

“Weaving”

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“Pa!” Gran’s cane lands on my fingers again. One of them is the finger I’ll wear my wedding ring on (it will have a shiny diamond, not a bloody one. My sister Jessica told me about bloody diamonds that grow in some African villages. Not ours. Have you heard of them?) when I’m grown up if it survives Gran’s cane, and the other is the middle finger Jessica and I use to abuse each other, a dirty, dirty thing. If you know the dirty, dirty thing I’m talking about, make sure you never say it in your whole life, okay? It is so, so bad. If you say it, repent seven times and kiss the ground and hope to die. Then that stupid Satan will run out of your body.

Sometimes, I give Gran my middle finger, but she has no idea. She keeps on saying, “Let me hear you using bad words. You’ll see. You’ll see.” She says it while wagging her *ka* finger. It doesn’t make me scared. My fingers are longer than hers. She’ll keep on saying it even when my middle finger is looking right at her. That was only once, though. Normally, I hide it behind my back, but that day I was really annoyed. Like really, really annoyed. Imagine a short old lady making you shave your head bald and then banging it with her cane because she can still see a little hair in the middle. Maybe it was magnified by her plastic goggles, I don’t know. They magnify everything. You should see her eyes. As if she’s in a swimming pool. Eh! Anyway, the hair the *kinyonzi* (in the village, a barber is called a *kinyonzi*) left could not be measured in a mathematical unit like decimeter, hectometer (I have a really sharp brain), etc. It was no big deal. I went for a marine instead of a shaolin. Can you imagine I used to have hair like the princess Cinderella? Anyway, whenever I remember that day, when Gran banged my head with her cane, I think to myself, “Who does she think she is?” Like she expected me to walk with a real bald head around my crush. He said hi to me yesterday, by the way. I was

wearing black leggings and a cream top. It used to be white, but the village has made it cream. This village can do things to clothes! Jessica hides hers in a big metal box. Cockroaches can't enter. Spiders can't enter. But can you imagine some maggots entered one day? *Oba* how? I wonder what thing she was keeping inside.

Anyway, me I like to talk about myself and not other people. My top used to be white. When my mother bought it for me, she was thinking I would only wear it in Kampala. I can picture her in the boutique in the mall, where you can see the same top one hundred times, picking it just for me with her small fingers. Sometimes, I used to wonder if she was a real human or an angel. Anyway, let me tell you, I was so, so smart, and my mother tells me (she used to) that when I grow up, I'll be a model. She says (she used to) that I look like a lady called Lupita. Do you know her? She is so, so beautiful.

Anyway, I replied to my crush, "Um. . . hi to you too." It's a shame I wasn't chewing any bubblegum. It would have been nice to blow a big bubble right after. Before problems, Jessica and I used to chew this nice bubblegum that tasted like green apples and was real green too. It was called Hub. . . I don't remember the name. Do you know it? It's not like the one we buy nowadays from Mama Kimbo's shop. Here's the thing, that Mama Kimbo doesn't have a child named Kimbo but the only thing she sells is Kimbo and little balls of bubblegum. Okay, maybe some matchboxes and rotten boiled eggs. Sometimes, she makes half cakes that are like rocks because she doesn't put *chapa mandashi*. If you want soft half cakes, you go opposite to Mama Inzikuru's shop. I can't go there. She's always saying, "What is that you are wearing?" You should see little Inzikuru. They named her after a champion. Let me tell you, Mama Inzikuru's Inzikuru will never be a champion. I've spoken those words over her head, and they will come true. Do you know what she did to me? I was holding her and she did pupu on me because she had no *pamper*. *Kyoka* Mama Inzikuru! How can you sell Pampers but not give your baby one? And let me tell you, that Mama Inzikuru can beat little Inzikuru!

