The snake, with strings attached. Draft 1.

Written by

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12a The Hague Main Road Cape Town South Africa FADE IN

1 INT. KITCHEN, NICHOLAS' HOUSE - NIGHT.

It is Saturday July 1 1978. Darkness, the sound of matches then a flame, a candle is lit.

NICHOLAS ABEL(7)a short boy, slightly effeminate sits next to his plump mother ANNA (43). Anna is dishing out the food.

NICHOLAS For the food we are about to receive, we thank you Oh Lord. Amen.

ANNA Good boy. I've prepared your favourite.

The pair wash their hands, Nicholas licks his lips, they proceed to eat supper, fish. Sound of mosquitoes is around. Nicholas swats them.

NICHOLAS We're the mosquitoes food, they prey on us.

ANNA Deliciousness is in the mouth of the beholder, so eat up.

Gunshots ring outside, the pair ignore them.

The mother picks up the report card, she smiles and goes back to eating.

ANNA I can sleep easy knowing I have such an intelligent baby boy.

NICHOLAS Without all the books I'm surprised I did so well.

She squeezes his cheeks. The sound of mosquitoes permeates the room.

ANNA Not like that good for nothing father of yours, wherever he is.

Nicholas scratches his arm.

(CONTINUED)

NICHOLAS Today the teacher asked us what our career options when we are all grown up.

ANNA And what did you say?

Nicholas shrugs.

ANNA (CONT'D) Trust in God, my dear, he will show you the way.

Anna leans on the wall.

ANNA (CONT'D) Like this, lean on God, he'll drive you wherever, like your chauffeur.

They both laugh.

INT. BEDROOM, NICHOLAS' HOUSE - NIGHT.

Sunday. Nicholas' mother lies on the bed, she is sweating and heaving. Nicholas' aunt, PHILIS (34)a tall stern looking woman is sitting next to Anna.

She is wiping away the sweat with her towel. Nicholas is sitting on the bed as well.

NICHOLAS It's a good thing you live so close.

PHILLIS Keep your fingers crossed sonny, she'll be alright.

NICHOLAS

Yesterday she was fine and today...

Phillis washes the towel. Anna twists and turns.

NICHOLAS What are we going to do Aunt Phillis?

PHILLIS

Everything in our power, tomorrow go to the clinic, I know its far so (MORE)

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PHILLIS (cont'd) you are going to have a loooong walk.

Phillis fluffs up Anna's pillow.

PHILLIS(CONT'D) Tomorrow you go to town, I'll sell your mother's vegetables for her.

Phillis stands up and goes out of the room. Nicholas kneels at the foot of the bed, he begins to pray.

NICHOLAS Please Lord heal my mother...

PHILLIS Boy, tomorrow you have to wake up early, a loooong walk. Go to bed and maybe God too can get some sleep.

Nicholas keeps praying for sometime. He then lies down next to his mother.

Phillis peaks in and sees him asleep, she closes the door quietly.

3 EXT. CLINIC PARKING LOT - DAY

Monday. Nicholas walks with a tall white man, DR. MEL PATRICK DA SILVA(52)wears a white overcoat his stethoscope is around his neck. On the doctor's coat is a badge with the Spanish flag.

NURSES bustle people in and out of the clinic. Nicholas has on a grey shirt.

DR. SILVA Sorry, young man.

The two arrive at the doctor's red car. Dr. Mel swings his keys impatiently.

NICHOLAS I can come back and pay the full amount...

DR. SILVA No can do, it sounds like malaria to me...See that's the thing with you people...

(CONTINUED)

Dr. Silva opens the door of his car.

DR. SILVA (CONT'D) Wait until the last moment, if you had nets like we told you...

Nicholas cups his hands and makes a begging motion. Dr. Silva shakes his head, he looks at his watch.

DR. SILVA (CONT'D) You're wasting my time and mine. And get your dusty hand off my car.

Dr. Silva starts his car and drives off. Nicholas walks back home.

4 INT. BEDROOM, NICHOLAS' HOUSE - NIGHT.

Tuesday. Nicholas sits next to his Aunt Phillis. She holds him close, hugging him tightly. Nicholas' mother has shrunken, she is losing strength, grow weak.

> PHILLIS That nasty doctor, he'll get what's coming to him.

NICHOLAS He wouldn't even give me a ride home. I wish I could could cut him up and have thirty pieces of silver.

