

I CONSIDER THIS ONE OF THE GREATEST  
ACHIEVEMENTS IN MY LIFE  
-ASSISTANT OF GUY WHO INVENTED PDF

# CHANDLER AND FRASIER: WITH LOVE FROM CHINA



CHANDLER AND FRASIER VOL 3  
BY ERNEST BAZANYE

For Buxie, Yolanda, Josey, "Ironhide" and Musa.

Chandler Wakake Bazanye and his elder brother Frasier Kacuncu Bazanye were students of a boarding school on the edge of the Great Lake Nalubaale. At this school they had most of their teenage needs met satisfactorily. Education, exercise, sabulenyanya and bushera for example. Other needs however begin to emerge as one becomes a teenager, and these cannot be catered to at a boys boarding school like Montego Bay SSS, so the boys were glad to be on school holidays, as this story begins. In their father's car, en route to Kampala, a city which was more gender inclusive than Montego Bay.

The air in the car that carried the boys home from school at the end of term was usually tense. For many reasons. For starters, their father hated having been talked into driving all the way to the lake and having to hunt up and down the shore for the boys who should have been waiting at the gate and then finally finding them standing by a wok of greasy sabulenyanya.

He hated the fact that it wasn't even real sabulenyanya which, if you are reading this from a desert area, or a semi-arid savannah far from the Great Nalubaale, was deep fried Nile Perch encased in flour. That is what real sabulenyanya is. What this was, however, bobbed suspiciously in the pan. It bobbed like fish intestines, fish eyes, bits of fish brain, even a leech or two.

Chandler had grinned. “Hey, Dad’s here! Hi Dad. We are having sabulunya. Want some?” He hated that.

He hated the fact that even after forcing them to wash their hands, the car still smelt of fish, even though he still couldn’t remember seeing any actual fish in that pan.

The boys also took umbrage at the fact that their dad did not hide his annoyance. “We have been led to believe that our parents should miss us while we are at boarding school and should be happy to finally have us back in the familial embrace! I know I don’t speak for myself alone when I say I am very disappointed in your attitude, dad!” chided Frasier.

“And who led you to believe this? Who?” challenged his father who, even though he was facing out of the windscreen, was still frowning at the youths behind him.

“TV!” replied Chandler. “In all the sitcoms. When the kids are back from school the parents are always soooo happy.”

“Well, if you were adorable little Americans with freckles and a team of scriptwriters who made sure that you spoke in sweet catchphrases things all the time, I might respond differently, but alas, you on the left: you are a criminal mastermind and you, on the right, are a confidence trickster. What I am transporting back to the city with me is a cargo of grief and consternation. No reason to be happy.”

“I can’t believe you just said that!” complained Chandler. “And not even under your breath or anything. You just said it out loud!”

“I, for one, am traumatized. Right now, I am traumatized. I can feel it. It’s like a ticklish sensation in my brain,” Frasier cosigned.

“Spare me the act please,” their father wasn’t buying it. “Pretending to be outraged and hurt. You both know that even before the holidays were announced you were planning some mischief. Some way to wreck havoc on my peace of mind, my reputation and my family name.”

The two boys gasped and grasped at their chests as if they were appalled that anyone could accuse them of something that was so, well, true. Because though they didn’t consider it an evil act, they had indeed started planning for the holidays long before they started. The goal: Girls.

Frasier had been in touch with what he referred to in a posh voice as his “friends in high places”, which Chandler was not fooled into believing did not simply mean friends in day schools in the city. These people were able to give details and tips on how teenage courting would be best done come holiday time. A lot of discussions were carried out in the broken English that school youth of those days use when they are communicating to each other by mobile phone.

“So wr d the baibz b @?”

“Wr u syn?”

“D baybez wr do de b found dring holde tym man.”

“cnt undrstnd wht u r syn. Pt in lyk 1 or 2 mre vwelz.”

“I sd we wnt 2 kno whr we fnd chcks durn te holdyz!”

“I swr meyb w jst ryt in nrml English?”

A lot of mobile phone megabytes were wasted but finally a plan was hatched. Well, the plan was conceived over Whatsapp, but would be incubated and hatched in the city. So far all the boys had was a phone number and the name of a friend of a friend of a friend whose name was Koons.

At the end of a long journey filled with threats and recrimination and suggestions of what should be shoved up what part of who, the grey Corolla rolled up the driveway of a pleasant white mansionette in Muyenga and out of it tumbled three men in identical moods of fury. At the door of the house was a woman with her hand on her hip and her own brow developing its own frown.

“What is this?” the woman asked, waving her free hand at the car and its contents.

“This? Your offspring,” replied Chandler and Frasier’s father.

“What is it doing here?” the woman said, her frown having fully developed and settled incontrovertibly onto her face. The other hand landed on the other hip.

“Solome, what kind of mother are you who asks what her own children are doing at her doorstep?” he accused.

“The kind who had them last holiday. It’s your turn to keep them. You boys don’t even think of getting into my house. Turn round and go back into your dad’s car. You are going to spend the holidays in Kireka. I don’t need you here disrupting my precious peace of mind. I do yoga these days.”

