job; making plans while resting up. When I was ready, I would be back; but on *my* time. Not anyone else's. I have mentioned I'm stubborn? In my opinion, you can only fail if you give up. I don't even know how to do that so I think I'm safe. As I was about to complete my higher diploma, I was retrenched from my position as company pharmaceutical technologist for a wholesaler. He said he had no more work for me to do. I later learned he was in the habit of doing that. This latest rubbish at the workplace filled me with an abhorrence of working for other people and I decided to go into business. I was able to live, pay the bills and what not, but it was sometimes very hard going.

Meanwhile, my sisters were progressing. They all finished university, got well-paying jobs, got pregnant and moved in with their men. Except one decided to move right in to the house with her man, and throw the rest of us out. With about two weeks' notice. Seriously. She contacted my dad, informed

him that she wished to buy the house, and then told us me that I'd have to leave by month's end. Still, by this time, I was immune to the habitual cruelty of these people – my family; I began to look for ways and means to get some rent.

God is faithful, and no sooner did I start looking than work found me. I'd been in negotiations with a couple of business people to register and run a pharmacy for them for some time. However, they could not find a suitable location for their purposes and so the deal fell through. However, I think one of them felt bad about it all and when a friend of his was looking for a person to register a second pharmacy for them, he recommended me. So once again, I was working- happily, by myself so no office politics; my older sister also sent me money to help me move; and the sister throwing me out also lent me money to move. So that worked out well. I at least did not have to deal with all of them anymore. I figured I wouldn't have to see anyone from my family ever again; but for some reason, they wanted to know where I lived. Guilt, I think.

Still, my son and I were so happy in our tiny servant quarter. He put on weight, and I realized that my misery had impacted on him too. He wasn't just naturally thin. He hadn't been eating; mostly because he spent most of his time away from the house. Now his cheeks puffed out and his skin glowed. We talked to each other more. We were like a couple of kids who'd ditched the parents and gone camping. We ate a lot of food that was bad for us, and watched a lot of television and even more movies. Life was good.

Eventually, we did tone it down a bit, cook the occasional meal, began living like normal people...after a few months, we found out that the owners of the property had no idea that

their property was being rented out, and that the 'caretaker' was really a gardener charged with keeping the compound presentable. So we were back on the market looking for a place to stay. I felt like I was back on the path again. Moving. Progressing in an ordered fashion. There was a destination here. I didn't yet know what it was, but I could see the light from afar. The end of the tunnel perhaps? Or a train approaching?

We found a bedsit in a neighborhood that brought my son's school nearer, and was much bigger but not much more expensive. We acquired some furniture, and my son became more confident of our living by ourselves. It wasn't just a holiday anymore; it was a way of life. I tended to fill the fridge with milk, to compensate for the strictly rationed tea we used to drink ever since my mother's death. I tend to have a minimum of two cups these days; if I'm having a cuppa. My son eats however much of whatever he wants, so long as it's nutritious and covers all the food groups. I don't get to go out, because it's just the two of us, and I can't leave him alone in the house all night; but I don't really mind having squandered my youth quite effectively in the pursuit of music, dancing and partying. Sleeping at nine o'clock is just about my speed.

I've learned and relearned the same thing over and over since my son came into my life. Expectations and reality and nowhere near similar let alone the same. I had a picture in my head of what single parenthood would be; always never having enough of anything, a child who is a perpetual underachiever because he doesn't know who his dad is; nothing but utter scorn and rejection from said father who would refuse absolutely to acknowledge the existence of said son; a family who

would turn away from us or treat us as second class citizens; general rejection by society...you name it, I thought it.

Instead, what I got was not just different, but the exact opposite. However empty my pocket has been, my son has never gone without; his father has *insisted* on being around, if only especially financially; everyone who meets him absolutely loves him – total strangers and friends and family alike; and talk about overachiever! The boy was travelling to Uganda with his football team when he was six- on his own, won about ten medals by the time he was seven, while being among the top three students in his class all the way, earned himself a swimming scholarship at ten. He generally is a precocious yet surprisingly obedient young man, with good moral values despite his spotty church going, (my fault), and very mature attitude.

I'd like to take the credit for his achievements and state that it's all due to my incredible mothering but I'm being honest here – so I have to admit that it's probably a combination of genes, personality, and a little bit of guidance from yours truly. Still...so far so good. Pray for us, won't you?

Epilogue

I'M A WRITER NOW; I left pharmacy behind me...mostly anyway. Reading through this and remembering the darkness I've been through, I am...bemused. I can't believe I survived that; I can't believe that was my life, my state of mind. I'm so happy now, all the time. Like even when I have problems or pain, I'm still happy. My son is a teenager, he's in high school. He hates the school but he continues to be a class A human being anyway; adolescence notwithstanding. I can't believe how blessed I am, how far I've come. If you're somewhere in the middle of the struggle then I can confirm to you that the light at the end of the tunnel is NOT an oncoming train. Its peace and serenity; happiness and acceptance. Life is good.

All praises and thanks be to God.

Don't miss out!

Visit the website below and you can sign up to receive emails whenever Annemarie Musawale publishes a new book. There's no charge and no obligation.

https://books2read.com/r/B-A-YGEF-AJXP

Connecting independent readers to independent writers.

Did you love *Single Motherhood Unplugged*? Then you should read *Child of Destiny*[1] by Annemarie Musawale!

[2]

The Princess and the Frog meets The Vampire diaries in this epic tale of forbidden love.

"If you don't do this spell, Charlotte is going to die!" Leo said looming over her.

"You think I don't know that!?" she huffed, "I told you, I can't *do it. It requires 'passion acquired in a lover's arms' and I. Don't. Have. That!"*

Mya was a fledgling virgin witch.

---

1. https://books2read.com/u/bWZpWY

2. https://books2read.com/u/bWZpWY

Leo, a faithless cad! Or diamond in the rough, depending on who you asked.

The circumstances are not ideal.

Magic MUST be performed or Leo's girlfriend dies. If she dies, that's the end of Leo's Cinderella story.

So what is a wanna-be Disney Princess to do?

Everything he must, obvi. If that includes a quickie with a reluctant witch, who can blame him?

Charlotte. That's who.

But she's dying right at the moment so she doesn't really get a say.

Wait, but what about Mya? Is she just gonna roll over like a good mouse and let herself be used as a means to Leo's ends?

That's just for starters.

Join Leo and Mya in this explosive journey of betrayal, teen angst, intrigue and witchery as they embark on an epic journey with fate as their driver, to discover the most powerful magic that ever existed.

True love.

Read more at https://t.co/CaY2U5Rq4a.

Also by Annemarie Musawale

Child of Destiny
In the Shadow of the Styx
The Swamp is Full of Mystery
Child of Destiny
Requiscant in Pace

PWP
A Collection of Erotica Tales

Standalone
Erase and Rewind
In Search of Paradise
Lunchtime Stories
Single Motherhood Unplugged
Cinderella By Any Other Name
An Anthology

Watch for more at https://t.co/CaY2U5Rq4a.

About the Author

I'm a Kenyan writer with a wider world view. I love to write stories that will edutain but not bog you down with the lesson. I want to say I write so you can read for fun, but on second thought, my stories do tend to get deep. I don't mean to. It's just how it goes. Enjoy it anyway. cry, laugh, cuss me out, read again.

If you want to cuss me out in person, seek me out on my website. I look forward to speaking with you about my stories.

Read more at https://t.co/CaY2U5Rq4a.