Anyway, let me talk about Mama Kimbo. I only buy her half cakes because I want to remember the taste of a doughnut. I used to eat doughnuts for breakfast, lunch, and supper but I'm starting to forget the taste. This village can really, really kill your tongue. Anyway, this isn't about Mama Kimbo and her *ka* shop. It's about her bubblegum. She serves it to you with a baby spoon which is supposed to be silver, but the air killed it. I wish you could see Mama Kimbo in her shop. Shouting, shouting for everybody like she is the owner of a supermarket. One time, she told me life isn't so bad, that I could be lucky and own a shop like hers when I am a grown up. God, forbid!

Okay, let me get back to Mama Kimbo's bubblegum. I can really go off topic. Sometimes, Gran tells me, "I asked you about abc, why are you going off-topic?" The point is, Mama Kimbo's bubblegum looks like some fat fingers squashed it into little balls and it tastes like the rubber on the back of a pencil dipped in oral rehydration salts; the ones they give you when you're suffering from *dios*. For me, I have never suffered from *dios*. I just know things. There's this big girl with big breasts who I always find seated on the bench outside Mama Kimbo's shop. She's always eating a half cake or a rotten boiled egg or sucking on ice bimbo (Mama Kimbo sells ice bimbo in a big box). She told me everybody has suffered from *dios*. Everybody. As if she saw me. As if she checked my panty. Do you know I bought her ice bimbo once (*oba* what was I thinking?) and almost got *dios*? I don't know if it's a problem for girls with big breasts. They have too many words.

There's another girl with big breasts I know who tells me all the time that I used to be beautiful when I had just come from Kampala. I always find her walking and walking around Mama Kimbo's shop. I think she wants Mama Kimbo's husband. He is always in charge of the shop around lunchtime. That's the time she walks, walks around. One day, I found Mama Kimbo's husband giving the girl a free kaveera of juice. Did I tell you that Mama Kimbo also sells passion fruit juice with no sugar? Anyway, I've never told Mama Kimbo what I saw. But can you imagine she is always showing people the picture of her

wedding day? They went to church on a boda boda. Mama Kimbo's husband was riding. Eh! Can you imagine, I was talking about Mama Kimbo's bubblegum and now I'm on the husband? Anyway, the color dies as soon as it enters your mouth. It's totally wrong for posing with in front of a boy you like. But still, it could work in an emergency. Like when your crush tells you hi. Anyway, that story is in another department.

I was talking about Gran. She has no clue about the word mistreatment. The one which she confuses for *disciprining*. "You're lucky I'm *disciprining* you," is her favorite line. I went to the *kibanda* (a *kibanda* is a cinema for villagers) last month to watch a movie when Gran had gone to Kampala for the doctor to check on her knee, which she uses to get sympathy from me. All day long she says, "Oh my! *Ayi, ayi* mama. *Wo, wo, wo!* This old age." The thing is, of all the movies they could have been showing, they showed one about child abuse. Actually, they called it child endangerment. I'm being endangered! It makes me think of a poor rhino. People who were born in Kampala care so much about rhinos. It's in our blood. We are always wanting to go to the zoo to see a rhino. Can you believe some evil people want to kill rhinos so that they can steal their horns? Such men are called poachers. If you know of such a person, please report him to Uganda Wildlife Authority unless you are the poacher. Please, if you're poaching, stop, stop, stop. Hahaha! I've talked exactly like the man from Uganda Wildlife Authority. Sometimes, I really know how to talk like people.

Anyway, of all people who could've been abusing the child in the movie, it was an old woman. She was a different color from Gran and spoke a different type of English, but you would think they go to the same tailor. A poor woman and a rich woman wearing the same skirt and blouse? Life can be strange. They arrested the old woman in the movie which means Gran should be in jail, sleeping on one of her mats she spends all day weaving. But I know for sure the social workers in real life cannot save me. They like to stand in the trading center singing about children's rights but that's where they stop. Even if one of them tried to be brave and sing those children's rights in people's homes, they would run away after seeing Gran. Her hair alone stands up scarily on her head like a

nimbus cloud full of lightning and legend has it she used to be a kickboxer. What do you think spoilt her knee? You wouldn't know it if you saw her sipping her millet porridge from her tumpeco and blinking away tears because it's burning her tongue but if you skipped the sweet old lady face and looked straight at her legs, you would see the potatoes popping out. And what would a social worker do for me? What? Where would they take me? Where? All the other relatives had too many problems or too many children or both. Better my life now than being sent to Kampala to work as a house girl where the boss man or lady endangers me at night.

