

ANOTHER ONE'S BREAD

**A PLAY BY
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**A commission from the Centre for Excellence in Food
Security, University of the Western Cape (UWC)**

About the Play

Another One's Bread explores various themes related to hunger in South Africa, but it does so in the context of the relationships between four women. Like every other theme, hunger intersects with a range of other issues – gender, class, apartheid's spatial geographies, education, corporatisation of services, etc to name but a few. What keeps the women together is THE SUBSTITUTES, a group of professional mourners, hired to provide mourning or mourning-related services at funerals. It is a dark comedy that takes its title from the Afrikaans expression "een man se dood is 'n ander man se brood" (one person's death is another person's bread".

An overarching theme is the taking of responsibility by women in particular for their health, their wealth and their happiness...and of their broader community, without depending on, or having their lives determined by government, men or anything else.

Given the commissioning of the play, it does seek to make particular points about hunger and related themes, but it seeks to do so – largely – in ways that are theatrically interesting and engaging, and consistent with its characters.

The Setting/s

The play takes place in multiple settings, but primarily in the home of Pumla, which she shares with Karabo, and later with Brenda. The set should allow for such multiple settings and easy transitions. It is a contemporary 2017 story/play (but could be 2015 or 2016 too).

The Characters

Pumla: a retired teacher in her early fifties (boarded because of Diabetes 2), initiator of THE SUBSTITUTES.

Andiswa: an estate agent, who is also the de factor "musical director" of THE SUBSTITUTES

Karabo: an aspirant writer, who teaches Xhosa part-time at a Mitchells Plain school, and is the Administrator of THE SUBSTITUTES.

Brenda: Karabo's unemployed niece from the Eastern Cape

The Structure

The structure of the play is framed as Brenda's story.

The Costumes

Costuming should allow for quick changes. A basic "underneath"/ordinary day costume, the black and white/colour "performance costume" and the black "mourning only" costume.

Scene One

The lights are down. Three women's voices sing a hymn in Xhosa. When the lights come up, Pumla, Karabo and Andiswa – wearing a similar, contemporary (black and white – large check) uniform (Pumla's fits more uncomfortably than that of Karabo's and Andiswa's) and sunglasses. They are singing and moving, their movements choreographed so that the impression is of a team of singers that has done this many times before. The choreographed movements are laced with irony, a comment by the team itself on what they are doing as professional mourners.

(It is up to the Director and/or the cast to find appropriate music for this opening sequence, some could be well-known hymns, others from popular local gospel singers and even appropriate popular songs).

After two verses or so, they abruptly break into exaggerated mourning, wiping their "tears" with exaggerated movements as each repeats a few words over and over again, at the same time as each other, but giving the audience and opportunity for the words of each to be heard.

Pumla: He was such a good man. *(repeat)*...such a good man...a good man...

Karabo: The most amazing father. *(repeat)*...most amazing...an amazing father...

Andiswa: A loyal and loving husband. *(repeat)*...a loving husband...a loyal husband...

They stop abruptly as if someone has corrected them. They lift up, or look "over" their sunglasses, look ahead, look at each other...

Karabo: *(as if speaking to someone who has corrected her)* Sorry...(she whispers to Pumla and Andiswa without the audience hearing)

They slip their sunglasses back on and without missing a beat, pick up where they left off.

Pumla: She was such a good woman...such a good woman...a good woman...

Karabo: We will miss this loyal wife...a loving wife...we will miss her...

Andiswa: The most amazing mother...so amazing...an amazing mother....

After a bit, the lights change, Andiswa and Karabo continue to hum and sway as Pumla steps forward, takes off her sunglasses and talks directly to the audience.

Pumla: My father was stabbed to death. On his way home from work. My mother was told that she couldn't slaughter an animal for the funeral.

Because blood had already been spilt. But she refused. She had all these people to feed.

Karabo puts on her glasses and steps back into line with Pumla and Andiswa. They start singing a more upbeat song than the one they started with, with new choreography. They end - after a verse or two and a chorus – on their knees, with their arms in the air, each one calling angels to come and do different things, again, saying these things at the same time, and with exaggerated speech and movement.

Andiswa: The angels are here...they've come to take her soul...come angels...take her...

Karabo: Angels from high...take her and fly...take her and fly...angels on high....

Pumla: The ancestors are waiting...to welcome another...rejoice ancestors...rejoice...

Karabo gets up and steps forward while Pumla and Andiswa continue to recite their words on their knees, quietly, but ever more excitedly.

Karabo: When my brother passed...all these women came to our house...everyone with a baby or a young child. We knew that he was a father, but we only discovered then that he had six children. And he was only twenty-eight. They all came to the memorial...these women and their young children. They were the ones who complained the loudest...why don't you have any food? Our children are hungry! We said this is a memorial not a funeral....

Karabo puts her sunglasses back on, leading a new song as she steps back, with Pumla and Andiswa rising to join her. This song is almost celebratory, and they dance with great gusto, and yet with respect for the dead and the occasion at which they are performing.

Finally, Andiswa steps forward while Pumla and Karabo hum and sway in the background.

Andiswa: They wanted my mother to sit on a mattress. And just look down. That's our tradition when someone dies. The elders wanted this to happen even more...because of the shame of his death. My father committed suicide. We were young. My mom said she had to put food on our table. So she went to work. The elders weren't happy.

Andiswa steps back into line and the three end this sequence with a rousing rendition of a popular song, with concomitant choreography.

Scene Two

The lights fade on the three women as a recorded song begins to play. The lights come up on Brenda leading an aerobics class to the rhythm and beat of the music.

It is for the Director and Actress to develop an appropriate aerobics routine: one that's aimed at women living in Khayelitsha, most of whom are older than Brenda (40 and above) and carrying weight.

Brenda: Five, six, seven, eight!

After a short, sharp workout routine in which she improvises, and challenges her class to get fit, Brenda talks directly to the audience.

Brenda: How did I get into *this*? To be honest, this was never part of my life plan. Not that I had a life plan. *(with a wry smile)* It all started when I met the wonderful witches of Khayelitsha as I called them. I got caught in their spell.

Scene Three

Karabo, Pumla and Andiswa are in the lounge of the Khayelitsha home that Pumla and Karabo share. They are no longer in their professional mourner outfits. Pumla is making coffee/tea. Andiswa is checking her emails on her phone. Karabo is on her laptop/iPad.

Karabo: Her son sent an email. They want a discount.

Andiswa: *(without looking up)* I would too if I were them.

Pumla: Hau, Karabo, how could you get it so wrong?

Karabo: They just gave me a name...Mpho Vanga. Most of the Mphos I know are men.

Pumla: I don't know about a discount. R1500 is not a lot of money...

Andiswa: It's the principle.

Pumla puts down a mug next to Karabo and offers one to Andiswa.

Pumla: But look at that coffin! These people live Shoprite lives and then they want to go out in a Woolworths coffin! I don't get it.

Andiswa: *(changes the subject, imitates Karabo)* "We will miss this loyal wife...this wonderful wife...we will miss her..." And then she's been divorced...for seventeen years, Karabo!

Beat.

Karabo: (*unimpressed with their teasing*) So what are we saying? Yes or no?

Beat. Pumla and Andiswa look at each other.

Pumla: 20% off...and it comes from your cut.

Karabo: 300?

Andiswa: I think that's fair...

Karabo: Then I'll only have a hundred.

Pumla: You mess up...you pay. This is not parliament.

Andiswa: We're going as professional mourners Karabo, so we have to be professional!

Karabo: (*shakes her head*) Eish...no meat this week...

Pumla: You know you can always eat with me.

