

## PEPSI

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After school Zara ran into her parents' room to tell her mother about her day but stopped abruptly when she saw the hard shell suitcases, semi-packed, on the bed. With a sigh, she dropped her battered backpack, with its ballpoint doodles and half torn stickers to the floor and sat on the edge of the bed. Her mother was in the bathroom. She heard the toilet flush and the sound of running water. When her mother opened the bathroom door, she saw her daughter, and immediately arranged her face into a pleasing smile. Zara's mother was pretty, more well kept than anything else and always, or so it seemed to the little girl, wore a distracted smile.

"Where and how long," Zara asked in a resigned tone well beyond her ten years.

"Very nearby," her mother replied. "Almost next door. Mombasa." Her mother kissed the top of the girl's dark head and told her to scoot over, which she did.

"Is it a conference?" She asked. Her mother nodded. "You didn't say how long for," Zara added.

"Barely a minute."

Her mother always gave her vague responses that were extreme in their understatement. She talked, the girl thought, like people in black and white British movies. This had begun to anger her ever since she had turned ten a month before.

"What the hell does that mean?" Zara said violently.

Her mother turned to her, startled but still smiling. The girl had never spoken like this before. She forgot to reprimand her.

"Well, just five days."

"Five days!" Zara shouted. "You are going to leave me alone for five days?"

"Not alone, *shona*, with Ato Rosa and the cook and" she stopped when she saw her daughter's face. She could not bear it when she cried. Out of habit she reached for the bell to ask the housemaid to summon Ato Rosa, their elderly gardener, to calm the girl down but stopped just in time.

"Don't call me that," Zara said, sniffing.

"What?" her mother asked uncertainly. "Shona? Why? I've called