Last time when somebody called Gran and the phone was on loudspeaker because she's becoming deaf, I heard the caller ask, "Don't you have a young *ka* girl about ten to twelve who can help my friend who has just given birth?" Gran said no after a long time, after giving me a look that said: Appreciate. Appreciate the life you are living, Thomasina. Those are the same words she says about five times whenever we are weaving mats and bags. She says them in a very small voice like she's not the same one who roars like a lion when you make a mistake. I curse that somebody who gave Gran the idea to weave bags. Not for something really bad to happen to her. Just something that would teach her a lesson. Why does she have to give people so many ideas? The mats alone were tiresome. And what is appreciate, appreciate? As if moving from a five-star house in Kampala to a two-room structure in the village is nothing. By the way, yes, Thomasina is my name. My mother thought it sounded like a name Shakespeare would name his daughter. Have you heard of him? Jessica had his book, but Gran took it away from her because she was always saying she wanted a boy to drink poison for her. Anyway, that man Shakespeare could write! Okay, I've never read his work but that's what my mother used to say. Didn't I tell you sometimes I really know how to talk like people? Anyway, I believed my name sounded like something that Shakespeare man would name his daughter until I heard with my own two ears and saw with my own two eyes a tomato seller telling her naked daughter with a big stomach and a string around her waist, "Squat and do pupu, Thomasina. Yes, that's potty." *Oba* what had that other Thomasina eaten? By the way, in Kampala, a potty is a toy toilet but here in the village, it

is the soil. Anyway, the tomato seller had never met me so there's no way she could have copied my name. And it doesn't matter if one Thomasina learnt to do pupu on a proper toy toilet and the other one learnt to do it on the soil. We are all Thomasina! Okay, I didn't mean to get angry, but have you ever seen a baby sharing your name doing potty on the soil?

“Why aren't you weaving?” Gran asks.

“Sorry, Jajja,” I say, but I'm really thinking: Can't somebody breathe air on her fingers to cool them after torture (another word for endangerment is torture) in peace? Besides, they deserve a break from Polypropylene. That's what the mats are made of. Okay, the straws we use to make the mats are made from Polypropylene. The word has stuck in my head. I have Jessica to thank for introducing it in my brain. Jessica is a whole eight years older than me, but she does not weave, and Gran has not disturbed her since that first day she decided to teach us and Jessica cried, saying she was not born to make things out of Polypropylene. Her fingers are as smooth as a baby's because they have never known true hardship. Mine carry Jerry cans, uproot cassava, and weave. Gran buys dirty drinking straws from somebody and I have to wash them and press them with my fingers to flatten them for weaving. In my old life, I was drinking soda like other people drink water but now I wash dirty straws. Sometimes, I taste the straws because they smell like beer.

Anyway, wow, wow, wow! Unlike me, Jessica spends so much time reading novels and learning fancy words like Polypropylene. She reads Sweet Valley High mostly. It's because one of the main characters is also called Jessica and because the Sweet Valley books were the last ones she collected before we became peasants. In her mind, they're still sort of new even though some of the covers are torn and some of the pages are covered in bean soup. I never thought I would pray for my bean soup to have at least one tiny ripe tomato. I never knew the true value of a tiny ripe tomato until I ate dry beans without one. By the way, have you ever eaten dry beans? Do you know how they sit in

your stomach? Anyway, how I used to waste tomatoes in my former life! All day long I would throw them at our former dog Giant so he could fetch them. Our old neighbors bought Giant because Gran couldn't afford a rich dog and she said the money would help me and Jessica. It did for about one month. The thing is, Gran told us, "This is your money, do whatever you like with it." So, we bought so many tins of tuna and salt crackers and chocolate and lots of Always because Gran had told us a scary story about what they used for menstruation in the old days. My, my, my! What a story! It made Jessica say, "Ew!" That's what she also said the first time she saw Gran's house. The thing is, we just expected her to be rich. If your mother is rich, you just expect all her relatives to be rich, don't you?