Karabo: Diabetic chicken and broccoli? Hayi, hay, hayi. (*breaks into poetry*) "I am an African! I owe my being to beef, not fish, to sirloin and lamb...okay, and maybe chicken if I have to..."

Andiswa's phone rings.

Andiswa: (*in her finest Model-C accent*) Good, evening, Andi's Properties, how may I be of service?

Pumla walks towards Karabo, mimicking Andiswa

Pumla: (*only so Karabo can hear and see*) Andi's Properties, how may I be of service...

Karabo laughs, but shakes her finger at Pumla.

Pumla: (*hushed tones to Karabo*) I'll give you two hundred...I had to say that...you know how (*hinting at Andiswa who has her back to them*) she is with money.

Andiswa: Sorry...who am I speaking to?

Karabo: Enkosi sisi wam!

Andiswa: *(loses her Model-C accent and coolness)* That's not funny, Luvuyo!

When Pumla and Karabo hear that it's Luvuyo on the phone, they roll their eyes and make a hasty exit.

Andiswa: *(in angry, firm mode)* Well, I'm not laughing! You take two days to respond to my message? *(Beat)* I don't care where you were! You're late. Again! That's the fourth month in a row. *(Beat)* Every time it's the same thing...cash flow this, cash flow that! This is your daughter! Have you no shame? *(Beat)* Would you like me to go to court? I will...I promise you, I will! Twenty-four hours *(sarcastically)* Luvvy, and if the money's not in my account...you can say hello to the Sherriff for me! *(ends call)* Bloody loser!

Pumla and Karabo re-enter, hesitantly.

Karabo: Is it safe...?

In the following sequence, both Pumla and Andiswa talk to Karabo as if they are having a conversation with her. Karabo just lets them talk but checks them out with a wry a smile.

Andiswa: This guy! *(shakes her head)*

Pumla: Not just this guy...all men are trash, I'm telling you!

Andiswa: What did I see in him?

Pumla: My son doesn't talk to me...

Andiswa: Every month it's the same thing!

Pumla: His father left when he was two.

Andiswa: We lost our house because of his schemes!

Pumla: My one brother was jailed for beating his wife.

Andiswa: And we were going to do happily ever after...

Pumla: My other brother dies in a car accident!

Andiswa: I thought we could still be friends after the divorce.

Pumla: They're all the same...I'm telling you!

Karabo: My brother had six children!

Pumla and Andiswa stop their self-absorption and look at her.

Karabo: Six!

Beat.

Pumla: *(pointing with her hand to Karabo, but looking at Andiswa)* See what I mean?

Andiswa: You always say how nice Bongi is...he's always smiling, he volunteers to help you with the school lunches...

Pumla: Bongi's gay...I'm talking about our red-blooded black brothers!

Andiswa: Mna...I'm going to look for a white man.

Pumla: Hey, wena, *all* men are trash...

Andiswa: Maybe...but maybe white trash is more evolved than black trash.

Karabo: I just hope you find someone who's evolved...with legs. *(gets onto her knees, assumes an Oscar Pistorius voice, crying)* "I didn't mean to shoot her, my lady..."

Laughter, phone rings in the distance.

Karabo: *(to Pumla)* Your phone.

Pumla gets up, and exits hurriedly to get her phone.

Pumla: *(as she exits)* Who's phoning me now...?

Karabo: Don't say I didn't warn you about Luvuyo.

Andiswa: *He* still stays in town but we have to stay with my mother in the township! I won't let him do that to Noni. By the end of the year...we'll be back in the suburbs, so Noni can be close to her school for next year, I promise you....

Pumla enters, talking into her phone.

Pumla: I don't know any Brenda... I think you have the wrong number....

Karabo: Oh...that's my niece.

Karabo puts out her hand to take the phone from Pumla.

Karabo: I gave her your number...my phone was stolen mos.

Karabo takes the phone from Pumla and breaks into Xhosa.

Karabo: Brenda...hello! (*smiling broadly*) (*Beat, looks anxious*) Where are you?
In Khayelitsha already...Okay, okay...See you soon.

Karabo hurries around cleaning up, not really doing anything, but not having expected Brenda to arrive without much warning.

Andiswa: Who's Brenda?

Karabo: My sister's child.

Andiswa: From Eastern Cape?

Karabo: Ja.

Pumla: (*snorts*) Another refugee.

Andiswa: She's coming to visit?

Karabo: My sister asked me to try to help her...she's had some kind of problems.

Andiswa: What kind of problems?

Karabo: With the law.

Pumla: She murdered someone...

Pumla laughs.

Karabo: Hayi, Pumla!

Andiswa: Drugs?

Knock on door.

Karabo: (*to Pumla and Andiswa*) Please...be kind.

Brenda enters with a battered suitcase. Karabo hugs her.

Brenda: Hello Makazi!

Karabo: Look at you...so tall!

Further welcoming words can be improvised.

Brenda: Like my father...that's what everyone says.

Karabo: *(under her breath)* Okay...we're not going to talk about him. Let me introduce you. This is my friend...Andiswa...*(no handshakes or physical contact, just "hello's")* and that's Pumla...*(more "hello's")*. This is her house...I rent a room from her. You find the place okay?

Brenda: Yes, the Uber driver had one of those things...

Andiswa: *(helping her)* A GPS. You were lucky to find an Uber to the township.

Pumla: You were brave to travel alone in a taxi.

Brenda: I'm not scared Anti. I learned to defend myself in prison. *(showing off her "weapons")* I've got pepper spray...a knuckleduster...

There is a shocked silence. Pumla and Andiswa did not know about imprisonment.

Karabo: *(breaking the silence/awkwardness)* You must be tired.

Brenda: It was a long drive.

Karabo: You're going to share my room...Second door left. The bathroom is straight down...Can I make you some tea?

Brenda: Yes, please.

Brenda picks up her suitcase.

Karabo: Milk and sugar?

As she exits.

Brenda: Hot milk please Makazi...and three sugars.

Brenda exits. Pumla and Andiswa draw closer to Karabo. They speak in hushed tones.

Pumla: Hot milk and three sugars...did she learn that in prison too?

Andiswa: What was she in prison for?

Karabo: Shoplifting.

Pumla: Sugar is killing our people!

Andiswa: How long for?

Karabo: Ten months.

Andiswa: When?

Karabo: She got out about four weeks ago.

Pumla: Just put in two sugars, Karabo.

Andiswa: What did she steal?

Karabo: Chocolates...sweets...Coke.

Andiswa: And they gave her ten months?

Pumla: With all that sugar, she's giving herself a death sentence.

Andiswa: She should go to parliament. She can steal all she wants.

Pumla: Without going to jail!

Andiswa: And she'll get fat!

Pumla starts a circle imitating fat MPs, pushing out her stomach, and doing a little dance. Karabo joins in and then Andiswa too. They do two rounds of "fat MPs", waddling like ducks with pushed-out tummies and laughing...ripping off the Freedom Charter.

Pumla: There shall be steakhouses and desert!

Karabo joins in.

Karabo: Amaaaandla! All shall be equal before the...coles-law! (*laughter*) But MPs shall have steak too!

Andiswa joins the waddling circle

Andiswa: The people shall...? (*She can't think of something...*)

Pumla: (*helping her out*) Oven! (*laughter*) The doors of burping and...vulgar shall be open!

Brenda enters...she smiles broadly at what she sees, picks up her tea and watches.

Andiswa: There shall be grease...

Karabo: ...and slap chips! Amandla!

Pumla: The people shall share in the country's...health!

Pumla stops the fun, suddenly aware of what she's just said. (to Brenda)

Pumla: You want to know why we have so many funerals every weekend?
Just look at our leaders....