Their father knew full well that it was his turn to keep the boys and the original plan had actually been for him to take them to his own house, but during that trip he had been so brutally reminded of what calibre of headache they are capable of inducing that he had to make one last-ditch effort to, well, to ditch them.

“Come on, Solome, I’ll owe you a favour.”

“What kind of father are you who tries to abandon his own children?”

“The kind of father whose children are these ones. Look. I’ll come for them tomorrow. Let me just have one last night of peace and quiet and then I’ll come for them tomorrow, I

promise. I am begging you.” He clasped hands together to make his begging seem more genuine.

“No way. I told you, I do yoga these days.”

“What’s that got to do with it?” asked Chandler who had been following the conversation from next to the car and lacked the sense to know that he should stay out of it. His mother took off her slipper and flung it at him. It narrowly missed his cheek.

His father, however, had picked up on the line of inquiry. “What has doing yoga got to do with it?” he asked.

“Yoga isn’t cheap, but it has given me peace of mind--expensive peace of mind. This serenity has cost me a lot of money, and I don’t want to waste it.”

He turned round. “Mwe, you boys. Do you promise not to disturb your mother’s expensive peace of mind tonight so she can let you stay here in her house where the Playstation is?”

Solome’s face conjured up a withering look and beamed it at their father. “Baz, you are the one who first observed that I am the mother of these creatures here. You think I can hold that office and not have the benefit of experience that comes from it? They can promise whatever they want, but I’m not going to believe them. Take them back with you to Kireka.”

“Mum, if we have to go to dad’s, can we take the Playstation?” asked Chandler, who really doesn’t learn. The second slipper whizzed past.

“Mum, Mummy, Mother dearest,” Frasier took his turn to speak. He had been waiting for her to run out of slippers before he opened his mouth, “O Matriarch, the Original Saint, every man’s first love, may I speak? I think the handover of the Playstation would be the first step to compromise, which is the best way of solving conflict...”

Solome sighed and looked at this son of hers. Then at the other one. Then she sighed again. “Boys, you know I love you. You are my sons and I love you very very much.”

They smiled. Even Chandler whose cheeks were still trembling from near misses.

“But get out of my compound! Baz, remove these bu-animals immediately!”

He had tried his best. He bundled the two back into the car and rolled backwards out of Muyenga.

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Now, a wise person once said this: you don't have to know how to do everything to get everything done. You just have to know who knows how to get what you want done and how to get him to do it. Koons was, in this case, the person who knew how to get done what the boys wanted done.

They had not met before and so there was an initial suspicion to overcome at their first encounter. "Your name is what? Chandler? What kind of name is that?" Koons asked.

Chandler patiently explained that he was named after his father's favourite character in a television sitcom.

Then, not satisfied, but apparently having lost interest in the query line, Koons turned to his brother. "And you? Nti you're Frasier? What kind of name is Frasier?"

Whatever Frasier means, it cannot mean "Patience" because Frasier scowled back, "What kind of name is Koons?"

Koons tried to explain that he was Robert Kusansala, and that the truncation was a way of making his name cooler. Frasier gave him a look meant to indicate that he didn't think the procedure worked and Koons decided that if he was to like either one of the two, he would have to like Chandler, so he did.

"So," he said, turning to Chandler and even smiling, "I'm told you wanna know where the chickadees be at. I'm your

man. I can hook you all up with alladat. Cos I roll wit the laydeez like dat. Playa style.”

Koons was a fan of the rapper Fifty Cent.

“Where would this be? I would really like to know,” replied Chandler, who, as you can see, preferred rock. Rock fans talk normally.

“You guys have the money?” asked Koons. And the boys gasped. It’s a difficult emotion to read, this one. Is it moral indignation or is it hurt pride? Fortunately, Koons dived in to sort it out quickly enough. “No, you dwanzies. I’m not a pimp. I mean, do you have the money to register for language classes? That’s where the babes be at.”

It’s something they teach you at places like that Harvard Business School about which you have heard so much, that one of the techniques of selling is this: First overprice your product. Then cut the price drastically to something which still has a high cost and a huge markup but is substantially lower than the previous figure. If you do this people will think they are getting a bargain and buy it.

Chandler and Frasier were so relieved to learn that they were not being asked to purchase escorts that they did not stop to consider the fact that even though it was school holidays they were still being asked to pay for classes.

So they asked, because one has to really, what language?

“Chinese, of course,” Koons replied. Then he even did the “psssh” sound people do when they think they have said something obvious.

Apparently there were some in Uganda’s business community who, recognising the looming growth of China in the world’s economy, could foresee a time not far away when having children proficient in a Chinese language would put them at a great advantage over their competitors who would be floundering to make orders and haggle prices in Luganda instead of Mandarin.

The result of this was that there was a group of young sons and, especially, daughters of rich people who would go to a hotel conference room three times a week to learn the language.

Rich daughters, it is widely believed, are hot.

And with that the deal was sealed.

But there was another deal that also needed sealing and fortune was smiling on the boys. Because it was sealed with far greater ease than they had imagined.

“Dad-to-the-dee! Let's conversate a bit,” Frasier grinned in that way that his father, not to mention his teachers, his pastor, and all the policemen who patrol the neighbourhoods in which

he resides, had come to view with instinctive suspicion. Without even thinking of it, his father scanned the room for quick exits and objects that could be used as weapons against him.