Anyway, I watch Gran's fingers as I move mine. Today, after one year, I will finally finish a mat. I say it to myself because we have to work in silence, so I've been told. It doesn't matter that Gran keeps on talking. A minute can't go by without her telling me something wrong I'm doing or her *ayi, ayi, this old age* things. I don't even know how I made it this far. How the straws stopped looking like just straws. How the colorful patterns were born. Shish! It's like the work of a pro. I'll praise myself even if it has taken me more than somebody can fly to the moon and back to finish just one mat, yet Gran has weaved I don't know how many mats and bags in the same amount of time. I'll praise myself even if Gran refuses to praise herself. As if trying to make drinking straws beautiful is the easiest thing in the world.

My mat has three colors: Red, green, and yellow. Have you figured it out? I chose them because I love Reggae music. Gran thinks the colors don't go well together but what does she know about fun music? What does she even know about fashion? She has a sewing machine but it's for making her clothes. I must admit it's quite exciting to see how it bites into the material. It's like some mosquito eating *somebody. Tututu*. Can you imagine I'd never seen a mosquito? Now, they eat me everyday. Jessica and I sleep under a mosquito net, but they sleep inside with us. That ice bimbo girl asked me, "But, what's wrong with your legs?" I answered, "Mosquitoes are eating them because they still have rich vitamins

inside them.” She laughed and laughed. You should see the back of her mouth. It’s like for a fish. I’m really angry at myself for buying her ice bimbo. But do you know that in this village there are witches who can make you do things?

Anyway, I wish Gran would let me make clothes for her instead. Somebody would tell her she is smart for once in her life. I also wish she would let me listen to Reggae music. Let me swing my hips (they have started to grow a bit) to No Woman No—Crying! That’s what that sound is. Jessica’s crying like a whimpering cat. I want to jump up and go and tell her, “Okay, who broke your heart?” but Gran’s cane is right next to me. I think it has a life of its own. Like Aaron’s staff before the Pharaoh. In Kampala, you go to Sunday school every Sunday. That’s why I know the whole Bible. It’s by King James. If you have any other Bible that is not King James, throw it away. I’m talking to you about who has Good News. Hahaha! I have really talked like Miss Esther. All the time she was making us read the Book of Esther. I think she thought she was also beautiful. She used to eat boiled eggs and gas for us and say, “Bless you”. Okay, it was just one time, but I wish you could have smelt it. I’m going off topic again. Anyway, I didn’t see Gran moving her cane, but I can feel its sour breath on my skin, and I can smell its hungry mahogany. Let me weave. Speaking of weaves, when is Jessica going to unplait her hair? I know she’s wearing real human hair but one whole year with the same weave? It must be the reason she is having man trouble. But anyway, the *salon* here is much different from the one she was used to. They don’t have coconut shampoo. I saw the owner mixing the shampoo one time and I don’t know much about making shampoo but I’m pretty sure you’re not supposed to squeeze oranges into water and add some Omo to make bubbles. I miss Omo so much. In Kampala, our house girl would put our clothes in water with Omo everyday and they would remain new.

Okay, my mat is finished. My fingers feel like they’ve just completed an Olympic marathon but there’s no one to give me my gold medal. Not even a bottle of ice-cold Rwenzori. Gran examines the mat, looking for *damages* like her eyes are microscopes.

Then she shakes her head and yawns like it is a normal day. I wonder what will happen to her if she says, “Well done!” I don’t know much about her. Apart from the kickboxer thing, I only know that she’s the sister of my real Gran. The one who gave birth to my mother. She has no children of her own. There was nothing wrong with her ovaries, she just didn’t feel motherly. It’s funny that life decided to give her some children at such an old age when all the motherly organs inside her have died. Mostly her heart. All the time thinking of beating, beating, beating! We call her Gran because well, she looks like a Gran. The wrinkles, the dimples, and the limping. She hands me my mat and I roll it and place it in the corner with the others. I want to ask, “Is the money from selling it going to be my money or. . .” Suddenly, I hear what Gran is thinking because of my special talent (I can hear people’s thoughts). I know she’s waiting to pounce. Somebody should really baptize her dead heart.