Brenda: I've never been to a funeral.

They look at her, stunned.

Pumla: Funerals are our best! We love them.

Karabo: Two or three...every weekend!

Andiswa: Funerals are big business, darling! The coffins! The motorcades! The fashion.

Pumla: The flowers.

Karabo: The food! Let's not forget the food!

Pumla: That's why we go!

Brenda: You go to funerals to eat?

Pumla: No, we collect the leftovers, and the rest of the week, we feed hungry children at three schools in our area.

Silence for a couple of beats.

Karabo: But we do eat.

Andiswa: *They* do. There's never anything vegetarian.

Pumla: You should come with us.

Brenda: Eeerrggh, no thank you!

Andiswa: Do you sing?

Brenda: (*smiles*) I won the Idols competition...

Andiswa: (to Karabo) You didn't tell us!

Brenda: The one in prison...

Andiswa: (making a point about the singing of Pumla and Karabo) We need singers.

Brenda: For what?

Karabo: (proudly, emphasising – with self-irony – “professional”) We're a group of professional mourners.

Brenda: What's that?

Karabo: We get hired by people...to mourn on their behalf.

Pumla: It's not cool to cry in public anymore. People don't want to dirty their funeral fashions, or mess their make-up.

Karabo: So we cry on their behalf. That's why we're called The Substitutes.

Brenda: (snorts) Like in football?

Karabo: Exactly!

Andiswa: We add glamour and glitz...we make funerals happy occasions.

Pumla: People are dying to die...just to have us at their funerals.

Brenda: You do it...for free?

Andiswa: No, darling, “hired” means we get paid to mourn! Like I said, death is good business!

Pumla: It's not much...just pocket money. It's not our real jobs. We split it three ways and 20% goes into the kitty. For our uniforms, transport, a rainy day...and the feeding scheme. If there's not enough leftovers.

Andiswa checks her phone.

Andiswa: I need to go...but I first want to hear Brenda sing.

Pumla: Hayi, no shame, it's late, you can't make her sing now.

Karabo: Ja, why don't we do that tomorrow when we rehearse for Saturday?
All through the latter exchange, Brenda has moved to stage centre. The others don't notice her. Brenda sings a song in the most beautiful voice.

The Director and the Actress may decide on the song, perhaps a well-known contemporary song by an African diva. It does not have to be long, or the full version, enough to give an impression of a beautiful voice.

As she sings, Pumla, Karabo and Andiswa, standing behind her, look her way and nod approvingly. As the lights fade on them, a spotlight stays on Brenda.

Karabo: (proudly) Her mother named her after Brenda.

Brenda: (once the song has ended) And so began my induction into The Substitutes. And my higher education!

Two scenes play out simultaneously. Andiswa and Karabo are in a coffee shop one side of the stage. Brenda and Pumla are at home, with Pumla ensuring that Brenda is studying.

Scene 4A

Pumla: I know you hated school. But you have to do this.

Brenda: Why?

Pumla: What do you think you could be without a matric?

Beat.

Brenda: (wryly) President?

Pumla: Hayi, hayi, hayi...you think you're clever, but if you're so clever why did you fail matric?

Brenda: You don't need to be clever to pass matric...

Pumla: Only a man can get to be President without a matric. Just to be nominated, his wife has to be a Doctor. Dr Dlamini-Zuma. So don't think you're going anywhere without an education.

Brenda: A lot of my friends have matric.

Pumla: Good for them!

Brenda: But they're all just sitting at home. Or having babies.

Beat. Pumla looks at Brenda, they stare at each other briefly.

Pumla: Let me read you something....

Lights fade. Come up on Karabo and Andiswa sitting at a table in a coffee shop.

Scene 4b

Andiswa has a wine glass, Karabo a draught glass.

Andiswa: I know you're going to hate me saying this, but I have to. I'm your friend. And friends say uncomfortable things.

Karabo: *(in a heard-it-all-before tone)* When am I going to get a real job?

Andiswa: Teaching Xhosa part-time and mourning at funerals are not going to get you a pension.

Karabo: Writing IS a real job. Chimamanda Adichie, Noviolet Bulawayo, Zuki Wanner...I want to be like them!

Andiswa: But you're *not* like them, Karabo...not yet.

They stop engaging each other, and look in the same direction as if a waitron has approached them.

Andiswa: Oh, sorry...we've been talking. Can you give us two minutes.

Waitron leaves.

Andiswa: By the way...I'm picking this up. So have whatever.

Karabo: I have money...

Andiswa: *(not listening)* Oh...and I'm giving you R200.

Karabo: What for?

Andiswa: I didn't want to undermine Pumla...about your having to take a cut. This is her project after all.

Karabo: She's already given me R200!

Andiswa's jaw drops. Then she bursts out laughing.

Scene 4a

Pumla: The other day...a government spokesman said that thirty million South Africans live in poverty. Thirty million! And you know what? 13 million

live on less than R600 a month! We make more than that in a weekend!

Brenda: Cool! So we're not poor!

Pumla: No, we're not. But poor people means poor children. And poor means no food. When I was teaching, that was the worst thing. These children coming to school when they've had nothing to eat. How can you learn like that?

Brenda: That's why you started The Substitutes.

Pumla: Exactly!

Brenda: So why's MaPumla telling me this...again?

Pumla: Because it's young people who are most unemployed in this country. And it's young women – like you – who are most exposed to poverty. And young women with little education – like you – are most likely to be poor. And young people in the Eastern Cape – like you – will struggle to get out of the poverty.

Brenda: So...I'll be fine. I'm in the Western Cape.

Pumla gives Brenda a "look"

Pumla: There's one condition to your being part of The Substitutes...you're going to get your matric.

As the lights go down.

Brenda: *(to the audience, from where she's seated)* Who would have thought you need a matric to cry on behalf of other people?

Scene 4b

Andiswa: *(talking to the waitron)* I'm going to have the beetroot and goat's cheese salad. *(As if answering a question from the waitron)* Er, no, no bread for me thanks.

Karabo: What does the burger come with? *(Beat, listens to the waitron)* Okay, I'll have it with chips. *(Beat)* Well done, please.

Andiswa: Meat and carbs...

Karabo: I was just thinking how nice it is to be eating without the food police watching me!

Andiswa: (*laughing*) Pumla's like a born-again. After sinning for so long herself, she'll take the tiniest speck out of anyone's eye!

Karabo: That's probably the most difficult thing about staying with her.

Andiswa: Which is why you need a decent income. So you can move into your own place.

Karabo: I like living with Pumla.

Andiswa: But there's no space. How long is Brenda going to share a room with you?

Karabo: I don't know.

Andiswa: You're too kind...what about *Karabo*?

Karabo: She's family.

Andiswa: What's happening with the teaching job?

Karabo: We started with twenty, and now we're down to six.

Andiswa: Mitchells Plain kids don't want to learn Xhosa?

Karabo: I was really hopeful at the beginning...but I think the school is not going to offer it as an option anymore. And I'm not qualified anyway.

Andiswa: So...

Karabo: My contract's till the end of the year. So I'm okay until then.

Andiswa: And then?

Karabo: (*sighs*) I dunno. Maybe the National Arts Council will give me a big grant. Or the Lottery.

Andiswa: You can't live on handouts, Karabo.

Lights fade. Lights come up on Brenda and Pumla.

Scene 4a

Brenda with her book/s. Pumla sweeping the floor.

Pumla: Eish, I need to sit down.

Brenda: Is Anti okay?

Pumla: Yes, I'll be....

