

VIII

Sibling Rivalry

I could see the tension rise with every second. Lonwabo sat in her corner and Namisa in hers. They muttered a few words with long pauses in between but I couldn't clearly make it out.

For a long time I wondered how it would be when they finally had a chance to sit and talk and today it was happening.

Staring at the monitor did nothing but build anxiety, everyone was waiting to see if they would attack each other or just give up on the small talk and sit in silence.

Malume Ntando apologized several times, saying he doesn't understand how it happened but his top priority was making sure that his niece and my girlfriend were okay. I could tell it was awkward for him to refer to Lonwabo as my girlfriend, the idea of me being with someone other than Namisa still hasn't settled in for many of our relatives. They always believed she and I were soul mates.

“Hello Mr Blake, we are working on getting the sound fixed in the meantime.”, he said with his head bowed.

“You can call me Angelo, are they going to be fine?”. I asked.

“Yes Sir. As long as no one is claustrophobic, they will be perfectly fine. Would you like tea or coffee?... I can get one of the maids to get it for you”.

Tea or coffee? I needed something stronger than that. My girlfriend and mother to my child were trapped in an elevator and he wanted to give me a coffee.

I shook my head, “No thanks Zweli. I will be fine. Just get the sound fixed while we wait for the maintenance manager.”

How could a simple vacation turn into such a disaster? Lonwabo and I wanted to take a break from our lives and go away for a bit and now here we were, I in the control room and she stuck in an elevator with Namisa.

I thought bringing her to the hotel would be great because I knew we would get special treatment and she would be pampered. Everything had gone so well and she was on her way to the lobby for check-out when she bumped into Namisa.

At first I thought maybe God was against me but it turns out that Namisa hired out one of the conference rooms to a friend as a wedding gift, so she was here for the reception and was making sure the decor was sorted and that the newlyweds room was prepared and ready.

The hotel was initially named Jabu’s House but after Oarabile was born, Bab’Jabulani wanted to rename it but we could never settle on a name. We thought of using Oarabile’s middle name, Thamsanqa but we felt it was a bit cliché.

Bab'Jabulani was a business man, he had a neck for it. I think it's why I decided to become an accountant, I wanted to be as amazing as he was. He was a mentor and a father to me, and in death he showed how much he took me as his son.

When he died, I was surprised to be called in for the hearing of his will. I was shocked as to how many assets he had but also how much he cared for my mother and I. He knew my mother loved charity work and so he left a sum of money for her to donate to a charity of her choice. For me he left a sum of money, a few assets and a letter.

“Angelo, my son.

If you are reading this, then it means I am no more.

I am sorry that I am no longer there to offer guidance but I hope that I died at old age and you and Namisa are now husband and wife.

Thank you for taking care of my daughter. Both of you would come to me and complain about the other, so I know she can be a handful but seeing how you were with her through it all, it shows that you genuinely loved her.

You had your flaws too but I often overlooked them because you were the son I never had and like any man with their son, you tend to focus on the positives.

Thus I am positive you are going to be okay. That you will take care of the family in my absence. That you will raise Oarabile to be a great man like his grandfather and that you will carry on and make us proud.

In the case that I passed before you have finished school, then I encourage that you go back as my soul would be at ease knowing you became a man with an education.

The decision to put you in this will was not mine alone but rather that of mine and my wife, Nomthandazo and as such, the decision to leave these assets to you was not mine alone...”

The letter carried on for 3 pages and I often read it when exams got difficult for me. It contained a breakdown of all his assets with instructions of how they need to be handled, how he chose me as the inheritor of the estate because he believed Namisa and I would maintain it together as husband and wife but also because he believed I have a good head on my shoulder.

Before we broke up Namisa used to joke and say he only gave me the assets because I was studying accounting and he knew she would blow all the money on traveling. I never let Namisa or my mother read the letter in full, I felt it was personal and only meant for me but also it was clear it was written before Oarabile passed away, so I felt like there was someone else who also refused to accept he was gone.

Our break-up felt rushed and sudden but we managed to find time to discuss the assets. Our friends suggested that we strip the businesses and sell the company assets because we were inexperienced and had a lot on our plates for us to run the

businesses but the thought of closing down and leaving so many unemployed did not sit well with us.

Namisa didn't want to go against her father's wishes, so we decided to leave the estate the way it was, the assets stayed in my name and I would take over all the businesses three years after I obtained my accounting degree but in the meantime she would get 80% of the returns and the remaining 20% would be mine but she would have to donate it to one of the charities my mother was partnered with.

The agreement was enforced with all assets except the hotel franchise. The hotels were given to Oarabile, in the letter Jabulani stipulated that if well maintained they would not only be able to help pay for OB's education but also give him something to start his life off with after university.

He left us the shares to the hotel, on the condition that we transfer them to OB on his 18th birthday but seeing as he had passed away, we decided to keep the shares and all the money from the hotels would be put back into the business so that Jabu's House would continue to grow. We would however keep the benefits such as using the facilities and hotel for personal events whenever we wanted.

Namisa and I became silent partners of some sort. As long as she received her dividends on time, there was never any cause to argue or communicate with one another. We were sure to select skilled individuals to be in charge of the day to day running of the businesses and I would do random checks of the finances and entities to ensure that things were going well. I was told sometimes she would do the same just to remind everyone that she hadn't completely neglected her father's property.

Everyone we hired was hired on the merit of their skills except Malume Ntando, being Namisa's uncle and Bab'Jabulani's brother, it made more sense to have someone who was family involved in the hotel business.

“Do you still love him?”.

Hearing the words broke my concentration and brought me back to the situation. Someone had managed to get the sound working. I looked to monitors and Lonwabo was looking at Namisa waiting for her to respond.