I go to Jessica, my delicate Jessica. She’s lying on her stomach on the tired bed we share abusing the photo of Simon John, her now former boyfriend. “You pig! You wear like only one pair of underwear, and it has a hole. You shameless *ass*. . .What do you want Thomasina?” Oh my God! I saved Jessica from saying a bad, bad word. Anyway, I tried to be as quiet as possible but come on. One underwear and it has a hole? Who wouldn’t laugh at that?

“Just checking on you,” I say. “What happened with Simon John?”

“He said he wanted to see what I would look like with another hairstyle.”

I laugh. “So?”

“I broke up with him. Where am I supposed to get the money for a new one? And who will do my hair? You’ve seen the women in this place. They all look like they’re wearing hats made out of hair.”

“You could wear a bald head.”

“Are you crazy?” she asks.

“Relax, I was just kidding,” I say.

I wasn't kidding. I know wanting Jessica to wear a bald head which I don't want for myself is taking it too far, but Jessica is always looking perfect. It would be nice to see her true head shape. When people say, “Your sister is so beautiful,” I reply, “You've never seen her with a bald head. *Ai mawe!* You know a triangle has three sides, right?” I just wish she could wear the bald head so I know I'm right. No one can be so beautiful. She has small feet, her eyes are big, her nose is small, she has a figure eight, her hair under the weave is so long and so thick and she hates combing it. Eh! A few months ago, I got ring worm. That's when Gran decided I should stop having long hair even if at school, there is a policy which says: If you're from Kampala, you can have long hair. I think they understand that if you're from real Kampala, I mean in the middle, then your hair grows like grass because you were fed baby formula and good food with all the vitamins somebody can think of, so your hair has no choice but to grow and grow for life even if you cut it off. Like Samson. I just love that name. It's my crush's name. Samson. It's like singing a song. I'm so in love with him. Thomasina and Samson. Come to think of it, that sounds romantic.

One of the pieces from Simon John's torn picture lands on my head. If Jessica does that to her boyfriend's picture, you can be sure it is really over. Poor Simon John, he always gives me lollipops so I can tell Jessica he is a good boyfriend. I'll miss them. They're big and red and the sweetness makes me forget that I'm now a villager at least for one minute.

“Thomasina!” It's Gran. I've just made her a mat, but she wants me to sell it. I have to sit on the soil in front of our house with the mat and look as sad as I can so a good Samaritan

will buy it. I rush outside and find Gran has added some of her mats and bags with ugly colors. What if people think I have a bad selection? By people, I mean Samson. Anyway, I can always explain.

I'm yawning because there are no cars passing by. I never thought I would wish to see a car. I was born seeing them, so I thought that's just how life was. My mother used to tell the story of how there was so much traffic jam when she was going to give birth to me. I didn't know a day would come when I would pray to see a car. I want to hear an engine to remind me that there are some machines in the world. It's not like I'm hoping for an areophane even though they used to fly over our house in Kampala everyday. Oh, life! It's super quiet here. I even miss the grass cutter who used to wake me up with his noisy machine.

I see somebody looking at my goods from far, but I know her. She doesn't have money. When she comes nearer, I don't tell her my greeting, "Hello dear, see these mats and bags, so colorful. Take this one." I let her touch, touch everything then she goes away without saying a word. The sun begins shining too brightly and I begin sweating. I wish I had a popsicle. Do you know them? They are like ice bimbo but made with clean water and real fruits. When you bite a popsicle, some ice breath comes out of it. No, I won't remind myself about the days I used to eat strawberry popsicles on a hot day. No, I won't.

I open my eyes and I can't believe who is standing in front of me. It's my crush. I lick my lips and smile at him.

"Have you been crying?" he asks.

"No, why?"

"Your eyes are teary."

"It's the sun."

“Oh.”

“Yes.”