“What I have here for you, Dadsadelic,” he said, pointing at his forehead, “Is a proposition. Wait! Before you say anything, remember, it is your duty, your sworn duty to make sure your own kids have the best start in life that you can possibly provide.”

“How much do you want?” the natural question was popped.

The answer was given.

The man clutched at his chest and rolled his eyes and gasped loudly. Then, because this was one of those times when gasping doesn't convey the distress within the soul in question, he actually said the word: “Gasp!”

“How much? No. Don't repeat it. Never say that number in my presence ever again.”

“Don't you want to know what it's for?” Frasier was upset that his carefully-practiced presentation was being derailed.

“From that amount, I assume you want to buy a Ferrari each,” he said.

“Hah hah. Dad, sometimes you are funny. You should write humour columns for the newspapers or something,” Chandler said. “Dad, it's for holiday classes. We want to enroll in some language training.”

The paternal eyes stopped rolling and it was his turn to say, “Hah hah! You are funny. You should write humour columns for the newspapers or something. You expect me to believe that you actually want to use the money you expect me to give you to attend class. In holidays?”

Frasier tut-tutted. “The man seems to think his children's education is some sort of a joke. Chan, the brochure please.”

And Chandler handed over a small, colourful brochure that was not that crumpled up.

“Learn Chinese Language! For Children!” it said. The bold letters made up for the brochure's lack of an actual voice, and enabled it to yell in your face nevertheless.

“Mandarin. The language of international business of the future!” it said. It had stopped shouting, but the exclamation marks kept the tone and posture of the aggressive taxi tout grabbing at your shirt.

The man holding the little wrinkled piece of glossy paper in his hand was about to say something about how the spelling

showed that English was evidently a language of the past according to the brochure's writer, when he noticed something.

“Classes Three Days a Week From Five To Seven Pm.”

“Chandler, go fetch me my bag. My wallet is in it,” he said.

Frasier had the sense not to question the source or reason when good luck suddenly thrust itself so abruptly at him, but Chandler did not. Chandler did not have the sense in many situations. He asked, “That was easy. What made you suddenly change your min-- ouch!” the last word courtesy of a surreptitious but nevertheless sharp kick from his brother.

Their father did not mind explaining. “If that's what it takes to get you out of here at least three days a week, to ensure that when I come home I have some time to relax in silence, then go learn Chinese. Go learn Russian. Go learn ancient Egyptian even. Just go.”

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When Chandler and Frasier entered the conference room of the suburb hotel in which the classes were being held, they walked in to feel many and various things.

For starters, in front of the class, which consisted of no more than six, was a very black man. Now, I don't mean very black in the sense that his complexion was dark, I mean very

black in the sense that he was not Chinese. At all. This doesn't engender as much confidence as an alternative would have.

Of course there is no rule that says Africans cannot teach non-African languages to teenagers in suburb hotels, but sometimes you end up a bit worried. Chandler and Frasier had both done all their schooling so far in Uganda. They had a nursery school teacher who spoke of “Cara Boloo” when describing the sky. They had primary school geography teachers who taught them about a place they insisted was called “Boshtony Mashoostes” and they currently shared a biology teacher who spoke confidently of single-celled animals called “omaba” and “plamisham”.

For the sake of those of you who need a push, they mean “amoeba” and “paramecium”.

This concern bothered Chandler more, perhaps, because he voiced it first. “Dude, we are going to learn to speak Chinese in a Soroti accent?”

His brother had picked up on the issue, but was the wiser.

He could have asked why so few eyebrows are raised about the fact that they all speak English in their African accents, or that if Chinese speak English it is in *their* native accents, or he could even have pointed out the curious phenomenon whereby Chinese people in Uganda who learn local languages, oftentimes speak them with flawless local

accents, but still speak English with their Chinese accent. There was so much to unpack and throw into the pot, but Frasier went with this:

“Since when did the ethnicity of your teachers bother you? Focus man. Focus on the main issue.”

“You are right. We need to remember what we are here for.”

And so they scanned the room. And that is when their hearts sank.

As you have been told, there were six people in the class upon the boys’ arrival. Only two of them were female.

Even Chandler could see that this was very bad mathematics indeed.

These two girls, let me tell you about the two girls in the class.

One of them, who we were later to learn was Pauline, was five foot seven inches tall.

Now, don't get me wrong here. I am not trying to insinuate that there is something wrong with girls being tall. In fact, over the year and a half it has taken me to get this book out of the mossy cave in my brain where ideas are formed and bring it all the way through the ninja processes and tactical protocols and finally lay it before you, I, your author, have had massive

gobsmacking, infatuations with not one, not two, but three women taller than me. Okay, let us not count the singer and actress Mariam Ndagire – two women taller than me. One wasn't interested. The other, well, how many stories do you expect me to tell you today? Let's do the Chandler and Frasier story first, then for the rest, I'll write you a Mills&Boon.

The point is, mature and sophisticated and secure men such as myself are not deterred by the fact that they may need a stepladder to gaze into their lover's eyes. They don't mind that to blow their girl a kiss they may have to aim upward. Us real men don't mind.

