

IV

Girls Need Love

Yesterday felt unreal. I was glad that the Khuzwayo's agreed to a DNA test but that only lessened the possibility of Oratilwe not being mine. I wondered how Lonwabo would welcome me at the airport this morning, I couldn't call her last night. I just texted her saying her family agreed to a DNA test and after that we will discuss damages.

I knew I couldn't tell her that they wanted lobola. Namisa's family insisted that it wasn't fair for me to expect Ora to grow up with her parents living in two separate homes but Namisa and I weren't on that path anymore and I wasn't sure we would be again. However I'm sure having us stay longer was part of their plan to get Namisa and I to talk but we had to leave, my mother had a wedding to attend today and I had to be home because today's the day Loni will be moving in.

Our flight was delayed by an hour, so it meant Lonwabo had to wait longer for us to land, she was already nervous about meeting my mother and this delay meant she would miss her doctor's appointment.

“She’s beautiful, you've done well son”. My face turned red. I can't believe my mom said that. I was red and Lonwabo was blushing. Couldn't she have started with ‘Hello’ or ‘Hi’?

My uncles were going to go to the wedding directly and Kyle was waiting for Jessica so they could get started on moving Loni’s things in, so it was just the three of us in the car. As much as I was happy to see Loni, I was happy my mother was here, it gave me a little time before Loni and I would have to go into detail about what transpired during the negotiations. I packed our bags in her boot and off we went.

This was the second time I introduced someone to my mother. They were opposite personalities. My mother always had her hair done and make up was part of her everyday look, while Lonwabo would have to convince herself an event really required her to put eye shadow on. They both weren't shy in nature but the car ride was really quiet. My mother was normally bubbly and welcoming but today she locked her tongue away, I wasn't sure if it was because of the 7AM flight or she was afraid to get too close and adopt another daughter, only to lose her after a few years.

We drove for 20 minutes in silence, my mother adjusting her hair every five minutes and Loni and I giving one another quick looks in the rear view mirror. I reached from the backseat to turn on the radio but my mother quickly hit my hand away. I forgot she never drove with the radio on when there were people in the car. She preferred conversation. In her attempt to end the silence, she asked the wrong question. “So when are you two having kids?”.

It was a joke. I knew it was joke. I'm sure Loni knew it was a joke. It was supposed to be an ice breaker but I felt my body turn cold. I never told her about Loni’s secret, it wasn't my place to say but had I said it, this could have been avoided. I started to whisper a silent prayer, hoping the heavens swallow me until I heard Loni giggle. “I took your son to work with me one day, it was aftercare and he was doing well until the kids woke up. After five minutes he wanted to run away Ma”, she laughed. “We have Oratilwe Mme. Let’s see how your son handles her before I add five or six more”.

“Five more?”, my mother exclaimed. “Angelo, I like this girl.”

They continued their conversation with seeming completely comfortable and ignoring my existence. One again I found myself invisible in a relationship but this time it was in a good way. My mother made sure to bring up embarrassing childhood memories and Lonwabo made

enquiries about how I liked my meals. It was good seeing them get along. We made a stop at Norkem Mall for breakfast then drove my mother to her house in Kempton Park and made our way to the Vaal.

The drive was loud. We hardly said a word to one another but sang along to our favourite songs. It was how we bonded, road trips and music.

We got to the complex just as the movers were leaving. Loni and I felt that this would be a great opportunity for us to bring our friends together, so it was both her moving-in party and house warming. I invited Vuyo and Mpumi and Loni invited Sthe and Tshepiso. Kyle and Jessica invited themselves, they deemed themselves the matchmakers of our relationship.

We were all assigned tasks. The girls were in charge of unpacking the boxes and the guys had the heavy pleasure of moving Loni's furniture in. The day went by relatively well with Loni popping in every few minutes to ask if anyone was thirsty or wanted a snack. Her friend Tshepiso was the party-starter, turning up the volume as loud as she could and occasionally sending winks at Kyle. There were a few times Vuyo had to step in and calm Jessica down. She was always that person, the one with a cool head and the one you turn to for support.

When I confessed to Namisa that I had been unfaithful, I never told her with who or that it happened only once. She assumed I had been having an affair and I never corrected her nor did she care to know who I had it with. Vuyo and I knew what we did to Namisa was wrong but we also knew it was something that would never happen again. I had lost my son, she was mourning her father. She had no one and the one I loved said she was done with me, who was I to know that the next day she'd call and say she didn't mean it when she said we were over?

Maybe I should have known better, it had been two months since we buried our son, so she spoke out of pain but I believed her when she said it was over and I believed Vuyo when she said it was okay for a man to cry.

We finished unpacking the boxes and the girls wanted to drink their cocktails, all the girls except Tshepiso. She joined Kyle, Sthe and I outside. It was clear Jessica didn't like the idea but she didn't want to come off as insecure. Instead she gave me the look, clearly it was my job to keep an eye on Tshepiso while she was around Kyle.

We were outside, Kyle had just put the meat on the fire, Sthe was passing around the beers and she came out.

“So what are you boys talking about?”, she said as she sat down.