He moves his fingers along my mat, and I cough so that he can know I made it.

“Nice colors,” he says. “Like Bob Marley.”

My gosh! My crush knows important things. It must be because of his mother. I wish I could be like her. She came to tour the village a long time ago and fell in love with it and refused to go back to America. What makes her happy in life is helping poor African people, especially children. Jesus Christ.

“Like Bob Marley,” I reply.

“So, what are you doing in the evening?” he asks.

I know exactly what I’m supposed to do in the evening. Go to the stream to collect water.

“I think I’ll go swimming at the stream.”

He smiles. What nice teeth he has! I think he brushes them and brushes them with Colgate everyday. Lucky him. Gran always buys a *ka* small Colgate for us and says, “Use little.”

“So, I’ll see you there?”

“Yes.”

He buys my mat and leaves his hand in mine for a long time when I’m taking his money. It’s sweaty. I can’t believe Samson’s sweat is on my hand! In Kampala, Jessica went to

watch a singer from America one day and he threw the small towel he used to wipe the sweat on his face at her. She was so, so happy, screaming, “I have his sweat! I have his sweat!” That’s what I’m screaming inside my head. I run inside and tell Gran somebody bought my mat. She’s still sleepy but she says, “*Ayi, ayi! Wo, wo, wo!* God bless. Who was it?”

“I don’t know. I’ve never seen them before.” I give her the money and turn. She’s going for a prayer meeting (I think she goes for prayer meetings because she is looking for a man) so I have enough time to prepare myself to go to the stream.

Jessica catches me stealing her lotion which never gets finished.

“What are you doing?” she asks.

“Putting on some lotion.”

“Stop it.”

I stop. I’ve already finished anyway. She looks at me carefully, but she keeps quiet. Finally, when I’m almost out of the space where a door is supposed to be, she says, “Do you want to tell me something?”

“No,” I say.

I carry one bucket (it used to be a Jerry-can, but somebody cut it into a bucket) to the stream. I’m supposed to fill five of them, but I can only carry one at a time. Today, I’m thankful Jessica does not want to help me.

It’s quiet at the stream. I’m kicking the water when two hands cover my eyes. They are soft and sweaty. Samson! I turn around and he smiles at me. He’s carrying my mat. Should I ask him why? Jessica said boys don’t like girls who ask too many questions. Let

me keep quiet. Anyway, he must be feeling true love for my mat and if he's feeling true love for my mat, then he's feeling true love for me.

"Come on," he says. "Let's go."

"Go where?" I ask.

"Into the trees."

I'm about to ask why when I remember no boy wants a girl who asks too many questions. Besides, Samson can protect me from a snake. Everybody knows he used to be a boy scout. That's the same as being a soldier. He pulls my hand and leads me into the trees. Usually, they look like one big forest. Now, they look like a paradise of Christmas trees. He stops at one giant tree which has a bird shouting on top and lays the mat next to its big roots and sits down.

"Aren't you going to sit down?" he asks.

I sit down but my hands start shaking. Then he gives me a kiss on my cheek. Then he gives me another one on the mouth. Then he pinches my breast which is supposed to be growing. Before I can say anything, my skirt is up, my panty is off and we're down on the mat. I say, "No, please stop!" But he doesn't stop. I end up saying Gran's words, "*Ayi, ayimama! Wo, wo, wo!*" He covers my mouth with his hand. I taste his sweat. It's bitter.

Afterwards, he stands and urinates on the dark brown soil. It's the first time I'm seeing his private part. It looks much smaller than it felt. The urine inside it can't get finished. He shakes it and turns to me.

"So, you won't tell anyone about this, right?"

I nod. I can't believe I'm no longer a virgin. I knew I would give it to Samson, but I thought it would be on our wedding day with a shiny ring on my finger if it had survived Gran's cane. Now, I'm not even sure if I want to be married to him with his super flat bum. I didn't even know I cared about the size of a boy's bum until now.