Teenage boys, however, especially Frasier and Chandler, will not have it. The female of the species, to them, is smaller. Anything that exceeds each boy's own height is null. Its sexuality is automatically voided.

For that reason, Pauline was saved from the terrible fate that awaited Charmaine, upon whom their eyes both alit.

Charmaine was shorter than both Chandler and Frasier, but the mathematics were still not good, because the answer to this problem was one over six. Or six to one if you prefer. There were four boys in the class already. Then add Chandler and Frasier. That makes six boys.

Six boys. Assume that all of them were here to meet chicks. Subtract the ones who are tall enough to confidently

make a move on Pauline (which was nil) and you are back to six to one.

Not good odds.

Usually, the Sons of Solome are not easily deterred by such: fight between themselves they do, but they have always had each others' backs. Tell Chandler he is facing six odds against his one and Frasier will leap in to remind you that it's six to two.

They looked at one another and then looked at Charmaine and then looked at one another again.

Yes. In one look brothers can astutely communicate to one another that they can expect to not only be abandoned but betrayed and even wounded by their own kin in this particular fight.

So the boys sat down and spent the next two hours completely failing to grasp the basics of Chinese vocabulary because they were caught in their individual reveries about Charmaine.

Finally Mr Ejakait declared class was over and that the students were released. He urged them all to practice as much as they could because practice was the best way to learn a language. He suggested that they exchange phone numbers so that they can call each other and speak Chinese to one another.

This was the first part of the whole lesson Chandler and Frasier had heard. Frasier immediately engaged himself in the fray.

Stage one. Remove the competition. Frasier yelped suddenly. “Dude, is that... No, it can't be. Is that WWE Superstar Rey Mysterio Jr walking around outside the window?” He pointed frantically.

Chandler dashed straight to the window to see because Chandler is the sort of person who does that sort of thing. There is no cure for the condition.

This left Frasier with plenty of time to lick his fingers, run then over his eyebrows and then saunter up to Charmaine.

The boy thinks he was emulating Barney Stinson, but was more Eh Banange, as he did what he considered sauntering. While his brother leaned out of the window to see where Rey could have disappeared to, Frasier wriggled his left eyebrow, lowered his voice a few notes and said, “So, you're Charmaine. Nice to meet you.”

Charmaine had been clearing up her notebook and somehow making it seem like a task involving many aspects, even though when you think of it, all she was doing was putting one notebook into one bag.

She looked up at Frasier (who appreciated the looking “up” part).

Charmaine had large open eyes. In some cultures large eyes are considered a sign of beauty. These certainly were in Frasier's individual culture. But there is more to such eyes.

Do you ever notice how a completely empty room seems larger than a room of the exact same dimensions that is furnished? This is the source of the common complaint: “This place seemed a lot larger when before I moved in. Now it's so crowded and stuffy.” That's because vacancy strengthens the impression of space.

And Charmaine's eyes sent the clear message that her house wasn't full of furniture.

“Hi. My name is Frasier,” he said, trying to make his voice deep like the guys in the Spanish Telenovelas.

“You are a Fresher?” she asked. She had a sharp squeally voice: the sort of voice that rarely says, “You don't have to explain at length, I got you the first time.” Frasier didn't pick up on this and continued kicking what he thought was game.

“No, no, no. Hah hah. No, Frasier. Frasier is my name.”

“Your name is being a Fresher,” Charmaine blinked.

“No, Frasier. After the hilarious sitcom character from the nineties. Frasier.”

“Which university are you?” she asked.

Frasier toyed with the idea of affecting the air of maturity and sophistication which he imagined (so wrongly) that university students had, but changed his mind very quickly when Charmaine confessed, “Me for me am in senior two.”

“I’m not a fresher in any university. My name is Frasier. Frasier.” But at some point you realize the hill you are climbing is sinking and your steps are not taking you any higher. So you change tack. “So,” he said, “Your name is Charmaine? That’s a nice name.”

“Yes. It is my name but I am not a chairman.”

Frasier at first did not realize that this was a joke because it was a really really bad one. All he noted was that she had finally achieved the distinction between name and things like job, vocation or educational status. He was relieved. Sure that they had finally unraveled that knot, he prepared to say something else that he would later think was a masterstroke of wit and charm when Charmaine said, “So, what course are you offering in university?”

This was when Frasier made two decisions. The first was that he would probably apply for a course in the study of psychology and the second was that it was time to call it quits.

“Would you like to meet my brother? Chandler! Chandler, first come and meet Charmaine.”

Chandler did not have the same approach to seduction that Frasier did. Chandler did not think of Telenovelas. He walked straight up to Charmaine and said, “Eh, but you girl what’s up? You look nice. I like your figure. Let’s go to the mall.”

Charmaine blinked the lids of the abyss and finally finished putting her notebook into her bag, took Chandler's offered hand and they walked out.

Frasier looked on. He was struck by that strange feeling approaching vertigo that he got whenever something like this happened.

Chandler turned round at the door and flashed him a thumbs up.

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I hope I have not given you the impression that this is not a happy family. Just because neither parent wanted to keep the kids this holiday and just because the parents lived apart

doesn't mean that the kids were not loved by their father and mother.

