

was a child. She tasted bitterness. Still, she had a guilty feeling she couldn't explain.

She remembered coming home a short while ago and hearing noise coming from the house. She walked into the garden and stood listening by the tree. What was happening here? Hunter was busy cursing Gloria who was wording him back.

'You little brazen hussy.'

'Look at yourself.'

'Do your work.'

'I'm not your servant.'

'Come here and let me slam your big mouth shut.'

'No.'

Naomi felt her heart beating wildly in her chest as she listened.

'Come here, you little monkey.'

'I'll tell mom you call me names.'

'You're a brainless brat.'

'Just like you.'

'You're a rotten little monster.'

'And you're a big one.'

'Pick up the broom and sweep.'

'I don't follow orders.'

'Come here and I'll show you how.'

'No. You're not nice.'

'Leave. You have nothing here.'

'Not without my mother.'

'Fuck off.'

Naomi jumped, oh my Lord.

'Mom buys all the food. You don't give her a cent and you don't care about us.'

‘Shut up, you little terror.’

‘You use her as your slave.’

‘What,’ he shouted louder.

‘Slave driver!’

When I put my hands on you, you wouldn’t be able to sit for days.
He sounded enraged.

She saw Gloria running her way. A big stone passed and hit the fence.

‘Stay put!’

‘No. All you can do is beat and curse. You don’t know how to give anything else.’

All she could do was catch her sweaty daughter and hold her tight against her. She could feel Gloria’s heart pounding as if it wanted to jump out of her body. Now she knew what happened when she was away to work. She remained standing with her daughter beside her. Her head was hot and she had the feeling that flames were escaping through her ears. Hunter came around the corner with a stone in his hand. She couldn’t see the reaction on his face because of the shadow from his hat, but his body jerked to a halt. Naomi made sure that he saw her standing there beside her child. That he knew she had heard them and that she had seen the first stone flying through the air which he had thrown. He dropped the other stone from his hand and silently disappeared around the house.

She left the house with Gloria. It was her fault her daughter had to go through this. Why hadn’t she moved out years ago? Why did she stay here? She felt tightness in her chest. They took a silent long walk, which cooled down the heat in her head. The sun shone on them merciless as they walked through the streets and small paths. Naomi felt as if they were without shelter. They reached a Kwihi tree that casted shadow from his old cracked up branches full of little green

leaves. She leaned up against the tree trunk to catch her breath, while Gloria sat on a stone. Naomi asked: 'Gloria, does this happen often?'

'Just the past few weeks. I couldn't take it anymore how he was bossing me around. When I had done what he asked, he still grumbled. He made me furious.'

Naomi was silent. My child was suffering because I hadn't protected her enough. Gloria was smarter than she ever was. Years later Hunter was still active in upsetting their lives. That time laid behind her and now she has to protect her child.

'I'll organize something where you can go after school en where you can do your homework in peace. Gloria, all I'm asking you to do is your utmost to pass your exams and then we'll be out of here. That I promise you.'

Gloria nodded.

Shortly after she had overheard the confusion between her daughter and Hunter, Gloria found him one day after school lying on the floor of the sitting room. Angeli who was her school friend from youth and her neighbour had called an ambulance. He was transferred to hospital.

Hours later Naomi came home and heard the whole story. Coma? How did he get in a coma? Now she had to go and visit him. Who said that? She didn't have to do anything. She really didn't feel to go back through the city for him. No, she wasn't going back. Lost time. Why should she visit him? He was in a coma. Why should she care? She didn't care if he stayed and lived in the hospital. If it was the other way around he wouldn't care one bit about her. She felt nauseous and inhaled deeply.

After she had something to eat she walked to the bus stop and took

the bus going to the hospital. When she reached the ward she was shown to, she heard him yelling at someone. Oh no, here he also had no manners. The nurse, who had just left his room, stood a moment at his door with closed eyes. Naomi also stood quiet and by his next shout the young nurse opened her eyes and saw her standing there.

‘My father,’ said Naomi calmly.

The nurse nodded and said: ‘He’d just woken up from a coma. He shouted when I came back with medicine that the doctor had prescribed. Just one moment please I’ll get the doctor.’

The nurse came back with a man wearing a doctor’s uniform. ‘de Groot,’ he said while giving Naomi a hand. ‘Your father is in my care. When he came in, the lab took some blood and tested it. Your father is a diabetic. Did you know that? Does he have medicine?’

‘I don’t know anything about that sir,’ Naomi said with raised eyebrows.

‘I think we could tell you more about the state of his body after we’ve checked him over. He would have to cooperate.’

They entered the room where Hunter laid; he was just pulling a needle out of his arm. Loose cords were hanging from machines that he probably had already removed from his body.

‘What are you doing?’ the nurse called out as she approached the bed.

‘Are you blind?’ he grunted.

Dr de Groot stepped forward. ‘Mr Richards, we have to find out why you were brought into hospital while you were in a coma.’

‘You can wait till hell freezes over. Just stay away from me.’ He got the needle out and started waving around him.

Naomi stood by the door quietly looking at him.

He didn’t look up. ‘You so-called studied to be doctors, but God

damn you, folks are dying. I'm going home and I don't want your hogwash in my body.'

What a load of rubbish. I can count his ribs. The bones in his face are showing through his skin. He's looking terrible and still he doesn't want to be checked.

She said: 'You didn't go into a coma just like that. There must be something that caused it.'

'Did you come here to drag me through the mud?,' he asked roughly.

'I wouldn't want to get my shoes dirty. Thank you very much,' she threw back at him.

She said nothing more and just looked on.

'I'm going home,' he said harshly.

'You're taking a risk going home without further research and medicine. Have you realized that you most probably were in a coma because you're a diabetic? Let us do some research to prevent more damage,' said the doctor.

'No way,' he shouted. 'No research. No medicine. I'm certainly not staying in this house of death to be poisoned by you lot.' He lifted his upper body and swung his long legs out of bed. He sat buttoning up his shirt. Unstable he got up on his swollen feet, holding on to the bed. He searched the floor looking for his shoes, which stood together in a corner. 'Where are my shoes?' The nurse and the physician looked at each other. Naomi could see the shoes. Was he blind?

'I'm sorry you won't let us check your eyes and body and that you chose to go home untreated.'

'I don't care what you think or say. You don't know what you're doing and you kill people who come in here for something small. I rather die at home with none of your poison in my body. Where are my shoes?' He sat on the bed.