

VIII

Graduation

“I know I'm late, I'm sorry”. I said as I parked the car, quickly rolling up the window and looking at Namisa.

“You haven't changed”, she said, “Always work first. You did the same with Oarabile”.

I didn't need her reminding me that I missed a lot of his life. I want to blame the situation, I was student and working towards being a man who would provide for him but truth is, I only saw

him on weekends and when it was time for exams I could go a month without going home so that I could concentrate and the responsibility fell on her to bring Oarabile to me.

She looked over to the passenger seat and frowned, I could tell she wanted to ask but held her tongue.

“Lonwabo had an emergency. One of her pupil’s parents called her and she had to rush to assist. So today it will be just you, Ora and I but she will do her best to join us later”.

Namisa sighed, “Birds of a feather I guess... It's just a shame, Ora was really excited to see her.”

Sometimes I wonder if she is naturally sarcastic or wilfully sharp-tongued but in all the years of dating her, I learnt not to engage her in every comment.

“I’m ready to go. Where is my princess?”, I asked.

“Did you finally buy a car seat? I was hoping we could use your car. I don't feel like driving”, she responded.

I was glad I bought the car seat, so she could finally stop nagging me but I had already made them wait an hour for me, so saying no to her request would have led to an argument. All I wanted to do was stare at Oratilwe the whole day. The last thing I anticipated was having to work on my day off but when the boss says he needs a report done, you get it done. I tried to work as meticulously as possible, so I wouldn't be called back in today or tomorrow when I would be spending the day with Ora. It was my weekend with her.

We agreed that the three of us would take leave on Friday, go to the different crèches and not only see the premises but also see how the teachers interact with the students. Lonwabo was supposed to handle the talks on curriculum and with her not being present, the responsibility fell on me. We knew she was just in crèche but the plan was to keep her in one school for as long as possible. In my mother's pursuit to giving me a quality education, I changed schools almost every year. Whichever school she felt was the best she would send me to that school, I even went to boarding school at some point but she didn't like the distance and made me move back home. Eventually I got a scholarship and they were in charge of which school I went to but all I learnt from that was I wanted stability. I wanted Oratilwe to never have to make friends and lose them but rather to get a sense of home that I didn't get.

Even though Lonwabo wasn't going to be there, she gave me pointers on what questions to ask and I promised her I would report everything back to her.

Turns out as a man, I knew which university I wanted my daughter to attend because I knew how expensive studying can be and so I saved for that but I never put thought into what impact the crèche she went to would have on her.

We visited different schools, laughed at uniforms and batted our eyes at a few costs. All in all it was a good day. After all the evaluations were done we drove back to my place.

Lonwabo was yet to come home. Namisa and I agreed that it would be wise if she waited for Lonwabo to get home before she left, so we could discuss all the schools and try make a decision together.

She was in charge of keeping Oratilwe busy while I got dinner started.

“You know... You never cooked for me while we were dating, I wonder if you are any good. When it came to where to eat out, you knew your stuff but cooking... You never did, except breakfast. You make an amazing omelette.”

I looked at her and laughed, “If I want to afford to send Ora to any of those crèches then I need to cut costs and cooking meals instead of take-out is one of the ways to save. The tuition at those schools could feed a small family.”

“A small family?” she giggled hard enough to almost sound like a laugh.

I forgot the way her face would light up when she was happy. Thinking about it, today was the first time the three of us were actually together like a real family.

“What?... Why are you staring at me?”, she asked while playing with her hair.

“Nothing. I am just thinking about today. I never tell you this but you are a great mother to our daughter.”

“Really? I am?”, she said jokingly, “Then I should be the one to pick the school right Baba ka Ora?”.

“Nope.”, I said, “If you pick the school then she’ll end up at that school you liked... What was it called again... The one with the purple uniform.”

“That was a great school. It was a black school and they taught Xhosa and Zulu. Oratilwe would have loved it there.”

I wondered if that was her deciding factor and why it mattered whether her child went to a black school or white school. I understand the fear of a black parent, sending their child to a school where their child may experience racism and I could tell her that racism exists in the world and not only in certain schools but I’m sure she already knew that.

“Maybe if we take the possibility of racism into account, the school has some merit but what do languages have to do with it Namisa?”

