

## Gravel in the Sole

Luyanda gently placed the cheese flavoured maize chip on the floor several centimetres away from the blue-grey bird. She leaned her head back so that it touched the pole behind her and shoved a chip into her mouth. She tilted her head back down at the sound of her feathered friend flapping hurriedly away with the chip secured in its beak.

Mama's hand was like that big claw thing inside the machine with all the toys that she would see in the small shopping centre across the road. It lifted her up from the back of her shirt and secured her to mama's side. She rested her head on mama's shoulder once she nudged it down. She glanced down at the cars as mama weaved in between them, visibly holding out an old tin can in front of her. As usual, some of the drivers took pity on them and opened a closed fist of coins over the mouth of the tin; others pretended that they did not see them and waited anxiously for the green light. Sometimes, if she was lucky, someone would hand Luyanda a sweet or a packet of chips, like the one she held tightly to her.

As the light went green, and some drivers became noticeably relaxed, the claw from the machine released her back down to the spot it fished her from- just like the real one did with the toys when she would watch other kids play with it.

She sucked her fingers once her last chip had been eaten then sat agitatedly in mama's shadow. Her body had become weak and tired, nearly tipping her over a few times, but by some external force- perhaps the heat from the sun, perhaps the sound of cars speeding by, perhaps mama's claw like hand picking her up at every red light- she never managed to close her eyes long enough to fall asleep.

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"Where have you been? It's almost five o'clock." Agnes demanded as she took Luyanda from her hands.

"Mxm, relax, I'm here. It's been a slow day today so I wanted to stay longer to get more money. But she's here so it's fine," Lindo breathed out with a roll of her eyes.

Agnes gently placed Luyanda on the double mattress island in the small room.

"Where's my money?"

For an unnecessarily long stretch of time, Lindo fished out a R20 note from her bra and handed it to an agitated Agnes.

She inspected the note like an owner of a pawn shop would inspect a diamond that some unlucky soul was looking to sell. "Does she still call you mama?"

"She calls every woman mama if she doesn't know their name."

Agnes let out a quick, dry laugh. "She doesn't call me that."

Lindo folded her arms and raised an eyebrow in an attempt to feign interest. "Ironic. What does she call you then?"

There was silence as Agnes placed the note securely in her back pocket. "Nothing."

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Sometime after Lindo had left, Agnes prepared Luyana and herself for bed. In the background, the small television placed on the too small table was reporting a story about seventeen year old Pakistani girl receiving a Nobel Peace Prize- Malala Yousafzai, it said her name was. Such story did not interest Agnes in the slightest. She had not seen it, but when she took one of Luyanda's shoes off, a piece of gravel had fallen out from inside. It had left a clear indentation in the sole of her foot. And in this way, and yet another, she carried with her a deep scar that was formed, at a young age, by the rough South African streets.