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“Yes, it’s tough but I manage.”

“So, listen, would you like to come with me to the Stellenbosch market on Saturday morning? 9 o’clock sharp.”

“Of course! I’d love to. I just love markets, June, you know, they sell such beautiful crafts. And the food stalls. The best honey and preserves. My granny and I would always go to the market when I was a little girl. I would use my pocket money to buy fudge. Those were the good old days. Anyway, yes. I’ll be there.”

“Okay, lovely, man. Listen, Fred will be at the sports pub nearby watching the rugby, maybe Garth would like to join him? Is he at home this weekend?”

“Yes, he is at home. But you know, my husband, he doesn’t like to go anywhere or leave the house when he is not working away. He prefers to stay at home. Maybe Fred can come and watch the rugby here at our house?”

“Yes of course, I understand. I will ask him, yes. So I will pick you up at 9 a.m. okay?”

“Okay, thank you.”

“Bye.”

“Goodbye.”

She puts the day’s newspaper down on the dining room table and skims through it. Page six has a photo of June’s daughter Kelly and her drummies troop from school. “Ah!” I better SMS June to tell her. She walks upstairs to her room to get her cell phone out of her

bag before returning to read the newspaper article. She takes a photo and sends it in a message to June. She wonders if June knows about the article in the newspaper. She closes the newspaper and stares at her cellphone for a few seconds, waiting for a response from June. But none. She looks down to the floor and remembers the mop and water waiting for her. She checks the kitchen clock. It's 2 p.m. "Oh, gosh!" Have to pick up Nicole from campus at 3 p.m. "The house is still such a mess," she panics. She mops the tiled areas of the house until it is spotless. Her mother always taught her, you must be able to eat from the floor, that's how clean it should be. She goes upstairs to get dressed. She combs her short, brown hair with her fingers. Spots a few grey hairs. Time to dye hair again. She puts on her lipstick, rose pink. Will match my pink cardigan. A spritz of Elizabeth Arden Green Tea. She sits on the bed to put on her denim skirt and pantyhose with her black ankle boots. She looks at the clock. It's 2:30 p.m. Have to leave now to pick up Nicole. She rushes into the kitchen. Juice. She opens the fridge and takes out the juice. She sees the note about needing to make the gyne appointment. Almost forgot. She has Dr Carol's office number saved to her phone. She dials. Number busy. Dammit. She calls out to Sylvia.

"Sylvie!"

"Mem," Sylvia lazily replies.

"I'm going to pick up Nicole from campus now. Do try and finish up by the time I get home."

"Okay, mem."

"If Devin gets home before I do, tell him there is food on the stove but he must wait. If Mr Cain gets home tell him the same, but if he doesn't want to wait, then he can dish up for himself. I also made some ham and cheese sandwiches for lunch this

morning that I left in the fridge just in case they get home early and they're hungry.  
Okay?"

"Okay, mem, I'll tell them, mem."

Sylvia goes back outside to finish the window cleaning. "Okay, thank you, Sylvie," she shouts. "What would I do without you?" She takes a tall glass out of the kitchen cupboard and drinks her juice. Phone Dr Carol. She redials. It rings three times. The secretary answers.

"Dr. Carol Thomas's office, hello."

"Hello. It's Mrs Cain. I would like to make an appointment to see Dr Carol. How soon can I get an appointment with her?"

"Okay, just a moment...she has an opening in November, on the 21<sup>st</sup> at 2 p.m."

"November! That's in two months. Don't you have a cancellation somewhere sometime this month? It's rather urgent."

"Okay, are you pregnant?"

"Oh no, dear, my time has come and gone for that. I need to come for my check-up, to do the pap smear and mammogram."

"Okay, let me just get out your file...what's your name and surname again?"

"Cheryl Cain."

"Okay, just a moment," she says putting Mrs Cain on hold.

Her eye glances over the room. Bedding. Creased. She straightens and flattens it. Looks at her watch, 2:45 p.m. "I am going to be late." Nicole gets very upset if she has to



wait on me. She looks at her wedding band on her finger and plays with it. It's her anniversary next month. Thirty-five years. Garth said they might go to Mauritius for a week. She has gone to *Sure Travel* for a quote on their flights and accommodation. He works so hard he needs a holiday, he is always so tired when he gets home...poor dear. It's right for us to have separate bedrooms; men of his age don't have 'needs'. But I miss his touch.