(Pumla slides onto the floor. She is at the beginning of a "sugar attack", waving her arms, unable to talk, moving her legs up and down. Brenda is bewildered and frightened.)

Brenda: Anti...Anti...what's happening?

She rushes around, trying to do something, but she doesn't know what to do. She gets a glass of water, and tries to feed this to Pumla but Pumla does not open her mouth.

She gets a cushion to put under Pumla's head.

Eventually she finds Pumla's phone, and scrolls through it, and dials.

Scene 4b

Karabo and Andiswa are both laughing. Their heads are closer together, talking conspiratorially, without wanting the other customers in the restaurant to hear.

Andiswa: And the fatter he got, the more his penis seemed to disappear.

Controlled laughter.

Andiswa: I used to say to him...Luvuyo, the more you braai, the less we naai!

More laughter.

Andiswa: He was 85kgs when we got married. By the time I left him, he was 130!

Karabo: Good that you left. He clearly had no respect for you....

Andiswa's phone starts to ring. She begins to reach into her bag to get it.

Andiswa: Where was his self-respect? But not only him. All his friends...they all look like they're pregnant with twins!

Lights come up on Brenda and Pumla. Brenda is on the phone.

Karabo: So unsexy!

Andiswa: (*looks at her phone, to Karabo*) It's the food police checking on you (*smiles*). Hello Pumla...

Brenda: (*anxious*) Anti, it's Brenda...I'm using Ma Pumla's phone.

Andiswa: (*sensing the anxiety*) What's wrong, Brenda?

Brenda: I don't know...Ma Pumla is lying on the floor...making all funny movements. Makazi doesn't have a phone...so I called you...

Andiswa: Karabo's right here. Hold on...

Andiswa passes the phone to Karabo.

Andiswa: She says Pumla's lying on the floor making funny movements.

Karabo: (*calmly*) Brenda...listen to me.

Brenda: I'm scared, Makazi...

Karabo: Pumla is having a sugar attack.

Andiswa: I'll get the bill...(*Andiswa exits*)

Brenda: A what?

Karabo: I told you this might happen.

Brenda: (*referencing Pumla's arm movements*) You didn't tell me she'll be like a traffic cop...

Karabo: You must inject her with insulin.

Brenda: (*remembers*) In the cupboard...(*goes to the cupboard*)

Karabo: Exactly.

Brenda: I've got the pen and stuff.

Karabo: I will talk you through it again.

Brenda puts the phone on the counter

Brenda: I've put it on speaker phone...so talk a little louder.

Karabo: Have you got the needle?

Brenda: Yes.

Karabo: Attach it to the pen like I showed you.

Brenda follows all the instructions.

Brenda: It feels a bit loose.

Karabo: Turn it clockwise to lock it.

Brenda: Okay...

Karabo: Now...very slowly, hold the pen so the needle points upwards. Then push from the bottom so that some insulin comes out. There must be a clear stream...no bubbles.

Brenda: No bubbles...

Karabo: Now go to Pumla and find a spot on her abdomen...

Brenda puts the pen in her mouth like a bone, while she undresses Pumla to find a spot on her abdomen.

Karabo: Do you have that cleaning thing...?

Brenda gets the swab.

Brenda: Yes.

Karabo: Wipe the spot where you are going to inject her....

Brenda: Okay....

Karabo: Now inject the insulin into her...slowly but steadily....

After she administers the injection, Brenda stands up and steps back. Pumla's movements slow down.

Karabo: What's happening?

Brenda: I think it's working...

Brenda steps forward towards the audience.

Brenda: We learned first-aid in prison...but this...this was something else.

Brenda faints. Lights down.

Scene 5

Brenda is seated, and Karabo is doing something with her hair. They can improvise chatter about the hairstyle in between the dialogue.

Brenda: What's a vegetarian? I know it's someone who doesn't eat meat. But why? Is it like a religion?

Karabo: Andiswa's a vegetarian

Brenda: That's why I'm asking. I never met a vegetarian before.

Karabo: Why don't you ask her?

Brenda: I don't know...it might be too personal.

Karabo: Andiswa would love to talk about it.

Brenda: So she doesn't eat any meat?

Karabo: No beef, chicken, fish, dog...nothing.

Brenda: Even fish?

Karabo: Some vegetarians don't even eat animal products.

Brenda: Like what?

Karabo: Eggs, milk, cheese....

Brenda: Yoh!

Karabo: Exactly! Yoh!

Brenda: But why? Is it religious...like Muslims and pork?

Karabo: For some yes...like Rastas. And Hindus believe the cow is a holy animal, so they won't slaughter cows.

Brenda: Yoh! So Hindus don't eat McDonalds....

*

Karabo: I think they make vegetarian burgers for them. But since you mention McDonalds...you also get political and environmental vegetarians.

Brenda: What do you mean?

Karabo: Some people believe animals are sentient beings...they have feelings. So they have a problem with slaughtering animals. And then others say these big farms that breed animals for food – like McDonalds - put small farmers out of business. And they use good food to feed the animals which could be used to feed hungry people. So they have a political problem with these big food companies.

Brenda: Yoh! Makes eating complicated!

Karabo: Then the environmentalists say farming animals leads to climate change...because cow farts contribute to green house gases...and blah, blah, blah.

Brenda: How come Makazi knows so much about this stuff?

Karabo: I'm a writer...so I have to research stuff.

Brenda: Mama and Gogo always talk about you and politics...so why aren't you a vegetarian?

Karabo: Two reasons. One...I love meat!

Brenda: And two?

Karabo: I love meat!

They laugh.

Karabo: My main reason is political. We never had a problem with breeding and eating animals in Africa. But now, with climate change and stuff...all because of industrialisation on other continents, we are being affected in Africa. And now they want us to change our eating habits? Fuck them, is what I say. I eat meat as an act of resistance!

Brenda: Ja! Fuck them!

Karabo: *(hitting her gently on the back of her head, smiling)* Hey, watch your language! *(Beat)* Why are you so interested in vegetarianism anyway?

Brenda: After what happened to Ma Pumla the other day...she says she has her vegetable garden for health reasons.

Karabo: I told your mother how well you handled it. She's very proud.

Brenda: Really? *(Beat)* She disowned me...

Karabo: Because of the prison thing?

Brenda: And the shoplifting and stuff. She said I'm an embarrassment to the family. That's why she sent me away....

Karabo: She didn't send you away....

Brenda: You don't have to be nice, Makazi.

Karabo: She wanted you to have the chance to start over...somewhere else.

Beat.

Brenda: You know how it started?

Karabo: I don't need to know. What's done is done.

Brenda: I want you to know.

Karabo doesn't say anything, waits expectantly.

Brenda: Tampons.

Karabo: *(incredulous)* Tampons?

Brenda: Some of my friends didn't have tampons. And they didn't have money...so I went to different shops and took tampons and gave them to my friends.

Karabo: *(for the first time, raising her voice)* You stole tampons.

Brenda: Yes, okay, I stole tampons.

Karabo: A good cause doesn't make stealing right.

Brenda: I know, I know...

Beat.

Karabo: Gogo said it was sweets and chocolates....

Brenda: *(smiles)* That came later.

Lights fade.

Scene 6

This scene "morphs" into the next one, which is a Substitutes rehearsal for a

forthcoming funeral. It starts with Andiswa (the de facto “musical director” of the group) entering, singing the opening line of a song. She is joined by Pumla from another direction of the stage, and they join Karabo and Brenda in a rehearsed formation, where they sing and move to the song.

At some point, Andiswa steps out of the formation, continues singing, but watches the other three as they sing and move. Then she gives feedback (to be improvised more) when the singing has stopped.