They were. Deeply loved. Neither parent wanted to take on the head-splitting inconvenience of hosting Chandler and Frasier for the holidays, but it wasn't because their parents didn't love them—it was because their parents were scared of them.

At times though, the familial affection manages to shine through. Such a time was this evening when Frasier had ambled home sadly alone and sat on the sofa to stare at the TV screen. His father arrived and, grinning with the smell of a few shots of good whiskey, plopped next to him on the sofa, stretched his arm around the back of this sofa and let his hand rest on his son's shoulder. He smiled, "My cub, how was the Chinese? Are you fluent yet? Can you argue a court case in Shanghai, write a speech for a political campaign in Beijing, broker peace with the Taiwanese? Or are you still on the basics, that is, dirty words?"

When he saw the look of sadness on his son's face, however, his own face fell. He was concerned to see such sorrow. "Why so morose, Frasier? What is wrong?"

"Dad, the world, it is full of woes and troubles," replied the son.

The father was expressing his love for his son, but not his patience. "Get to the point," he said.

"I fell in love today, dad. Well, that's kind of overstating it. I didn't even like her. She was dumb as an empty bottle of bricks. Meaning that not only was the bottle not doing its job of containing bricks, being empty, but you have to ask yourself why on earth it should? Why should a bottle go around storing bricks? I hope I have underscored just how dumb this girl was, dad."

"You have made it clear, yes. Proceed," urged the father.

"Well, she was hot. Her name was Charmaine and, and there is no such thing as a girl named Charmaine who is not really hot."

"Is that your generation's version of Kentaro, Karungi and Angom? I have never met a woman with those names who was not scorching hot. Ayayaya..."

Frasier looked at the man who had all the options and chose to name him something that he couldn't even use to get past the introductory phase of chatting up a girl, then just sighed. It wasn't worth it.

"Ah. I see what the problem is. Ah. It's times like these that truly try a young man's heart. Love. Loss. Pain. Confusion. What is the reason? Why? How? Many questions. It's a very

difficult time to go through for adolescents, I know, and I want you to know that I understand and that I am here for you whatever you are going through. Now, here's what we are going to do..."

Frasier looked up at his father, eyes beginning to glimmer with hope.

"Turn the channel to a sitcom. In this house we don't watch videos by rappers named Lil Anything." And the man rose to head to the kitchen to get one more glass of whiskey.

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The next evening Frasier sat slouched in his chair as Mr Ejakait droned on ahead of the class about conjugation and root verbs or whatever the hell they do in such classes. One of the reasons these books are free is that I didn't spend any money on research, so forgive me if I didn't remember the exact terminology of linguistics as an academic discipline. Frasier had tried staring out of the window of the conference room, but unfortunately, the architect who designed the hotel knew what he was doing. The entertaining views were kept for the restaurant and the rooms for paying guests. The conference rooms, he figured, were places where people would not, or at least should not, be looking outside windows, and therefore he placed them in the middle of the most boring part of the hotel's

acreage. There was nothing to see outside but, literally, grass growing. Occasionally a marabou stork would swoop down, but everyone knows that you do not willingly look at marabou storks. They are the only creatures on earth which look more disgusting than their own feces.

So Frasier turned his attention to the interior of the class. Because it was now a class like the ones at school, he began to fall back into the patterns of behaviour he was accustomed to adopting during class. He looked at everything except the teacher. He studied the other students. In the front, observing the teacher keenly and taking notes and even occasionally mouthing the words to try and get a firmer grip on the proper way to say them, were the twins. They were the type of people who actually get excited about the opportunity to gain new knowledge and skills, not because they expect to get a reward, or because they want approval of their peers or authority figures, or because they are afraid of getting punished, but purely and simply because it really gives them a rush. You know such people? They just get pleasure from learning things—and the more difficult and obscure the better. Some people call them geeks. The proper term is “intelligent” and I am one of them, and in the end, we end up ruling the world so take your nuggu. Frasier was, like you haters, unable to appreciate the natures and the hungers of the curious human mind, so he sneered at the twins and moved on to the next student.

The next student, Mark, was looking at Mr Ejakait with a look that is more closely related to stomach discomfort than the study of foreign languages. His eyes were squinted as if he was really trying hard to see something that was not coming into focus. His mouth was hanging open the way mouths hang open when the head behind them is preparing to instruct them to blubber. The poor boy was leaning forward and clutching at the edges of the desk as if he was afraid he would fall off. There was a pain that he was feeling because he could not understand what the man was saying.

Fourth on the list was a fellow who had introduced himself to the class as Andrew who clearly wasn't having any more progress in learning Chinese than Mark, but he wasn't going to let this bother him. He had his mobile phone under the table and from the movement of his fingers it was easy to tell that he was hard at play. At times he would frown and stab hard at a button with his thumb. It was a shooting game and he was clearly trying to kill someone.

Finally, there was Chandler and Charmaine. Frasier could barely stop himself from sneering loudly when he looked at them and saw that they were passing notes at each other and giggling. There really isn't a good reason for him to have felt that way, but he wanted to put Chandler into Andrew's phone game. He was in the process of visualizing this, when he heard a light, whisper.

“Pssst.”

He looked around.

“Hey,” she said. “Frasier, right?”

Because they were not really supposed to be talking, Frasier affirmed this without words.