“I want my daughter to learn about her culture Angelo.”

“And why wouldn’t she learn that at any other school? How does going to a black school teach her culture?”, I asked.

“It will teach her how to fit in with people of her colour or are you saying white schools are better than black schools?”

“I never said that. Don’t put words in my mouth”, I said.

“You didn’t deny it either”, she remarked. “Predominantly white schools have been proven to lack the ability to accommodate South African black languages in their curriculums however are able to include Afrikaans. Therefore this results in idea that there are languages that are more significant than others hence decreasing the agency of learning African language by black pupils.”

Namisa’s words had me rolling my eyes. She loved culture and always felt it was her most defining feature. I admired that about her, the way she could speak about herself and where she came from and I wanted to give the same to Oratilwe but at what cost? Would I sacrifice my child going to a school that I felt would give her a great education in favour of one that had the option to teach her an African language.

“So you are blaming schools for children not wanting to learn about their heritage? What is the purpose of sending your child to school? If you are sending them to have a career and get an education then isn’t your argument flawed if your emphasis is on

learning black languages and using them as a guise to absorb culture?

If you take into account the fact that languages can boost a career or allow opportunities overseas. Would you want our daughter to learn a language like Zulu that can't be used in any country except South Africa, whereas a language like Portuguese is spoken in 10 different countries?"

I saw her place her hand on her hip and I knew an argument was coming.

"Angelo, do you then disregard the fact that your child is human, that she needs a sense of belonging and being rooted. Do belittle culture just because we aim for her to have a career oriented. In a case whereby your child has aspirations to be a musician or poet that uses their home language to express themselves do we then tell the child that no you can't do that because it's not globally recognized?"

I shook my head. "No, our daughter can be whatever she wants to be but other than becoming a poet or an artist, where would learning an African language take her? I want my daughter to go further than I did, even if that means she goes to live somewhere far away like Germany."

I wanted to understand where she was coming from but I couldn't. Maybe she wanted our daughter to learn to communicate better or maybe I didn't value culture enough but no matter what she was saying, I just could not agree with it.

“She needs to be cultured, can we at least agree on that?” she said with her tone slightly raised. “Going to a school where she can learn a language close to home will keep her cultured and give her a sense of pride. She will be spending around eight hours at the school or crèche and the one you liked had about two black teachers. She is going to come home speaking a language she can't use, what is the point in that? You learn more about any topic or subject when you get a chance to study it. For example Zulu, you learn about the customs that are involved in that particular culture it is interpreted and understood. She will learn diversity at that school.”

“What? So you expect the school to teach her culture?” I asked. “There's a difference between expecting a child to be raised by a school and expecting a child to be exposed to a place that is accommodating and doesn't plant a seed to make a child feel belittled or less significant than another. You want her to learn an African language basically because it is a nice skill to have and you want the school to take over our responsibility. If you can predict the future and our daughter wants to be a poet or maybe

a language teacher then I can agree to send her to a school solely on that.”

“Angelo, if she won’t learn it at school then how will she be taught culture? Where will she learn it?”

“Here... With us... She will learn culture here. You and I are from different cultures ourselves. So do we now force her to take on English and two other subjects so that she can get both cultures or one culture takes preference over another?”

“No Angelo. That’s not what I am saying.”

She could see my blood was boiling despite me trying to keep my cool. We kept on going back and forth, arguing and moving closer to one another. Stating her case and me arguing mine.

“Angelo. Namisa”, Lonwabo yelled. “What’s that smell? If two could stop flirting from a moment, you’d see the pot is on fire.” She ran to the kitchen to turn off the stove.

Namisa and I got so caught up in our argument I forgot I was cooking and didn’t even hear Lonwabo come in. Slowly we

backed away from one another. Namisa looking a little embarrassed and picking up Oratilwe from the mat.

“Come on Princess, let mommy take you to the bathroom and make sure that your nappy isn’t wet. If you’ll excuse me guys”.

She took her leave and left Lonwabo and I standing in the corridor, staring at one another. She looked at me and shook her head.

“I had a really long day”, she said, “And I am too tired for this. I don’t want an explanation. I just hope you know what you are doing.”

She said her peace and went upstairs. I thought today was supposed to be about Oratilwe, it baffled me how I was the bad guy once again.