Andiswa: That’s sounding good, ladies. Pumla, you just need to keep more in rhythm with the rest of the group.

The ribbing is good natured, with lots of laughter.

Pumla: You always pick on me!

Andiswa: That’s because you’re always out of rhythm.

Pumla: Until I’m not.

Karabo: Two hours later...

Pumla: I’m not as young as you lot anymore...twenty years ago...

Andiswa/ Karabo: *(together, as they’ve heard it all before)*...I would have wiped the floor with you.

Pumla: Exactly!

Brenda takes up a place next to Pumla.

Brenda: Just watch me, Anti...

Pumla: Thank you! At least she tries to help!

Karabo: Good luck with that, Brenda!

Andiswa: Okay, let’s do the last verse again....

They sing, and Pumla does a better job of keeping time (movement) with the rest, thanks to Brenda’s help.

Andiswa: One more time...but this time, imagine that you’re actually at a funeral, and you don’t have your sunglasses...I want to see your feeling.

They sing a verse and/or a chorus again, this time with gusto, movement and feeling.

Andiswa: Bravo, ladies! Bravo. Let's take a break.

Brenda exits and returns with four glasses and a bottle/jug of water.

Karabo: Can we do some admin?

Pumla: That's your job, Karabo.

Karabo picks up some papers.

Karabo: I want us to go through these forms....

Andiswa: Oh right...the ones you made....

Karabo: So I don't get it wrong, yes! *(Beat)* So basically, the forms ask for the name of the person, male or female, marital status at the time of death, age, how many children if any, if married – is spouse still alive, what the person died of...

Pumla: That's a lot of information.

Andiswa: You forgot to ask for their bank account...

Laughter.

Karabo: It is a lot of information, but I thought it would help us with customising our mourning.

Pumla: Mourning is mourning...what do you mean "customise mourning"?

Karabo: Like...if a person has died of AIDS, we can wear red ribbons...

Pumla: No-one wants people to know their family member has died of AIDS.

Andiswa: Still...

Karabo: I know...I'm just using it as an example.

Pumla: Give me another example....

Karabo: I can't think off-hand....

Brenda: *(helping her aunt)* If someone dies of a heart attack, we can make big red hearts and one by one place it on the coffin...while we sing a song...

Silence. They all look at her, taking it in.

Brenda: It can mean two things...there's the heart attack, yes, but also...the person was loved, and will depart in love.

Andiswa: I like that.

Karabo winks at Brenda.

Pumla: Sounds like more work.

Andiswa: The thing about business Pumla, is that we must keep on innovating. Today, we're The Substitutes...the only show in town. Next week, there'll be three other groups like us. We must stay ahead of the pack and offer something more, something different.

Karabo: We have a standard package for two thousand, right? What I'm thinking is we can have a list of things that people can order in addition to the package...with a price list for each thing.

Pumla: Like what? That's all I'm asking. Convince me.

Andiswa: And will the additional prices be per person or just part of the whole fee?

Karabo: We can decide...once we know what additional things we are offering. And then, if people want to pay more than 2000, that's up to them...

Pumla: (*conscious that she's rhyming*) I'll leave you to innovate. I need to urinate!

Karabo: That's one of the things I was thinking....

Pumla: Urinating?

Karabo: Poetry...

Pumla: For a moment I thought you meant pissing on someone's grave. I know a few people I'd like to do that to.

Karabo: I could write a poem for the person who died.

Pumla: (*mischievously*) They wouldn't be able to appreciate it...

Andiswa/ (*together*) Pumla!

Karabo

Pumla: (*laughing*) Okay, okay...

Pumla exits.

Andiswa: What were you thinking of charging for a poem?

Karabo: I haven't thought....

Andiswa: How long would you work on a poem?

Karabo: I'm not thinking epic...I'm thinking 6 to 10 lines max.

Andiswa: That shouldn't take you more than an hour?

Karabo: Depends on the Muse.

Andiswa: And what would you charge? Per hour?

Karabo: I don't know...I've never had to give this kind of value to art before.

Andiswa: Come on Karabo, we're not talking art...we're talking...copyrighting. After the first few poems, you'll have a few templates. Then it will just be a different name each time, with the most appropriate template.

Pumla enters

Pumla: So let's hear the innovations....

Andiswa: We're still talking poetry...

Pumla: Karabo, with all due respect, you're not a poet. You write short stories. And you want to write novels.

Karabo: I want to write poetry too. Can I give you an example of what I mean?

Pumla: Now you're talking!

Karabo: One of the people whose funeral they want us to perform at, died in a car accident.

Karabo reaches to get her I-Pad.

Pumla: Probably drunk.

Karabo: I wrote a little poem for him. (*looks at Pumla*). Not him...his family.

Andiswa: Go Karabo!

Karabo: (*reads*) Our journey on the road of life
Has miles of love and feet of strife
And when that journey needs must end
Those left behind have hearts to mend

Now here we are to bid adieu
To father, friend, a colleague true
But this we know, it is "so long"
We'll meet again, we will stay strong

Thank you!

Pumla: (*clapping*) Wow! That's beautiful!

Andiswa: That's great, Karabo.

Karabo: It needs a bit of work, but I just wanted to give you a taste....

Andiswa: I had a lump in my throat.

Pumla: Me too.

Andiswa: Talented aunt, hey Brenda?

Brenda has been silent and shifts and smiles awkwardly.

Pumla: (*to Brenda*) What do you think?

Karabo: Be honest...

Brenda: Miles and feet?

Karabo: I know, I know...but kilometres and metres are not exactly poetic.

Brenda: I didn't like it.

Pumla: Why?

Brenda: I thought it was...

Andiswa: What?

Beat

Brenda: (*shyly*) Corny.

Karabo: It's for a funeral...it's supposed to be...sentimental.

Pumla: I know we asked for your opinion, but there's no need to be rude.

Karabo: Pumla...

Pumla: We have enough people trying to pull us down. Men...white people...Especially men!

Karabo: It's okay

Pumla: We don't need to do it to ourselves. We must support each other!

Andiswa: Pum...

Pumla: If you can't be constructive, then rather say nothing.

Karabo: She was just...

Pumla: We are sisters here. We survive *because* of each other! And *for* each other!

Andiswa: (*somewhat wryly*) Amen!

Pumla: No-one's going to do it for us! Your aunt was trying something new. Best we can do is support her. Especially if we can't do any better ourselves.

By this time, Brenda has stood up. She launches into a poem with gusto and in a rap style.

Brenda: Who are you Death, with your evil grin
You've done your best, now let the angels in
They've come to take our next of kin
To a place where you no longer win
This is the place called...heaven!

As she exits.

Brenda: Sorry...I need the bathroom.

There is a moment of silence.

Pumla: (*to Karabo*) I liked yours too. It's different.

Karabo: (*shakes her head, smiles*) Maybe I should also just be an estate agent.

Andiswa: Just?

Karabo: Maybe I should give up writing....

Andiswa: And *just* be an estate agent?

Karabo: I didn't mean it like that.

Pumla breaks the slight tension.

Pumla: I'm going to make tea.

Andiswa: We still need to talk about those forms...the next funerals.

As Pumla exits.

Pumla: Sure.

Andiswa: Did you know...?

Karabo: About the poetry? (*shakes her head*)

Andiswa: The girl's obviously talented. How did shoplifting and prison come to be part of her story?

Karabo: Chapter one: you fail matric. Chapter two: you don't have a job...you don't have money, but you still want things. Chapter three: So you take. And you get caught. Chapter four: Your family can't afford a lawyer. The end.

Shouting from the back, off stage.

Pumla: Hey! Hey you little skelms! Fok off! Hey...!