Philis picks up a bowl of porridge and tries to feed Anna. Anna refuses.

> PHILLIS She won't eat, and neither have you?

NICHOLAS I'm fasting.

PHILLIS Slow down. Boy, you're always fasting, there's never that much food in any case, I don't think God would know the difference.

NICHOLAS I will go to the church tomorrow, perhaps the priest will say a prayer for mama. Nicholas reads his Bible by the candle light.

PHILLIS Happy are the poor Mosquito nets and repellent indeed. Does that doctor know what it is like down here?

NICHOLAS He's car is as big as this house.

PHILLIS It's hell down here, it's hot and smelly and...

Phillis yawns.

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PHILLIS (CONT'D) I'm going to bed.

Phillis leaves the room. Nicholas sits at the bed praying, drops of sweat run down his forehead.

EXT. CHURCH PARKING LOT - DAY

Wednesday. Nicholas stands opposite SINBAD (25)an Indian priest, he is wearing a black suit and a rosary around his neck. The priest is medium build, has a receding hair line and talks with a sneer.

NUNS in black get in and out of the church. The priest's white car, smaller than Dr. Mel's is parked a distance away.

SINBAD I haven't seen you in a while, Nicodemus.

NICHOLAS

Nicholas.

SINBAD You say your mother is not feeling very well.

Sinbad is looks into the window of his car, he is combing the little hair that remains on his head.

> NICHOLAS I have gone to the doctor.

5.

SINBAD Poor Norris, it's probably a demonic manifestation, nothing that a donation can't fix.

Nicholas clenches his fist.

SINBAD (CONT'D) A little sprinkle of holy water and your mother would be cleansed of the evil spirit.

Sinbad takes out a bottle.

SINBAD (CONT'D) Cheap, R100.

NICHOLAS A hundred rand! I spent all my money on food.

Sinbad puts the bottle in his pocket and gets into his car. He takes out a cheeseburger from the dash board. Nicholas licks his lips. Sinbad takes a bite.

> SINBAD (While chewing.) Man cannot live on bread alone, oh this? I'm just breaking my fast. Smile, Nelson, God is testing you.

Sinbad closes the door, and drives off. Clouds of smoke plume high up. Nicholas chokes and coughs.

INT. BEDROOM, NICHOLAS' HOUSE - NIGHT.

Thursday. Nicholas' mother just lies still now, breathing once and so often. Phillis is standing beside Nicholas who is sitting. Phillis places her hand on his shoulder.

PHILLIS

Be strong.

NICHOLAS She is growing weak.

PHILLIS Did you have supper?

Nicholas nods.

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PHILLIS (CONT'D) Thank God, at least you have put behind your silly rituals, I was getting fed up with your superstitions.

NICHOLAS There are not superstitions...

Phillis raises her hands to the sky.

PHILLIS Well then why doesn't God just heal her then. God can you hear me?! If you can, make my sister well again.

There is crashing noise, Phillis goes out of the room, she comes back a little later.

PHILLIS (CONT'D) I was a little afraid there, just a metal plate that fell over. Must have been a rat.

Nicholas is holding his mother's arm.

PHILLIS (CONT'D) You know I'm here, right. You're not alone.

Nicholas nods, after a couple of minutes he turns, Aunt Phillis has left the room.

7 INT. MARKET PLACE - DAY

Friday. The market place is crowded with PEOPLE. Nicholas walks through the sea of people still in his grey sweater. Finally he arrives at a tent, beside the tent is the remnant of a small second hand black car with no wheels.

8 INT. TENT, MARKET PLACE - DAY

There is a very short black MAN (61), with short nappy hair and very light skinned. The man has beads around his neck. He is busy grinding some powder. There are some old WOMEN at the back of tent peeling potatoes. He looks up and continues grinding.

> MAN Hello, young man.

NICHOLAS Afternoon, sir.

MAN Call me Sol, short for Solomon.

NICHOLAS I need your urgent help, my mother is lying at home sick with a terrible fever.

SOL Sounds like witchcraft to me. No problem there, Sol can fix that.

NICHOLAS The doctor said...

Sol comes around the stall, he is wearing animal skins, and is bare foot. He begins looking into his sack. Nicholas covers half of his face with a smile.

> SOL Don't trust those witches.

Sol takes out a rock, with an inscription on it.

