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**THE BIG
ISSUE**

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CHANGE IS IN YOUR POCKET

**Men
against
human
trafficking**

**Sexual
slavery
exposed**

Zephany

Nurse

in her own voice

THE

Two mothers. One daughter.

PHIA

An astonishing true story.

NY

JOANNE JOWELL

Zephany by Joanne Jowell tells the astonishing story of 22-year old Miché Solomon who was kidnapped as a baby and later discovered that the life she knew was built on lies and deception. In this extract, Miché remembers the day the woman she called Mom was sentenced to 10 years in jail for kidnapping her as a baby.

I was at work the day my mom was sentenced. The minister's office is in Queen Victoria Road, right near the courts. It is so close that I could have bumped into people going to and from my mommy's trial any time – and once I almost did, when I was at the coffee shop nearby and my colleague told me to hurry and run back to the office. I knew my mom was going to be sentenced that week, but I didn't know exactly when. On the day, Minister came into the office where I was sitting at and said, 'Did you hear the verdict?'

'Do you know what's happening?' I went on Google, because Minister didn't want to say. I immediately saw that she was sentenced to ten years concurrent. My phone was ringing. It was my daddy. 'She got ten years,' he said. 'Ten years.'

My entire family had been to court and my daddy told me that when the judge announced the sentence, my cousin fainted and everyone was so emotional. How is this even possible – that she can be away from us for so long, yet she was in our life every day?

My daddy asked how I was feeling. I couldn't describe it. I just said, 'It's fine, it's going to be okay.'

Minister said that I could go home, that he's going to give me off for an entire week and I must just take the time. Past 11 am, my daddy came to fetch me. As I came out of the office, there were a whole lot of people standing outside. Everyone was looking very worried. 'Are you okay?' they asked. 'I'm fine,' I said. 'It's going to be okay.'

What was I feeling? Disappointed. Sad. Confused. And I have to say – a little surprised. Because even after everything was said and done, I still had hope that my mom wouldn't go to jail. I remember the day she was found guilty.

At the time, I was writing my exams. I remember coming home and everyone just sitting in the lounge, quiet. It honestly felt like someone had died that day. I went into the room and I burst out in tears on my bed. I was just crying and crying and crying. How am I going to do this? Is my mom going to jail? My boyfriend was there that day and he came to comfort me. He said, 'It's going to be okay. At least you knew you were heading for something like this. Don't take it as a huge shock.' 'But still, I had hope that somehow she wasn't going to be found guilty.'

Afterwards, everyone came into the room and reassured me that they would be there for me, that it would be all right. It felt like they were offering condolences. And all through the house, there was this deep sadness.

Seven months later, on the day my mom was sentenced, I guess I was somewhat prepared. I had known for a while that there would be a punishment, so I didn't take it as hard as when she was found guilty. But I had convinced myself that she wouldn't get jail time. I thought maybe they would give her two years, with house arrest afterwards. I even hoped she would just get community service, though I did understand that this wasn't just a petty crime, like shoplifting. But ten years . . . ten years is a long time.

I didn't hear a word from the Nurses the day my mom was sentenced. None of them came to my house and knocked that day, not Celeste, not Morné. If they could just have thought, What is Zephany feeling right now? They knew that I loved my mom. I made it clear that my mommy will always be my mommy; obviously it would have hurt me that she'd been sentenced to prison for a long time. But neither of them, not one of that family, came to say, 'Do you need us? Do you

want to see us?' Nothing.

They threw a helluva party at Morné's family and I can't say it's wrong because, to them, justice was served. Justice was served to them, but they didn't think once, How is our daughter feeling?

They couldn't expect me to hate my mom. Yes, I was angry with her, and angry for being lied to, but I still love her! I didn't care if she did or didn't do it. Nor can the Nurses say that all their problems were due to my kidnapping. From what Celeste has told me, there were problems even before I was born; not all their misfortune is due to me being stolen. To the public, they made it seem that it's because of Lavona they are divorced; it's because of this woman that Celeste tried to kill herself. But the public don't know the rest of their story.

I remember when Morné called my dad an 'idiot'. I wanted to say to him, 'Well, this "idiot" is still working for your daughter and supporting her. Do you even care what I need?' After the sentencing, when my cousin fainted, my aunty also had an outburst. You can see it online with everything else.

She couldn't handle it anymore and she said to the cameras: 'Have they ever called her to ask does she have a roof over her head, does she have clothes? She doesn't want anything to do with them. Not because of anything, but because they don't care about her! It's not about my family. It's about Zephany!'

People always ask me: 'How would you feel if it happened to your child?' I honestly couldn't say; it's a terrible thing to imagine. I could only hope that the person who stole my child would be as the mom who raised me – that the only thing she wanted was to love a child, be loved by a child . . . no other intentions like hurting the child or human trafficking. Just love. □