“Pauline,” she whispered. Again, without words, Frasier indicated receipt of this info.

“Hey, I notice that you have two pencils...”

He wasn't a prolifically literate young man, but he had put a pencil in his trousers the day before when he first came to these classes and then, forgetting that they were the same trousers he was wearing again, he had placed another pencil in them that evening, so he did in fact have two.

Pauline wiggled the rollerball pen she had in the air. “Out of ink,” she whispered. “Would you be so kind?”

Again, he hadn't said a word. He just passed one pencil over the table to her. She smiled when she took it and mouthed the words “Thank You”.

Now, there is something you need to know about teenage boys. They defy all logic and sense. They are completely unpredictable. You have no idea what it is going to take to set them off. Just 24 hours before this Pauline was not even

accorded a second look but right then, she just smiled, a dimple winked, and when she said "Thank you" the shape of her mouth did a little dance, and then she leaned back over her books and her eyelashes exhibited themselves as being lush and in the instant that followed Frasier was head over heels in smite. He spent the rest of the class the same way he had spent the previous class. Only this time, instead of daydreaming about that movie with Tom Cruise and Angeline Jolie now starring him and Charmaine, he recast Jolie's part to feature Pauline. As the class drew to a close and Mr Ejakait was reminding the students to practice what they had learnt by having conversations with one another in the language, urging them to call each other up for this exercise, Frasier's daydreams had expanded in elaborateness to the point where he was now planning names for the kids. He rather liked the idea of a son named after himself, but then, given the strife the name Frasier had brought him since he learnt to introduce himself in speech, he had to wonder if it was humane to make another person live through it. Why bequeath such pain upon your innocent children? Why? He broke off from the daydream to wallow in self-pity for a while. "Flesh" and "Foolisher" were only two of the silly schoolyard nicknames he had had to endure before he discovered that there were protocols to follow to prevent this sort of thing from becoming a plague. Fighting and acting like it didn't bother you were two. Just saying your name was Frank

was a third. He should call the boy Frank, he thought, coming back full circle.

The class was ending. The twins were quivering in excitement and were nattering to each other in the Chinese they had learnt in the past two days. And then laughing. Frasier sneered. There was no way those geeks had learnt enough Chinese to crack jokes. This just consolidated his view of them. Mark's expression had changed to one of relief. The mouth was finally able to close. Andrew was angry. He had not yet finished his game. Frasier did not turn to look at Charmaine and Chandler because he had higher priorities. Pauline stood next to him with the pencil in her hand.

The hippocampus or the medulla or both, perhaps, flexed themselves in Frasier's skull and ejected any objection they found to the fact that she was a clear foot above him. She offered him the pencil. "Thanks, Frasier. You are a life-saver. I cannot understand how I could let myself come to a class with a pen that was almost out of ink. I'm such a twit sometimes. But thank you. I owe you one."

She said all this and Frasier should have been able to respond simply. There is a long list of prefabricated responses to expressions of gratitude in any language. None of them availed themselves to the boy this evening. In fact he had not even gathered that he was being thanked. All he registered was that there was a sudden flurry of eyelashes, a barrage of

dimples and a blitzkrieg of those tinkling sounds that arrange themselves around the words of women with nice voices. Being the victim of such an assault, the poor boy stepped back. The response was odd and Pauline was worried that she had done something wrong. She frowned.

“Duuuuuuuude!” shrieked the hippocampus to the medulla. “Did you see that? Yet another dimple! Now it's in between her eyebrows!” “I saw! I saw!” responded the medulla. “It makes her face become even more beautiful. It is as if that of angels singing amongst the stars!” “I think we can shut down now,” said hippocampus. “We have seen enough beauty for the rest of Frasier's life. Let us retire.” But the cerebellum, fortunately, was able to step in. “Guys!” “What?” they barked. Cerebellum was always interrupting important discussions. “I think we should be working on a response. She said something.” “Oh. Yeah. Say something,” said hippocampus. “You say something,” said medulla. “I don't have the speech process centres. I thought you did.” “I can't find them. I thought you had them.” Cerebellum got frantic. “Guys! Find them!”

“Frasier, are you okay?” Pauline said, drawing closer. The poor boy almost died because now, in addition to seeing and hearing her, he could also smell her. This is when Chandler walked up. “Hi peoples,” he grinned.

He was with Charmaine, who cooed, coquettishly slapping his shoulder. "Chandra, it's not peoples. It's people!"

"Hi, Chandler. Hi Charmaine," flashed Pauline's dimples. "Hey, we are supposed to be exchanging numbers. That means I'll need this pencil for one more thing, Frasier."

"Take my pencil. It's yours. Take my pencil. You have already taken my heart," was what Frasier didn't say because, thankfully, his tongue had forgotten how to move.

"Okay. Here's mine," said Charmaine, and she recited it. Slowly. And had to stop halfway and count off on her fingers before she could get the second half to kick in.

"Mine is 073595 093," said Chandler, doing that thing where you look at the paper to see what the other person is writing.

"Great," smiled Pauline. Frasier wished she would stop doing that. Smiling with such dimpled potency and making his heart race. He needed his blood pressure to stabilise. But she was looking at him now. He had to say something. She was actually waiting for words.