A part of me wanted to text Namisa or Lonwabo and tell them that we got the sound working now and we could hear them but a bigger part of me was more interested in the conversation, so I

quickly told everyone to clear the room and asked Malume Ntando to get the elevator sorted.

“It’s okay. I won't hold it against you. I just want to know the truth.... Do you still love him?”, Lonwabo asked again.

Namisa looked at her and then down at her phone, almost as if she was hoping that someone would open the elevator door when she looked up.

“He is my son’s... I mean my daugh... Hmmm... Why do you want to know? He is with you, so what does it matter now?”, Namisa asked.

“We’ve been stuck here for almost two hours. Earlier on when I asked you if he was a good man, the way you spoke of him, it felt like more than simple admiration.”, Lonwabo responded.

“I don't think I ever stopped and I don't think I ever will but I'm not sure if that's what you are really asking me right?”.

They looked at one another, Namisa waiting to see Lonwabo’s reaction and Lonwabo wondering if Namisa knew what bearing those words meant for her future with me.

In the control room, Malume Ntando was looking at me, wondering if I would say anything or react.

“You want to know if I am still in love with him and the answer is yes, I’m still in love with him. I thought I was over him but when we crossed eyes, my heart pushed restart and I was back to being the woman who wanted him to love me”, Namisa said and paused. She then reached into her bag and pulled out a slab of chocolate and offered Lonwabo a piece. “Here, I normally have snacks on me all the time, Ora loves them, especially chocolate... Don’t worry, I won’t tell him how I feel though. It wouldn't be fair”.

“Fair?”, Lonwabo asked.

“We are talking woman to woman right?... I want him back but it must be his choice. Telling him I'm in love with him and having Ora will make it hard for him. I don't want to get him back because I'm his baby mama, I want to be chosen.” She said and looked away.

I could see Lonwabo was not pleased by the response, it was written all over her face.

“No offense but you sound a bit arrogant”, she said.

Namisa giggled, “I suppose it would sound that way but you've known him what, a few months... I've known him over 15 years. I know how to make him fall in love with me again. Do you know his favourite meal? Do you know what song he listens to when he is stressed? Do you know where he goes to when he needs to clear his thoughts?”.

Lonwabo opened her mouth to speak but all she uttered was silence. I felt bad for her, Namisa might have been out of line but it was all true. There was so much about me that she did not know and it would take time to learn.

“You must be special though. He has been single all this while and you managed to catch his attention, he even moved in with you. Whenever I brought it up, he would say that he wanted to wait for marriage.” Namisa said with a grin then asked, “How did you do it?”.

“As you said, you've known him for years. So you know he is a gentleman. I used to live with a friend from university but her boyfriend used to make advances towards me. Eventually he moved in with her and he would have his friends visit. Long story short, I don't like unwanted attention from men and I don't want

to live alone. It's not safe in this country. Women are being kidnapped and killed, so if I had to go home and have a man make advances or try touch me, I would rather have it be someone I'm in a relationship with, so when Angelo offered, I agreed.”

Lonwabo never invited me to her place, I always thought it was because she was trying to be the lady that she is and avoid sex but its clear now that it was because she wasn't comfortable there. She and I had gotten closer and more open since she told me about the rape and abortion. Her bond with Ora was also growing, on weekends when she'd visit, Lonwabo would let me work and watch her by herself. Seeing the ladies in the elevator talking gave me hope that maybe we could all make this work.

“He is a gentleman, he is a good man.”, Namisa said with a smile on her face.

“What do good men deserve? Don't they deserve to have their daughters in their lives?”, Lonwabo asked.

“No offence but you don't know me well enough to question my decision.”, Namisa reacted with clear annoyance in her tone. “Why I kept him out of her life is non...”

“Wait”, Lonwabo interrupted. “That is between the two of you. What matters to me is right now. You want him and he is with me. If he picks you, you play happy family but if he picks me, what happens? Do you take her away from him?”.

Namisa looked at her and I could see she was upset that Lonwabo even insinuated such a thing but quickly her expression changed and her face looked more relaxed. The Namisa I knew would have moved to her corner and sat in silence but in that elevator she surprised me and showed me she had grown.

“Hmmm... He is her father. We have our history and we lost our son but he and Ora are close, so I would never want him to lose another child. No matter what happens, my daughter will have her father in her life and you too”.

“What? Me?”.

“Yes you too Lonwabo. For the past two months you've been spending time with her. I think you love her too don't you? I won't take her from your life too.”

As Namisa spoke, I could see Lonwabo fight back the urge to smile. She was really happy to hear those words and so was I.

She had grown to love Oratilwe in the past two months, planning play dates, buying her outfits and even

“Would you like to come with us next week? I'm not sure if Angelo invited you but we are going crèche hunting for Ora, the one she's currently going to keeps increasing prices but all they do is make her draw pictures and make her share her lunch with the other kids. Having you there would be great, especially with you being a teacher”.

Namisa suggested that we go together and look for a crèche. It was her way of trying to make me feel more involved in Oratilwe's life and to try and co-parent together. I say Namisa but I think I have therapy to thank for it.

Lonwabo suggested that Namisa and I should go for therapy to help us parent better. She was afraid our unresolved past would cause unnecessary conflict. I was sceptical at first because I thought it would do nothing but bring up old wounds but as the weeks went by, our communication improved. We agreed on visitation schedules, play dates, boundaries and now we were going to pick a crèche together.

Namisa was always very possessive and never one to share, it was rather strange that she invited Lonwabo to join us. I wonder if

she was really trying to include her in Ora's life or did she have another motive for asking Lonwabo to tag along. A few months ago our lives were normal and now it is like we are on an episode of Sister Wives.