

VII

The Trouble With Faith

It's been three years since I was last here.

Everything looks the same. The sand, the sun. I remember the day we laid Oarabile to rest. I was amazed to see so many people there to celebrate a life that was short lived. He could hardly form sentences yet everyone had so much to say about him and what he meant to them. It felt so fake.

The condolences and smiles, many didn't want us together as a couple and losing Oarabile was the cement they were happy never dried.

Even though Namisa and I had dated for years, this was the first time our families were really in the same place. We never paid damages for him, scheduling the negotiations was always a problem and so that was the first time our uncle's met.

He went from being our beacon of hope to someone we mention in memories. His death took everything from me. Her family and mine parted ways, my friends and family distanced themselves from me. Kyle, Tsebo and Nhlanhla didn't know what to say to me. Then again who was I to judge, I hardly had much to say. I spent most of the day comforting Namisa and doing small talk on her behalf. Now here I was on my own, staring at your tombstone, trying to find words and wondering if you even understood the role I was meant to play in your life.

“Hey OB... It's me... Your dad. We used to play together. It saddens me to think you are nothing more than a box in the ground, a body that has probably decayed. I don't know if you heard but you have a little sister now.”

They say the dead should not communicate with the living but I took the whistle of the wind as a sign that he was listening. Maybe he was and maybe I was just that desperate for him to exist somewhere other than my mind. In her healing she gave away all the things we bought Oarabile, so I didn't have anything to remember him by other than his baby pictures.

I was left with his baby pictures and a deep dislike for Winnie the Pooh. I used to love the cartoon but seeing Winnie on his tombstone made the sight of the teddy bear unbearable.

I was also the one left with all the questions. 'How did he die?', 'Was he ill?', 'How is Namisa taking it', 'When will you be ready to have another child?'. Namisa got time off school, time off from the world. She had three weeks to rest, and just shut off everything. Her communication was limited to myself and her immediate family. I on the other hand was thrown into the world.

I still had to attend lectures, be social, I had to still be happy for everyone. My mother was falling apart, my cousins were hurt and I had to be there for them all. I had to keep their world together and pretend mine wasn't falling breaking apart. A man is strong, so the death of my son shouldn't not have phased me. After all a woman has a natural clock and a man can have a child anytime. A lot of people felt I should have leaned on Namisa but whenever I tried to open up to her, she would burst into tears because I would just bring the pain back for her, so I would put my emotions on hold so that I could comfort her. In the end I realized that their 'lean on her' was just their way of saying I should be there for her because this is harder for women than it is for men because they are more connected to the child.

Putting Namisa first, the questions and being forced back into society with no support; I don't know how I made it through and managed to retain some part of my sanity.

Namisa and society aside, it wasn't that the questions weren't valid, it was just that I didn't have answers myself. She couldn't tell me what happened. She said something about being at a family friend's place, that he was fine when she last checked on him and that when she checked again he wasn't breathing. Some people said maybe her 'cousin' rolled over and suffocated him, others suggested he was poisoned and others said it was just God's will. With all the confusion, an autopsy seemed insensitive. I asked Namisa for one and she asked if I blamed her or her cousin for what happened, that I suspected them of foul play. She brought Oratilwe to me because she didn't want to leave her with anyone who wasn't immediate family, I guess a part of her blamed her cousin too.

No one taught me how to parent. They all expected me to just understand. My mother, Namisa's parents, none of them shared their experience or raising a child or what they learnt. They just felt I should know, maybe because I was once a child. They forgot that they were once children and when I needed guidance, I needed more than "you are a father now".

Adults think that is enough, in that statement I should understand all my responsibilities and making the right decisions should come naturally. No one said I would be affected more than just financially, more than just my time management would need to change. No one said he would own all of my being or that having a child meant gaining the risk that losing them could crush your soul beyond repair. Everything became about them even things that are not related. No one said you could find yourself at a gravesite talking to yourself.

“I blame God for taking you. Not every couple who wants to, can conceive. He is in control. He lets rapists and murders get to old age but you were a soul without sin and you left us before your first birthday.” I spoke but no wind this time. I wasn’t sure if you disagreed with my sentiments or our heavenly Father silenced your lips.