Pumla runs past them, angrily, with a broomstick.

Andiswa and Karabo run out after her, so that the stage is empty. We hear Pumla shouting, off stage.

Pumla: I know where you live, blerrie skelms!

Brenda enters.

Lights fade.

Scene 7

Brenda and Pumla are in walking clothes. They are walking at pace. Pumla puffs

through her dialogue.

Brenda: Tell me if I'm going too fast.

Pumla: You're going too fast.

Brenda slows down marginally. Beat.

Brenda: You're doing well.

Pumla: I know you just want to punish me...

Brenda: For what?

Pumla: For shouting at you the other day.

Brenda: (*dismissively*) We got shouted at all the time in prison.

Pumla: Karabo said I was over the top. Especially...(*puffs*)...especially after you saved me.

Brenda: Forget it. (*looks at her watch*) Twenty more minutes...

Pumla: And then?

Brenda: (*smiling*) And then one-hundred sit-ups!

Pumla: You want to kill me?

Brenda: And then we would have done three kilometres.

Pumla: That's good?

Brenda: By the end of the month we'll be doing five. (*Beat*) That woman's waving at you...

Pumla: I'm ignoring her.

Brenda: (*waving at the woman*) Why?

Pumla: I don't want people to recognise me...they'll think I've gone mad.

Brenda: (*laughing*) It's not mad to exercise.

Pumla: I haven't exercised since I was at school!

Brenda: That's why those boys got away...

Pumla: Blarry skelms. (*allowing herself a little laugh*).

Brenda: You said you know them...

Pumla: Funny thing is...they get the school lunches we prepare.

Brenda: So you're angry with them for raiding your vegetable patch.

Pumla: I was then. In the heat of the moment. Seeing those two kids jump over the fence and take my tomatoes....but you can't be angry at people for stealing food.

Brenda: I suppose...

Pumla: We must be angry at the system that makes people do that. Especially children! (*puffing*) Can we stop for a minute?

Brenda: Sure. (*Beat*) You okay?

Pumla: I'll be fine...just need to get some breath back.

Brenda continues to run on the spot.

Pumla: After I was boarded from teaching...bad health...I got a payout so I was able to buy that house. I was lucky...it was on a decent plot of land, not like those matchbox RDP houses where you can hear the loo flush two houses away. Everyone talks about land, land, land...I wish government would build houses on decent plots of land...and teach people to grow their own food. But you know...

Brenda: What?

Pumla: That solution is too simple for government.

Brenda: Maybe you should be in government.

Pumla: (*gives Brenda a wry, dirty look*) I'm trying to be healthy! Let's go...And no more talking...I need all my breath.

Pumla and Brenda walk at pace, looking directly ahead as the lights fade. Brenda exits.

Light stays on Brenda.

Brenda: It didn't matter how much Pumla tried to ignore people on our daily walks. First, one asked to join us. Then another neighbour. By the end of three weeks, we had a walking group of seven.

Lights fade

Scene 8

Karabo and Andiswa at Karabo/Pumla's house. They are paging through forms. Andiswa has a glass of wine, Karabo a beer. They read, very matter-of-factly, no emotion.

Karabo: Male, 36-year-old, stabbing. Saturday 4th, 2pm. Mourning only.

Andiswa: Female, 73, natural causes, also Saturday...11am.

Karabo: What do they want?

Andiswa: It says here "Performance with dignity".

Karabo: Performance with dignity?

Andiswa: (*laughing*) No stripping.

Karabo: Damn! (*laughter*)

Brenda enters with a mug of coffee/tea.

Andiswa: Female, 45. TB. Saturday 11th. Doesn't give a time.
Female. 9. Nope. We don't do those.

Brenda: What don't we do?

Andiswa: Children. No children's funerals.

Karabo: Brenda, can you take the TB form and phone their number. Ask them what time the funeral takes place on the 11th.

Andiswa passes the form to Brenda. Pumla enters, looking like she just woke up. Brenda exits.

Pumla: (*yawns*) Isn't exercise supposed to make your fresh? I just want to sleep all the time.

Andiswa: It will get better. I only need six hours of sleep.

Pumla: (*behind Andiswa's back, miming*) "I only need six hours of sleep"

Karabo: We've got two for this Saturday. Natural causes at 11 and a stabbing at 2. We normally ask for a minimum of four hours between starting times...because things can go on...

Pumla: What do they want?

Karabo: 11am wants a performance, 2pm wants mourning only.

Andiswa: Natural causes wants it with dignity.

Pumla: So no jumping into the grave and stuff.

Andiswa: You can jump in. But then you have to stay there.

Laughter. Brenda enters. Hands the form to Andiswa. For much of the time, Brenda sits and whatsapps on her mobile phone or checks Facebook.

Brenda: 10.30.

Andiswa: Okay, thanks.

Pumla: Good thing they're not the other way round. The stabbing will be sadder and take longer.

Karabo: So what do you think? It's your call...which one do you think will have the most leftovers?

Pumla: Are those the only two for this weekend?

Karabo: There's one for Sunday afternoon but...

Andiswa: I can't do it.

Pumla: Why?

Andiswa: I have a show house.

Pumla shakes her head and makes a sound to express her annoyance.

Andiswa: That's my real job, Pumla. That's what's going to get me out of this...this...

Pumla: Black township?

Andiswa: Whatever.

Karabo: We can try to do both on Saturday.

Pumla: (*not letting go of Andiswa*) We're offering a service to people in need.

Andiswa: So am I. You know how difficult it is for black people to find properties to buy or rent in Cape Town. So if I find something in the suburbs that I want to market to my people, you bet your ass I'm going to do it.

Pumla: And make some money off *your* people...

Andiswa: Sure...just like we do off *our* people's grief.

Pumla: That's not how it started.

Karabo: Ladies...we've been through this....

Andiswa: No...it started out as a way of collecting food for hungry school children.

Pumla: Then you convinced us to make it into "a business".

Andiswa: You don't complain when you get 8 to twelve-hundred every weekend.

Pumla: Now we're offering extras and what-what! I sometimes wake up in the middle of the night because I've had a nightmare. We've suddenly become this funeral package business. We make the coffins. We grow funeral flowers in my vegetable patch. We do the catering. We even dig the graves.

Andiswa: (*humouring Pumla*) That's brilliant, Pumla! For you that's a nightmare. For me, it's a business woman's dream...the one stop death service! We can get a fee for placing the death notice.

Karabo: (*joining the teasing*) For printing the funeral programme.

Andiswa: What about making the final clothes for the corpse?

Karabo: We could run a cash bar at the wake.

Andiswa: Hire the tent.

Karabo: We could even keep goats in the backyard for slaughter.

Brenda tries to end Pumla's embarrassment.

Brenda: Why don't just the three of us do it on Sunday?

Beat of silence.

Brenda: The three of you did it before I joined. I could do Andiswa's parts.

Pumla: Now that's a good idea!

Karabo: We could a four-part on Saturdays and three-part on Sundays.

Beat.

Andiswa: (*defensively*) A lot of it is my intellectual property...

Pumla shakes her head, makes a sound to express her disgust.

Karabo: We can pay you a 10% royalty...like writers get.

Beat. Andiswa has not considered that anything could be done without her.

Andiswa: Let me see if I can shift that show house. (*takes out her phone*)

Karabo: (*directed to Pumla*) Which one shall we do on Saturday?

Pumla: Whoever brings the deposit first. (*exits angrily*)

Andiswa: (*hushed tone, to Karabo*) What was that about?

Karabo: (*whispering*) Sugar low. Time for her injection.