Sthe and Kyle looked at me and I looked back at them, I let out a sigh and said “Sex. We are talking about sex”. I didn’t want her to get the impression that all men talk about when they get together is sex but recently at work there sexual harassment matter. The matter of consent became an issue at the office and it became clear that more focus was placed on women to protect themselves then it was for men to understand the importance of consent.

“Tshepiso giggled, “Typical. Boys, will be boys”.

“No, it’s not like that Tshepi”, Sthe interrupted, “Angelo was telling us about something at work and I was just saying that girls are allowed to have sex”.

“Allowed?”, she looked at him “Thank you for the permission Sthe”. She said sarcastically.

“What I meant was that things are different now. Women are more expressive, more comfortable in their own skin and some men have adjusted well and others haven’t. So women flirt, women make the first move and some men take that as consent. If I take you out and spend all night buying you drinks and you agree to come home with me, we are definitely having sex.” Sthe took a sip of his drink, waiting for a reaction.

Tshepiso shook her head, “As a woman and someone who sometimes sleeps with women, I would like to say, women want to have the choice to say yes or no. Anything other than that is rape”.

“So what you are saying is we don’t know consent? We just assume it. Do you always get consent from your partner? Do you always get a yes?”, I asked and then turned to Kyle, “Do you always ask Jessica if she wants to have sex before you two have sex?”.

He took a moment to think about it and then shook his head.

“So does that mean you rape Jessica regularly?”, Sthe asked.

Kyle shook his head again. “No, we have a rule. We don’t deny each other sex. She said when I want it, I must take it, even if she’s sleeping.”

Tshepiso blushed, “Oh... So you like surprise attacks. Well, me too”.

“I think you are going off topic Tshepi, I’ll be back now. Let me go get more drinks”. I stood up and went to the kitchen to Lonwabo was standing next to the stove.

“Hey babe, are you okay?”, I asked.

“Yes my angel, I am fine. Just a little tired”, she responded.

I walked over to her and held her hand, kissed her on the forehead and led her to the bedroom. “Babe, rest. I will entertain everyone. You just take a quick nap”.

She smiled and said, “Wait, don’t leave yet. Come lay with me”.

I walked over to the right side over the bed and then lay with her, I put my arms around her and pulled her closer. In all the drama going on, it was clear she wasn’t okay. Finding out she now has to play be a step-mother to a two year could not have been easy for her.

As she closed her eyes, all I thought to myself was that I was blessed to have such a wonderful woman in my life. I kissed her forehead once again then she placed her hand on my cheek and slowly we started to kiss. After our conversation on consent, I knew I had to take it slow and listen to whatever her body was telling me but we had never had sex before, so I wasn’t sure what her body was saying but her hands were pulling me closer and I believe she wanted me.

Our bodies moved closer and closer to one another, her biting my lips, me kissing her on the neck. Her pulling me on top and my hand sliding up her top.

“Wait... I haven’t done this in a really long time. Can we take it slow?... I would like to undress myself.” She said it with her eyes closed and her hands on my waist.

I moved back a bit to give her room to undress. She started pulling off her top and then said “Wait Angelo, what if someone walks in? We are still hosting our friends”.

I laughed, “I think they are too drunk to notice we aren’t even there”.

She laughed back and continued undressing. I waited until she was finished. It was our first time and I knew I had to go slow. I placed my hand on her cheek and worked my way down, moving from her lips to waist and finally placing it between her thighs. I kissed her lips one more time and as I started to place my finger in, she jumped up. “I can't do this. I'm sorry. I can't.”

“You can’t? Why?”, I asked. “Is it me?”.

She shook her head and let out a great sigh. She opened her suitcase, took a towel and wrapped herself with it and ran to the bathroom. She locked the door and stayed in the bathroom for about five minutes. I was scared. I thought I had maybe rushed her. I was worried she might say I tried to rape her. I never asked if she wanted me to touch her, I just assumed she did.

She came out with water on her face, I could tell she had been crying and she thought washing her face would hide it from me. She moved from the bathroom and came to sit next to me.

“Before you ask, it’s not you. I find you attractive”, she said in a gentle whisper. “I know it's not the right way to tell you or the right time but I'm done making excuses in relationships. I had my excuses lined up. Today I would say it's not possible cause our friends are around or I'm too tired. Tomorrow I was going to lie about my period or something and on and on. I'm tired”.

I look at her shook, I was confused and couldn’t understand what she was on about.

“I told you that I couldn't have kids, I didn't tell you why.”, she paused. “My uncle... He used to rape me. He raped me. He then taught my cousins... His kids how to please a woman with me as their training doll. He got me pregnant but my mother didn't want everyone to know her

brother and his sons were rapists or that her daughter was now used goods, so she took me for a backdoor abortion. Something went wrong and I lost my womb. Other than the rapes, I have never had sex. I don't know how to".

I was lost for words. I always thought we hadn't had sex because she wanted to take things slow or she wanted to wait until we were both ready but now it's clear that is deeper than that. She doesn't know how it feels to have sex as a choice. I was glad she told me the truth. I was happy she trusted me enough to be open with me but now I had a new dilemma in front of me, I didn't know how to love someone who had been hurt in that way, where would I even start?