I think the worst part of it all was that I was the one left without faith. They say God doesn’t choose favourites but Namisa healed faster than I did and she said it was because of Him. Three years later and I am still stuck in the mind of a man who refuses to accept that the first person he ever buried was his son.

“I blame GOD”. I cried. “I blame you. I am mad at her for not seeing I was in pain, I am mad at my family for demanding that I be okay but I am mad at you most. I was a good son to you but you took mine from me. I blame you for letting me love him, I blame you for letting him breathe and I blame you for taking him from me without giving me a chance to say goodbye.”

Some would call it blasphemy, I wonder if it makes me a sinner for questioning His choices or more of a believer because like any son, I can admit I feel betrayed by my Father?

My Father took everything from me. My friends didn’t know what to say or how to relate. I was the first to have a child, I was the first to lose a child. They were still processing the former, how would they now comfort me through the latter?

My relationship with my mother suffered. I remember the look on her face when I told her Namisa was pregnant. She was angry, she said things she could never take back and things I am yet to forgive. She had all that anger over something that didn't last that long.

“I know she misses you too.”, I said with a smile on my face. “She hasn't asked to see Ora, she wants to wait until she is sure Ora is mine. She doesn't want another grandchild taken away from her.” I hoped knowing that he couldn't be replaced would make him smile, that the fact that my mother and I still missed him would give him some sort of comfort and maybe he would forgive us for never visiting.

“I passed by the way. Your father is almost CA. I work at this great accounting firm in the Vaal. I wrote my last exam and I am waiting for my results. I believe I made it. I only saw you on weekends, so I have no choice but to have made it right.

I told you I was mad at God, I am mad at my family and my friends but Oarabile, I am also mad at you. You took away the love of my life. I am sure she told you that we don't talk much anymore. We didn't until she told me about your sister. She was in the hospital and she needed blood and... I'm sure she told you all about it. She told me she visits you every chance she gets.”

Namisa was always stronger than me. She hid Oratilwe from me but maybe it's because I wasn't as strong as she needed me to be. When I couldn't take it anymore, I ran to another for comfort and gave them more than I was allowed to give. Vuyo had been my best friend for so long that it made sense to talk to her. We shared everything. She was

comfortable enough to tell me when she was on her period and needed me to get her pads and she was the first I told when I found out Namisa was pregnant. I don't know who took advantage of whom, was it I who was mourning my son or her who had just fought with her partner. We both needed comfort, we just found it in the wrong way. We agreed never to speak about it and the next time we spoke, she and her ex-boyfriend were pregnant and expecting their first child. I was hurt that she hid that she was pregnant from me and I couldn't think up any reason I told myself that she was still giving me time to recover from losing Oarabile. Maybe she was just protecting Oratilwe from having a weak father in her life. A father who still held on, a father who couldn't forgive his creator.

I stood there in silence for a few minutes. The sun was setting and I still had so much to say but words would not leave my lips and my heart was just as silent. Being there felt like both an accomplishment and a moment of disappointment. This was the first time I was here but it took me so long to get here. I knew I couldn't stand there forever and wallow in my thoughts, I still had to drive to Vuyo's place. She and I hadn't really spoken since the night Loni moved in and she said she was worried about me, so I said I would pay her a visit before I went home after seeing Oarabile. She didn't really give me much of a choice. She said she knew I would be a wreck after going to the cemetery and so I promised I would see her before driving home.

God gives and God takes. Losing him taught me that God does things and doesn't give reasons, I learnt to feel God is unfair and chooses tests for His children based on how well He thinks they will cope. Despite the anger and my feelings, in all this, my biggest struggle was with myself because I still held on to Him. I stopped praying, I stopped spreading

His word and going to church was a thing of the past but I knew He was still there, just watching me suffer. Whether He was rooting for me to recover or not, I just knew He was watching with the son He took from me next to him.

God broke me, took all I have and even though I didn't believe in His love anymore, I still believed in him. I suppose that is the trouble with faith. Some take misfortune as a sign of God's non-existence but I took it as a sign that He doesn't love me.