"Hello?"

"Yes. I'm here, hello."

"Mrs Cain, the doctor says that you have already come for your annual check-up six months ago."

"Yes, I know, but I would like to come again. One can never be too sure. One day you're okay and the next you're told you've got cancer. I don't want to be a victim."

"Okay, certainly ma'am. The doctor has an opening in three weeks, September 24<sup>th</sup> at 9 a.m."

"Okay, perfect. Thank you."

"Pleasure. Bye now."

"Goodbye."

Mrs Cain takes her car keys out of her handbag and heads to the garage. As she starts the car she remembers the flowers for Mildred. "Oh gosh! I almost forgot." She switches off the ignition and runs into the house to get the pink lilies and the vase she bought for Mildred. Mildred loves lilies. Anything to help soothe the pain of loss. She pours out the fresh water

and wraps the vase with the flowers in pink and white tissue paper. She walks back to the garage and gets into the car; puts the flowers on the back seat and drives off.



## Nurse

My aunt was a nurse. She came home with ink-stained pockets and smelled of hand sanitizer and Melrose cheese. When she started out as a trainee nurse at Nico-Malan training college she paid R325.00 for her studies. She earned R75.00 at Groote Schuur Hospital in the 80s. She woke up every morning, at 4 a.m. to leave for work to catch the 6a.m. train so that she would be at work by 7 a.m.

When she was a little girl she always admired the nurses that came to their primary school. In the year 1970, she was in grade two, and she had her first check-up with the nurse. The nurse checked her eyes, ears, teeth and her hair for lice.

The day before the nurse arrived, the teacher told the children:

“The nurse is going to come to school tomorrow so you must wear your best panties and wash your hair because she is going to ask you to undress and check your hair.”

My aunt always bought special panties and pyjamas to wear in hospital because nurses usually check the patients' underwear to see if they are *ordentlike mense*, decent people. My aunt said she always used to check the patients' underwear when they were sedated.

She came home with many stories when she worked at Karl Bremer Hospital in Bellville in the late 90s. She diced onions and complained about the drug-cupboard that someone forgot to lock.

“How could Annette be so careless? She could get into big trouble if I reported her to the matron. Luckily, I went to check if it was locked when I did my rounds.”

She ironed her clothes for work and told the story of the nurse that got pricked by an HIV-infected needle.

“We are all on high alert about the needle prick and how careful we have to be when handling sharps but it happened so stupidly. She picked up the patient's file on the trolley and underneath it was the needle and it pricked her and she was crying and we were crying for her and she was put on ARV treatment immediately and sent home.”

She sipped a cup of tea and explained how a fifteen-year-old Asian boy was attacked by armed robbers. He was shot in the head and pronounced brain-dead by the ER surgeon.

“Such an innocent life taken. The family don't want to switch off the ventilator. Shame. The boy is in a coma so they said they would wait until he wakes up but he has already been in hospital for three months. It's very sad.”

My aunt lowered her voice and said that his family paid his medical bills in cash.

She often spoke about a patient, Mrs Maughn, a ninety-two-year-old who was admitted to the surgical ward when she was working at *Panorama Medi-Clinic*. Mrs Maughn received a hip-replacement.

“Such a cute old lady. We kept her comfortable with morphine. Her family never came to visit,” my aunt would say. Mrs Maughn would talk and talk and my aunt would need to do her rounds but she enjoyed listening to Mrs Maughn's stories.

“Just another twelve hour shift,” she used to say and sigh.

The next moment she would take off her spectacles and rub her feet.

“What should I make for supper?” she asked but did not wait for an answer. “Is there tomato paste? I'll make pasta.”

My aunt left the nursing profession before retirement. She was taken from us too soon. A heart attack in her sleep. But we take comfort in the fact that her journey into heaven was a peaceful one. We love you Nurse Daniels and we will miss you dearly. Rest in peace.

“Is that fine mommy?” I ask, not sure of how my eulogy will be received.

“It’s beautiful, my girl. Your aunty will be proud. She is looking down on us from heaven smiling. You have captured her so well.”

“Thanks, mommy. Okay, now I’m ready to go.”