Lights fade. Brenda steps forward in her The Substitutes uniform. Spotlight focuses on her. The Substitutes are performing at the funeral of the woman who died of natural causes. Brenda recites John Donne's poem, which she remembers from school (and which informed her earlier rap interpretation of it)

Scene 8

Brenda: Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.

Pumla, Andiswa and Karabo in uniform join Brenda in the background, humming a mournful tune, all wearing sunglasses, except Brenda.

From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from three much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go

Pumla: *(interjecting, under her breath)* And women...

Brenda: And soonest our best men...and women with thee do go
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery
Thou are slave to fate, chance, kings and desperate men...and women

Pumla: *(interjecting)* No, only desperate men...!

Karabo and Andiswa pull Pumla back in line.

Brenda: And dost with poison, war and sickness dwell
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st though then?

One short sleep past, we wake eternally
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

*Pumla, Andiswa and Karabo join Brenda as they sing a final hymn at the funeral.
The singing is beautiful, dignified, with minimal movement.*

The Director and/or cast member select a hymn/song that they believe is appropriate.

Scene 9

Lights come up, The Substitutes are at the funeral of the stabbing victim; they are dressed all in black, occupying different parts of the stage. They will only mourn, each one taking turns to weep, then two weeping together, then three, back to two, then all four i.e. it is choreographed weeping.

It starts with funereal, organ music playing in the background. Each of the four passes by the coffin of the victim, and then starts to weep, once they see or pass the victim's face, starting with Karabo, then Pumla, followed by Brenda and finally Andiswa.

Karabo and Pumla end up next to each other as if in the front pew, with Brenda and Andiswa further back, on either side of them.

Karabo and Pumla weep first, setting off Andiswa and then Brenda. Karabo and Pumla stop. Brenda stops, Andiswa keeps wailing. Which sets off Pumla and then Karabo and Andiswa again.

After a few rounds of such choreographed weeping, with some movements at times e.g. Pumla falls to her knees, and Karabo has to help her up; Andiswa weeps and moans "We will miss you Thando...oh Thando we will miss you", they exit in single file, Andiswa, followed by Brenda, then Pumla and finally Karabo. As she is about to

exit, Karabo puts out her hand as if accept an envelope with their payment.

Karabo: *(back to audience, looks in the direction of her outstretched hand)*
Enkosi.

Lights fade.

Scene 10

Scene 10

They are back at Pumla's house, "unwinding" and reflecting on the two funerals that they have attended. Brenda's and Karabo's default positions are to go to their phone and I-Pad respectively.

Karabo: I'm glad we did both. It worked out fine.

Andiswa: The first one was lovely. But the second one was really sad. I don't usually cry, but I really did at that one.

Pumla: Ja, shame. A young father...those three children...I felt for them.

Brenda: Does anyone know what happened? How he was stabbed?

Karabo: We don't ask. We can't get emotionally involved. We get only enough information to do our job.

Andiswa: His wife seemed to be taking it well.

Karabo: Which one was his wife?

Andiswa: The one with the three children.

Karabo: That was his sister. She hired us.

Pumla: So which one was his wife?

Karabo: I don't know.

Silence as they all think about this.

Andiswa: Maybe she was the one who stabbed him.

Pumla: That's what I'm thinking. And she's in jail.

Brenda: What if he was abusive...

Karabo: ...and she stabbed him?

Brenda: Maybe he wasn't such a nice person. That's why they had to hire us to mourn. In case no-one came to the funeral.

Andiswa: This is why we don't need to know details.

Brenda: We could have mourned a woman-abuser.

Andiswa: That's not our business.

Brenda: It goes against what we stand for.

Andiswa: So what? We made R500 each.

Pumla: And they're donating a lot of food. Which will make a lot of children happy.

Karabo: Anyway, we don't really know if that was the case. We're just speculating.

Brenda: Shouldn't we get to know more...in future?

All: No!!

Brenda: (*puts up her hands in mock surrender*) Okay....!

Pumla: He actually had quite a nice face.

Andiswa: I thought so too.

Brenda: I can't look at dead people.

Pumla: It's part of our job.

Brenda: I'm glad we wear sunglasses. When it comes to the part of looking in the coffin, I just close my eyes.

Karabo: I wonder if the priest knows how he died.

Andiswa: Why?

Karabo: Because it's the same mumbo jumbo. They're all going to heaven!

Andiswa: Haai, shame. That's what the families need to hear.

Brenda: Makazi, imagine a priest saying... "this one, this one's going to the big fire!"

Karabo: He'll be fired! *(laughter)*

Pumla: When I die, I don't want any mumbo jumbo at my funeral. I've heard it all so many times...I could bury myself!

Andiswa: *(teasing Pumla)* We'll have to hire ourselves to mourn...because no-one will come!

Pumla: Wena! I will make sure to outlive you!

Andiswa: Vegetarians live longer than meat-eating dinosaurs. Just saying!

Karabo tries to take the sting out of what Andiswa has just said.

Karabo: I'm okay with three-score-and-fifteen. As a meat-eating dinosaur...

Pumla: Oh, and I don't want to be buried.

Andiswa: Okay, we'll donate you to the Museum for Diabetes 2.

Pumla: *(ignoring her)* I want to be cremated.

Brenda: Cremated?

Pumla: I don't want worms feeding on me.

Andiswa: That's very thoughtful...for the worms.

Karabo: You want to practice for the big fire?

Pumla: And I want my ashes strewn in my vegetable garden.

Karabo: Why?

Pumla: I want to rest in peace close to my home, not with a whole bunch of strangers in a cemetery. Where every week they dump more and more strangers next to you. *(to Karabo)* And that way, I can keep an eye on you!

Brenda: Oooooooh!

Pumla: *(to Brenda)* And you! If you're still staying here! I'll make sure you're doing something with your life!

General laughter and improvised chatter/teasing.

Karabo: Oh by the way...natural causes wanted to know if they can do an EFT for the balance.

Andiswa: Absolutely not! We're a cash business. We don't want SARS to know about us. I'm not paying for anyone's firepool! Or to fly anyone's family around the country!

Pumla: *(to Brenda)* We do our own taxes...that's our percentage to the school-feeding kitty.

Karabo: Anything we need to reflect on from today?

Pumla: No...all good.

Andiswa: Oh...*(to Pumla)* what were you doing interrupting Brenda during her poem?

Pumla: I was trying to make it more inclusive.

Andiswa: That's how it was written.

Pumla: By a man!

Brenda: It was four-hundred-and-fifty years ago!

Pumla: We were at the funeral of a woman...

Karabo: *(trying to break the tension)* Who was 450 years old!

Andiswa: You can't just change things to suit you

Karabo: Especially not while it's being performed!

Andiswa: That was very undignified. I'm surprised they haven't asked for a discount!

Pumla: I asked Brenda to change it during rehearsal.

Karabo: *(taking responsibility)* I said she shouldn't. It's a poem. A work of art.

Pumla: It uses sexist language.

Karabo: If you don't like Mona Lisa's smile, are you going to change it?

Pumla: That's different. It's apples and pears.

Karabo: So if I wrote a poem, and you didn't like some of the language, would you just change it?

Pumla: No, I'll ask you to change it. I can't ask John...because he's...done!
(*She snorts*)

Andiswa: Well, whatever, I just don't think you should do that again, Pumla.

Pumla makes an exasperated noise.

Andiswa: It's not professional! (*Beat*) You handled it very well, Brenda.

Brenda: Thank you.

Andiswa: You earned yourself an extra bit of cash. (*as she exits*) See you guys tomorrow!

Karabo: Glad you could change the show house times...

Andiswa exits.

Pumla: Guys...? Are we guys now?