SOL (CONT'D) You see this, this is the Stone of the Ancestors.

Nicholas crosses his arms.

SOL (CONT'D) Actually it's the kidney stone of a great king. This is the answer to your problems. Very powerful.

NICHOLAS How much does it cost?

SOL A modest R30.

Nicholas takes a step forward.

NICHOLAS I can afford that, just wait.

Nicholas begins searching in his pockets. Calmly at first then frantically. All the while Sol is talking.

8.

SOL All you have to do is wash your mother in it... What's the matter?

NICHOLAS I can't find my money. Someone must have stolen my money!

Nicholas looks right and left. Sol shrugs and goes back to his power.

SOL There's nothing for free, sonny. If you don't pay, you don't play.

Nicholas puts his hands on his head. He sighs, Sol is whistling. Suddenly Nicholas takes the stone and makes a run for it.

SOL (CONT'D) You rascal, come back with my... Catch him!

Nicholas disappears into the crowd of people and makes his way out of the market place.

9 EXT. STREET - DAY

Nicholas begins walking home, briskly and running a little, he smiles and looks at the stone. Cars drive by.

10 INT. BEDROOM, NICHOLAS' HOUSE - NIGHT.

Nicholas arrives home at 7pm. Phillis is lying on the bed her arms on her head. His mother is on the bed covered under a blanket. Aunt Phillis raises her head, she has tears on he face.

NICHOLAS

Is she?

Phillis nods and Nicholas drops the stone. Nicholas falls to the edge of the bed.

Phillis and Nicholas begin to cry. They sit beside each other, beside themselves with grief.

9.

11 EXT. GRAVESITE - DAY

Saturday. Nicholas and his aunt stand at the gravesite. It is a garden - like cemetery with fruits in view. The MOURNERS have left. The sky is grey and so is Nicholas' suit. Nicholas is busy weeding around the tombstone.

> PHILLIS Forget what the priest was saying about the Virgin Mary being our surrogate mother.

Phillis wipes the tears from her eyes.

NICHOLAS I wasn't listening.

PHILLIS I am here for you. Me and my husband, as a housemaid we'll pull through.

Nicholas stands up, Phillis puts a hand on his shoulder. She pulls him close.

PHILLIS (CONT'D) You are an intelligent boy, only you can stand in your way.

NICHOLAS I'm going to be an accountant and make a proper tombstone for mum.

PHILLIS That's the spirit, I will stand by you, just like this.

Phillis leaves Nicholas and follows the mourners.

Nicholas takes out the Stone of the Ancestor, the inscription has rubbed off.

He throws the stone into the sky. He looks at his palm, then to the sky.

NICHOLAS God, the doctor charged me an arm and a leg. The priest? Alms. The sangoma? But you? Why have you have taken away my mother... Answer me!

The wind gently blows.

NICHOLAS I thought so. You don't even exist.

Nicholas sees two nickels on the ground, he picks them up and rubs them together.

NICHOLAS

But if you do exist, this is my last prayer. And this coin, the dollar, the snake with strings attached, is the only god I pray to. And only \underline{I} shall be accountable for my own actions. The only prophet I know of is the profit of the dollar, this snake will clothe me, give me wisdom and get me out of the jungles disguised as a jungle. Amen!

Nicholas flips the coin, turns his back to the tomb and leaves the garden.

12 INT. BEDROOM, NICHOLAS' HOUSE - DAY

Sunday. A guitar plays off screen sombrely.

Through the window a view of the sun rising from mother earth. A bed just beneath a broken window. Hard earth, a bag with clothes in the corner. A guitar rests on the cracked wall.

Nicholas rises and obstructs the sun. He gets out of bed. He kneels at the foot of the bed.

He looks under the bed and takes out application forms at the university. Angle on BURSARY. He also takes out a maths book and pen. He puts them on the bed. He leaves the room.

13 INT. BATHROOM, NICHOLAS HOUSE - DAY

The guitar continues to play. Nicholas takes a cold bath out of a bucket.

He leaves the bathroom.

14 INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Nicholas puts on a yellow shirt. He takes the books, forms and pens. He closes the door. On the ledger is a coin on one side and a small Bible on the other. A wind blows through the window.

Through the broken window shacks and make shift houses of the ghetto abound. Way out in the distance is the city with towering skyscrapers. The guitar continues playing.

FADE OUT.