"073595 093," he finally said. Then, because people repeat phone numbers, he said it again. "073595 093." And because he was so glad to have regained the power of speech, he added, "Frasier."

This is when Pauline frowned again. “You guys have the same number?”

“He's my brother,” Chandler explained. “That's actually our dad's phone.”

Frasier, sure that he must contribute to the conversation, said, “Same dad, so it's the same phone number also.”

“Oh, I didn't know that,” Pauline was very gracious.

“It's a Nokia,” said Frasier.

Chandler now realised that the time had come for him to swoop in and rescue the unfortunate, so he said, “Pauline, don't leave. We still have to get your number, but let me talk to this brother of mine for a second,” and he pulled Frasier away. When they were a safe distance away, Chandler looked into his brother's eyes. “Frasier K. Bazanye,” he said. “Do you need me to kick you in the teeth with my Timberland boots? You know they are not real Timberlands. It's spelt 'Timbreland' on the side, so it will really hurt.”

Frasier looked on the verge of tears. “I have no idea what is going on! The things are not doing the thing!”

“You mean the words are not coming out?”

“You see? That thing you just did! I can't seem to manage to do it.”

“You mean construct coherent sentences?”

“How on earth do you do that?”

“The offer to kick you still stands.”

“I really think I will need it.”

“Okay. Ass or shins? I don't really want to kick the teeth in. It might just make speech more impaired.”

“Wait. Give me a second. Wait. Oh. I think I am coherent again. I just needed some fresh air.”

“You're sure?”

“I'm quite positive that I have my lucidity back.”

“Describe the twins and we see.”

“Sniveling little evolutionary embarrassments the sort of which are normally only found on the underside of the rotting remains of badly-cooked food festering in that one rubbish skip that all the houseflies call 'the ghetto.’”

Chander, convinced that the problem had been rectified, only then allowed Frasier to return to civilised society. Pauline had been chatting with Charmaine and had another look on her face. Between you and me, dear reader, I think she was scared and wanted to quickly dash to wikipedia to find out if Charmaine was even possible.

“So his name is Chandra, not Sandra. Sandra is for girls only,” Charmaine was saying with intensity. Pauline was trying to figure out whether she should act as if she was glad to have been warned of this in time to prevent a terrible faux pas or to just pretend it hadn’t been said.

She was relieved to see the boys return. “Gentlemen!” she beamed.

Frasier, having just got the gift of gab restored unto him, was glad to swing it right now.

“You know what we were discussing right now, we were thinking what a great idea it would be if the four of us broke out of this place. I mean, we have been in class, for crying out loud. We need to go somewhere and act like it is some sort of holiday, which in fact it is. So, this hotel must consist of more than just conference rooms. Should we look for a restaurant and find something to eat? Pauline, come on, don’t say no. You just said you owe me, and this is me demanding my pound of flesh. Come, dine with us.”

He said all that without pausing for breath. Hippocampus, medulla and cerebellum exchanged high fives.

“I’d love to, guys, but the problem is I have an evening lecture and...” here her mobile phone bleeped... “Oh, my ride is here to take me back to campus. Look, I’ve got to go, but I’ll see you guys tomorrow, right?” And in a flurry she quickly

gathered up her book, her jacket and her bag and was out of the door.

Frasier and Chandler watched through the window as she approached a dark VW Golf parked on the gravel path a few feet away from the entrance of the conference hall. A young man got out and stood in front of it. She was walking to the car, but when he got out she broke into what was distinctly a skip, the levity of which increased the closer she got to him. In turn the man, who had been looking as average and normal and nondescript as men of regular height and build look when they wear t-shirts and jeans, suddenly brightened up and took on a distinct glow. He smiled and his eyes twinkled a twinkle so vibrant it was visible even to the Frasier's so many feet away. He became abruptly handsome as she got closer and his chest became broader as she approached it, as if it was a hallway opening itself to allow her entrance. His hands were wide apart to prepare to embrace her. In turn, she, her skip so buoyant by now that it honestly seemed as if the force of gravity had been momentarily distracted by something on the other side of the hotel, sailed through the air into his open arms and they were entwined in an hug so expertly entwining that it was as if the director of one of the more successful romantic comedies, probably one of those starring that fellow with the rubbery accent— the one who speaks as if his mouth is made of rubber bands melted together— what's his name? Colin Filth or

something—as if the director of one of his movies had personally overseen the choreography of this scene.

Or that Nicola Sparks lady.

“Must be a relative come to give her a ride,” said Frasier in that quivering tone that hope whimpers through when it is on the verge of death.

But then she tossed her braids back and completely and utterly and without any possibility of misapprehension of the nature of the events Frenched the man.

Now, I don’t know if any of you reading this are of the age that permits you to understand what “French” means. You may be too old. It is something done with mouths to other mouths to indicate that the holders of the respective oral cavities are lovers.

After the snogging, they giggled and cooed and vanished into the vehicle and vroomed off.

There was a moment of silence.

Charmaine broke it. “So Pauline is also at university like you, Fresher.”

I could have reported what Frasier muttered to himself, but then I will end up getting another call from the Ministry and they already told me that if I write such things again they will have my wrists slapped. But it seemed like eons later when all

the curse-words he knew and their various combinations had found their way out of his mouth. Then he took a deep breath and invented some more. Somehow vegetables and livestock worked their way into the diatribe that followed.