Lights go down on the scene, Brenda steps forward to talks to the audience.

Brenda: No, it wasn't so bad. In fact, it was quite good. I was making some money. Not in a way I'd ever thought possible, but it always felt like this was just the beginning. I was learning a lot about food, exercise, business, managing different personalities....

Scene 11

This scene takes place at Pumla's home. She is on the phone, not in a good mood. She has a utility bill in hand.

Karabo enters with her iPad.

Karabo: Still waiting?

Pumla: I'm number eleven now...

Karabo takes up her seat at a table.

Karabo: The Arts Council is supposed to be government's way of helping us. If I get rejected this time, I promise you, I'm going to bomb parliament.

Pumla: Hello, yes? (*sighs*) You are number seven in the queue...

Karabo: There are 12 pages of application form...twelve!

Pumla: I've been on hold for fifteen minutes. I'm going to run out of airtime!

Karabo: (*reads*) Yoh! They don't fund individuals applying for publishing!

Pumla: Hello? (*to Karabo, with a big smile*) Hey, I am number one! Me and Jacob! Numba Wun!

Karabo: The NAC wants bank statements...(shakes her head)

Pumla: Yes, hello Phumzile...finally! My name is Pumla Njalo and my account number is (*looking at the bill*) 426793...

Karabo: And financial statements...?

Pumla: No...793. Not 783...that's the number of charges against Jacob.

Karabo: Tax clearance certificate...that's what Jacob does...clear out our tax!

Pumla: I'm calling about my water bill. It's R1327. I live in Khayelitsha, not Constantia.

Karabo: Why financial statements? I'm not a company!

Pumla: What do you mean it's the number of units I used in the last month? I used the same water as every other month! And this bill is four times the amount of the other bills!

Karabo: "How many people will benefit? White. Coloured. Indian. Black. Is Disability a race now?"

Pumla: Phumzile, I know there's a drought but that's not my problem. You can't charge me....

Karabo: They ask for your race, but then they say they don't fund running costs...(snorts).

Karabo listens to Pumla, who gets increasingly excited.

Pumla: Sisi, I know you're just doing your job, but I want you to send someone here to come and have a look again at the water meter. (*Beat*) Maybe they made a mistake. (*Beat*) No, no, no...people are not stealing water. It's not like electricity. (*Beat*) I'm sure all these rich people with big gardens are not paying this much for water. And all those golf

courses! But you always take it out on us...ordinary people who are just trying to make ends meet. *(Beat)* I am NOT paying this bill! Absolutely not! *(Beat)* You'll what? *(Beat)* You cut off my water, and I promise, I'll burn down the municipal offices in Khayelitsha. I don't care, I'll burn...it...down! *(turns off the phone)*

Karabo: They're all the same, ne? DA...ANC. Government...they don't give a damn about us.

Lights fade.

Scene 12

Brenda talks to the audience. Andiswa and Karabo hum a mournful tune in the Background, without being visible to the audience.

Brenda: Nothing prepares you for it. Even going to lots and lots of funerals. Not for when it happens to you. *(Beat)* Ma Pumla died of a heart attack that night. Was it decades of bad eating and drinking? Was it her pent up anger and stress? Could we blame the City Council? Everyone tried to make sense of it. But it doesn't matter. Ma Pumla is no more

Scene 13

Pumla's memorial service. Karabo is the Programme Director. Pumla is on a raised platform behind Karabo - she is lit up when appropriate. The other characters are not aware of her, but she can see and comment on what they are doing. When Karabo starts to speak, light comes up on Pumla.

Karabo: We have decided that in honour of our dear friend, Pumla, this will be the last time we do this. It simply won't be the same without her.

Pumla: Yoh!

Karabo: We want to thank you all for coming. Your presence here shows just what an impact this incredible woman had in our community.

Pumla: Madiba...come look. I know it's not as big as yours...*(looks to the left, as if listening to Madiba, then repeats what he says and bursts out laughing)*...but bigger than Trump's inauguration. Ai, Madiba...still has that humour!

Karabo: I'd like to read a poem which I wrote especially for Pumla.

Pumla: Good! I didn't like John Donne.

Karabo: When all is said and we are done

It will be known you were the one
Who changed our worlds, who made us be
What those who shaped us, would not see

Poor in grace, perhaps lacking charm
And yet we knew, you meant no harm
You only wanted what was good
You salt of the earth, you manna food

Go with love, and rest in peace
Your life's work done, cut by disease
And still we know, you'll be beside us
Walking, talking, making a fuss

Go with love, and rest in peace
With you beside us, we'll walk with ease.

Thank you.

Pumla wipes away some tears. Lights fade on her.

Karabo: And now, I'd like to call on Andiswa and Brenda to render an item.

Brenda and Andiswa step forward to do a duet, Amazing Grace, together.

With the director, the actors work out which lines/verses to do as solos, which to do as duets. As for the characters, it may be fitting that Brenda does the first verse (Andiswa hums); Andiswa does the second verse and they both do the third.

Brenda/: Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
Andiswa That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home

And grace will lead me home.

Lights fade

Scene 14

This is the closing scene. At the centre of it, is Brenda, starting where and as she started at the beginning of the play, talking to the audience in her gym instructress gear. Karabo, Andiswa and Pumla all assume a position in a different part of the stage, with a spotlight shining on them when their story is told/concluded.

Spotlight on Karabo, in a smart dress. She is speaking at her book launch.

Karabo: I've attended many courses and workshops on creative writing. And they all seemed to have the same mantra...start by writing what you know about. It's taken me a while to actually put that into practice, but it gives me great pleasure to stand here tonight at the launch of my first book, *The Substitutes*. It's what some in the trade call "Faction"...no, it's not about the ruling party...*(laughs)*...it's creative writing based on facts. And I owe this to two people in the room tonight – my good friend Andiswa Mponya who I know from high school, and my very special niece, Brenda Mbongo. And to someone who is no longer with us, but who, I'm sure, is very much in the room, an incredible woman...Pumla Njalo.

Lights fade on Karabo and come up on Pumla, with a broad smile on her face, waving like the Queen of England, acknowledging the crowd, regally.

Lights fade on Pumla and come up on Brenda, who is completing a gym routine similar to the one she did at the beginning, to a Brenda Fassie song.

Brenda: 5, 6, 7, 8...!

Looking good, all of you!

Spotlight comes up on Andiswa, and another light remains on Brenda.

Brenda: Andiswa didn't get to marry her white knight in a Mercedes Benz, but she is engaged to Ricky September from Athlone. They met when he popped in at a show house for black people. Some would say it was accidental, but others of us know better.

Lights come up on Pumla, with her hands on her hips, and a broad smile, pulling out her tongue in the direction of Andiswa. As lights on Pumla fade.

Brenda: Andiswa is so in love...she's even started to eat fish.

Andiswa: *(her scrunched up face belying her words)* Yes, no, this snoek is very nice...very nice.

Lights fade on Andiswa and stay on Brenda.

Brenda: As for me, I now run my own exercise and nutrition centre in Khayelitsha. There's a huge demand; people *want* to be more healthy. Some of the mothers in the school have taken over the feeding scheme.

We have weekly fresh veg stokvels, daily walking groups and feeding schemes in eleven schools. Without any government help. These women are just doing it. And we're trying to keep "professional mourners" out of business.

Things are looking up, and we know it's because there's someone up there, looking out for us.

Lights fade on Brenda and come up on Pumla in a track suit.

Pumla: (*clapping her hands in time*) 5, 6, 7, 8!
Come on Angels, move...those...wings!
Khayelitsha needs you!

As lights fade to black.

5...6...7....