I dress and go to carry my bucket, but my legs can't walk properly. When I reach home, I go to my bed, but Jessica is in the bedroom, pretending to fold her clothes. We still have a lot of clothes like we are still rich. That's the good thing about clothes. They can make you forget you're poor if you're good at pretending. Jessica never folds her clothes. She just likes to touch them and smell them and pretend she's still rich.

"What's with you?" she asks.

"Nothing. I just want to lie down," I say.

Thankfully, she leaves the room and I begin crying. I don't like crying in front of Jessica. She tells me everything's going to be fine even though it's not, then she tells me, "Enough of being a baby. It's time to be tough." So, I'm glad I can cry in peace. I can't believe what just happened. Am I a woman now? Anyway, my thighs are still the same size, and my breasts are still the same size. I guess I'm not.

My fingers move faster and angrier. It only takes me five months to finish two mats. Gran smiles and smiles and her cane is quiet until the next month when my stomach becomes swollen. She pokes it with the cane, but Jessica pushes it away from me. I didn't even know Jessica was so strong. Could it be because she only eats man food (posho and dry beans) now? Anyway, I didn't even know she loved me that much and hated Gran that much. The way she is poking Gran's chest with her own cane! And the cane looks ready to destroy Gran, too. It's like it doesn't care she is the owner. If I had always known the cane works for anyone who is holding it, I wouldn't have been so scared all the time. But anyway, beat Gran like she beats me and go where?

“Which boy?” Gran asks. “Or was it a man?” She moves around the room like a wild animal. She is not even limping. Maybe the doctor in Kampala magically fixed her knee. Who knows? I keep quiet. Samson is not even my crush anymore and he has a girlfriend who is seventeen years old like him and she looks like she could be Jessica’s twin sister. I hate her so much but now I love Jessica so much. She’s still pointing Gran’s cane at her. Each step Gran takes, the cane is there before her foot lands on the ground.

“We don’t need to know the boy,” Jessica says. “We just need to discuss how we are going to help her and the baby.”

I know Jessica knows the boy. Sometime back, she woke me up and asked me, “Why are you dreaming about Samson?” She didn’t ask me who Samson was because everybody knows him, and everybody knows his mother. How can somebody not know a woman who left America to live deep down in the village in Africa? Anyway, my gosh I hate Samson! And to think when many people call him Samusoni and he hates it, I’ve always said it the proper way, Samson, like I’m singing a song.

I walk out of the room and leave Gran and Jessica to fight about me and my baby. I’m really wishing for menstruation. I didn’t know there would ever be a day I would be really wishing for menstruation. To wear a pad that makes my private parts really, really itchy. Life can be really, really strange. My mother used to call me her baby. That was just a year ago. How can it be that a baby has a baby inside her stomach? Oh God, I’m so sleepy! I’ve never felt so sleepy during daytime, but I just want to sleep and wake up when I’m suffering from menstruation.

Can you imagine I dreamt about weaving a mat for a baby? Jesus Christ. I go and sit in Gran’s tiny living room. Half of it is made of cement and that’s where the money stopped so the other half is soil. It’s not fashion like Gran says. Gran’s tumpeco full of porridge is on her tiny table in the middle of the living room. I’m hungry but I fear touching things

on Gran's tiny table. I'm looking at the porridge, pretending like I'm drinking it when Gran enters and gives me the tumpeco.

"Drink," she says. "You're drinking for two."

This is crazy. Gran giving me some porridge from her tumpeco? I drink quickly. I've become like a pig. Always wanting to eat. Always wanting to eat quickly. But how come Gran put some sugar in the porridge? Hasn't she spent the whole year teaching us how to drink things without sugar? Hasn't she been telling us how it will make us live long happy lives? A noise comes out of my mouth when I've finished and guess what? Gran takes the tumpeco to the kitchen. Wow, wow, wow! When she comes back, she asks me a list of questions: Do I want to keep the baby? Do I know how hard it is looking after a baby? Do I know how painful it is to push a baby out of your private part? Am I ready to have a baby? I cry and cry and cry.

Can you believe a social worker decided to show up? Somebody told her I was pregnant. Me, an underage girl. Gran asks, "What?"