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A phone conversation between a Tecno and an iPhone was to take place that evening.

“Solome?”

“Yes, Baz?”

“We have a problem.”

“Is it the boys?”

“Yes.”

“Well, they are living with you so, correction, *you* have a problem.”

“I think you will retract that when you hear the details.”

“I am going to regret asking this but what are the details?”

“We agreed that, given my particular psychological limitations, I will serve when there are rudimentary and basic parenting tasks to be done, but that I should leave all the Advanced Parenting to you.”

“Oh no. But Baz, I was just on the way to the yoga class.”

“Solome, the boys claim they are in love and have had their hearts broken. They need some sort of, well, some sort of fathering or mothering intervention.”

“Why can’t you do it? Haven’t you been in love and had your heart broken before? Haven’t you learnt how it is dealt with?”

“I know how to deal with *my* heart getting broken, but I can’t teach the boys my method. It says clearly on the bottle that alcohol is not to be supplied to minors.”

“I was so looking forward to this yoga.”

“Well, your sons need you. Especially now, given that their father is useless to them.”

“How bad is it?”

“Frasier has it worse. He got a crush on this girl who turned out to be a university student who already has a boyfriend. Chandler’s is much simpler. He’s just embarrassed because, well, let me quote his words: he said, ‘My girlfriend is even dumber than me!’ ” he said.

A long and sad and exasperated sigh flowed through the ether from the iPhone in Muyenga to the Tecno in Kireka. Finally Solome said, “Okay. Bring them over. I’ll take care of it.”

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Matters of the heart are completely inscrutable. No man or woman has ever mastered their intricacies. No one knows what it is about a the curl of a lady's eyelash that sends a gentleman's heart racing, or what it is about the wink of a young man's eye that causes a lady to swoon.

What sets the pulses of two hearts apart to beat in rhythm? No one knows.

And what is it that causes love, once commenced, to then cease? Where does it go when it goes? How do people fall out of love? I don't know. I have never known. I still nurse a degree of infatuation for that tall woman I told you about earlier, the one who told me she thought of me as an asexual, non-option ("Mbu, we are just friends.").

I used to think that no one knows or will ever know, until that day when Chandler and Frasier returned to their dad's home in Kireka after having spent the week at their mother's home.

They had slouched out of his home with their shoulders low, and their heads hung and their eyes dark with sorrow when they left. They had been silent all the way as their father drove them up and down the hills of Kampala. When he dropped them off, he felt like he might be burying them. They

were not even this miserable when he dropped them off at school at the beginning of term.

But now, on their return, they were back in full blazing glory, bursting with mischief, noise, clamour and that appetite for destruction that grows greater the more it feeds.

“Hello, boys,” their father greeted as they slid off their boda bodas.

*“N ĭ h ǎ o fù q ĭ n,”* they grinned.

*“Dài yù,”* said Frasier pointing at the bodaman.

*“Duō shao?”* quizzed Chandler.

“Just give him oba ten thou. It’s not as if he is cruising a Lear jet. That should be enough,” Frasier concluded.

As Chandler handed over the cash, Frasier beamed up to his dad.

*“Z ǎ o shang h ǎ o?”*

“Little dude, I tried to learn Rukiga when I was still with your mother, but I just couldn’t find the time. I was busy trying to juggle so many things at once—building a career, making a new home for a new family, trying to get enough money, putting up with that crazy woman’s incessant flow of crap— I just couldn’t find the time to learn the language, so please indulge me.”

*"Titurikugamba orukiga taata, turikugamba orukyaiina,"* said Frasier.

"You paid for it, sir, so we had better use it," added Chandler walking up after dismissing the boda boda. He had a strange habit of always slapping the bodaman's butt and saying, "Giddyup!" when he sent them off.

"Oh. Okay. Why do all the words sound like the same word?"

"It's difficult to explain to a layman," grinned Chandler. They walked past into the house talking three languages because just two weeks of Chinese wasn't enough to discourse at length about anything.

Their dad sat on his balcony with his laptop and his mug of coffee, which is what held the office of beverage-in-situ until the sun came down and it was whiskey-time, and he clattered away at the keyboard. From within the house the sounds of jocularity and mirth kept rising and falling. The boys were clearly over their heartbreak. After a couple of hours of whatever hard work their father had been doing over his computer, he finally broke his concentration and allowed his mind to wander a bit. How on earth had she cured them so fast? He wondered.

He picked up the little Tecno told the Android Siri to call Solome.

“Okay, how did you do it?” he asked.

“Dude, I’m in the spa!”

“How did you get them to get over the women?”

“You are interrupting my spa treatment, Baz!”

“The sooner you answer me, the sooner you get back to your spa.”

“*Nibagyeta* Playstation, Baz” she said and ended the connection.

That is the moral of the story. A couple of days of video games and the boys had forgotten all their worries. Their spirits were right back where they were supposed to be. A few hours of sports, a few more of racing, a couple of shooting aliens and all their melancholy was gone. This is the moral of the story. Tell your daughters not to trust teenage boys: Teenage boys don’t fall in love.

The End