"Underage," the social worker repeats. She has very pink lipstick which makes her teeth more yellow and very brown makeup, but she is very black. She speaks very nice English, though, like my former English teacher. "How could you let her get pregnant?"

I see Gran's cane pointing at the social worker. I swear the cane has a life of its own! I close my eyes and I hear the social worker whimpering like a cat. Hahaha! Then I hear her *bu* shoes running *kokoko* outside. Why did she wear them? Dressing, dressing for us. Did she think she was going to a wedding?

I'm lying on the verandah when I see Samson's girlfriend. She is wearing sunglasses and purple braids down to her bum (have you ever seen a baby wearing a *pamper* full of urine and pupu?). She takes off the sunglasses and winks at me. I don't wink back.

Maybe that's how they greet in America but in this village, we don't do such silly things. I can't believe right now I'm proud of being a villager. This girl is funny. I've not winked back but she still says, "Hi there, cutie! Nice mat you made. I'll put it in my dorm room. Cool vibes."

I swear I've never been a fighter but wow! The blood inside my stomach is so hot. She walks away and I see the picture of angel wings on her back. I laugh and laugh and laugh. I can't believe she thinks she is going to heaven. Believe it or not, God knows people. He really does.

The blood inside my stomach is still boiling when I tell Gran and Jessica, I can't have a baby. Gran smiles but Jessica looks like she is about to faint.

"What are you thinking of?" she asks. "That baby is already a real human. I'm not letting a doctor kill my sister with forceps!" she screams.

What is a forcep? I like how the word sits on the tongue.

Gran shakes her head. "It's okay," she says. "I know the right herbs."

Jessica starts whimpering like a cat and runs out of the room like she is the one carrying the baby and Gran limps out soon afterwards. Already, everything is back to normal.

I'm drinking from Gran's tumpeco again but this time it's a bitter green drink. I feel no change in my body. Just the same headache I've been having. When I've finished, Gran tells me to lie down. I yawn and walk out of the room, thankful that the green drink hasn't worked because I'm not sure if I don't want the baby. I was just so angry when I saw Samson's girlfriend.

It starts at nighttime. I turn and turn and bend and bend. I wake Jessica to tell her I'm giving birth, but she rubs her eyes and stretches her hands like she is still rich and says, "Are you crazy? The baby is dying."

So many things come out of my private part. They are all bloody. It's the worst type of menstruation I've ever had.

In the morning, Gran gives me her tumpeco again. I shake my head because my mouth is too swollen. I just want to vomit and vomit.

"This will clean your stomach," she says.

I take the tumpeco and drink slowly. Afterwards, I run to the latrine. At a time like this, I wish I could use the toilet in Kampala which I would sit on and swing my legs. Now, I have to squat and squat and pray and pray that I'm in a dream which is almost ending. This pain! Jesus Christ. Do you know why I say Jesus Christ? There is a handsome man called Jesus who lived a long time ago before I was born. Jesus, I need a miracle.

I go to bed and sleep and sleep. I see a face which looks like Jesus but there is so much light. I can't be so sure. I see Samson and his girlfriend on my mat. In my dream, I close my eyes so I won't see the rest of their business. Business he shouldn't have been doing with me. His girlfriend is tall and has big hips. I'm tiny and flat. She wanted to be on the mat. I didn't. I struggled to weave it. She didn't. I drank bitter herbs. She didn't. When I wake up, my stomach feels like somebody is trying to pull it out and I'm so thirsty, but I don't want to drink anything. I think of my mother. She used to tell me how each part of my body was delicately woven together in her womb. I was born with three hundred bones. I'm not like a mat made of Polypropylene straws that can be flattened.

About the Author:

Yvonne Kusiima is a writer from Kampala, Uganda with a degree in Social Sciences. She is interested in the complexities of human societies and aims to shake things up to make this world a better place and believes stories have the power to change status quo, one word at a time.

Her work has been published in African Writer Magazine, The Kalahari Review, Brittle Paper and The Hektoen International Journal of Medical Humanities. You can follow her on Instagram @yvonnekusiima and Twitter @YvonneKusiima