

V

Memorable Amnesia

I didn't know what hurt me more, the fact that she carried all this pain or that she felt the need to hide it from me. I always knew she was a strong woman but hearing about how her uncle and cousins used to rape her, my heart sank.

A part of me wished she had not said anything, I could feel my hate and anger build for people I'd never met. How could family do that to their own? I could hear the pain in her voice, she spoke the words calmly but she wasn't okay,

“It started off small. He would offer me sweets in exchange for a kiss on the lips. Letting him touch my breast meant he would help me with my chores, so I had more time to spend with my friends. When I sat on his lap, it meant I could watch whatever television show I wanted and letting him give me a bath or help me change into my pjs meant a little extra tuck shop money”.

“I’ll be right back”. I said the words and knew what I had to do. I moved my hand from hers and ran out the room. I had to get everyone to leave. Loni was opening up to me and this music, the guests it had to stop. I wanted her to tell me everything and I needed her to feel safe.

I always knew Loni didn't get along with her family but she never told me why. I respected her privacy because my own family dynamics weren't something I was always proud to share. It was beyond me that a mother could protect her daughter’s rapist merely because they were blood.

Each group needed their own reason to leave. So I told Loni’s friends that she was tired and wanted to call it a night. They understood because Loni always arrived early for events, so she could leave early. I never asked myself why but maybe it was because she never felt safe enough to be out late. Tshepiso felt it was too early even for Loni but Jessica, tired of her advances at Kyle agreed it was time to leave.

Kyle pulled me to the side, he said he wanted to talk. He had on his naughtiest grin but as he was about to speak, Jessica gave him a look and his demeanour changed. “Dude”, he said, “You can't clean this all up by yourselves. Don't you need help?”.

“Yeah Kyle”, I responded, “I can’t do this... but... but Vuyo will help me. Yeah she’ll help me. So I won't be alone”. I knew Vuyo hated cleaning up but if anyone would understand I need everyone to leave without asking questions it would be her.

He smiled and as he shook my hand goodbye, he slipped me a condom. Seems the only reason he wanted to offer help was so that Loni and I could consummate her moving in much sooner. If only he knew that sex was the last thing on my mind.

One by one the guests started to make their way out until it was only Vuyo and I left down stairs.

“Angelo, I don't know what's going on and I can tell you are nervous. You'll explain when you are ready. I hope you haven't killed someone’s daughter. Also you owe me big time”. She said her peace and helped me clean up. Once she was done doing the dishes she hugged me goodbye and left.

We were alone. Finally. I could go back and check on Loni.

As I made my way up the stairs, my phone started to ring. It was a number I didn't have stored on my phone, so I assumed it was one of Loni's friends, maybe they forgot something and needed to come back for it.

"Hello... Is this Angelo Blake?... My name is Dr Lynda Tsdira and I am Lonwabo's psychologist... I was on the phone with her earlier and I believe she was having a panic attack... Would you kindly..."

I put the phone in my pocket and ran up the stairs. Loni was on the floor. I picked her up and carried her down the stairs. I lay her on the couch and tried to wake her.

"Loni, Lonwabo. Wake up". I was panicking, I wasn't sure if I held back or used all my strength but I was shaking her, hoping she'd wake up. "Lonwabo, wake up. Please wake up".

"Angelo", she responded, "I'm awake".

"Are you sure? Some lady named Lynda called. She said you were having a panic attack". I pulled her close to me. She was awake. She was fine. In this moment she was fine.

She told me about how it started at the age of 12. Her uncle used to rape her whenever her mother wasn't around. He felt he could do whatever he wanted with her because they had no place to go. Her grandparents left the house in his name and her mother couldn't afford to pay rent for the both of them, so they lived with him for free.

He treated her as his sole property until she turned 14. Then he taught his sons to rape her as well. It became their bonding ritual. Whenever they would visit they would take turns raping her. It continued until they got her pregnant and she told her mother. Her mother was infuriated but forced her to have an abortion and forced her brother out of the house. She threatened to report him to the family elders if he didn't leave.

My emotions went on a rollercoaster. I hated them, I admired her courage and wished things could be different. She was still dealing with her past and here I was bringing more drama into her life.

“Loni, her family asked me to pay lobola”. She had been honest with me, I needed to start being open with her.

“Is that what you want?”, she asked.

I shook my head and kissed her forehead. “You’re what I want baby. I’m happy with you”.

She smiled a temporary smile and said, “I’m afraid you’ll pick her over me.”

“I told you that I wouldn’t do that to you. Ora won’t come between us”. I held her hand and pulled her closer.

“Ora’s not the problem”. She pulled away. “Since the rapes I’ve become paranoid, I’m depressed. So many people thought I was an ungrateful child or I was seeking attention because I was reserved but it’s the voices in my head. They made want to be alone. They told me nobody cares about me and no one would pick me. My own mother picked a house over getting justice for me and now they tell me she’s the problem and the fact that they want lobola just made them louder”.

“Loni, why didn’t you tell me? I told you if you wanted to talk, would could talk. You know how much communication means to me”.

She looked at me and rolled her eyes. “If communication meant a lot to you, you would have told me that her family wanted lobola or better yet that you met with her in the first place instead of involving Jessica and Kyle in your lie. You and your decisions feed my anxiety.

And you want us to talk? Talk about what Angelo? How she is giving you everything I wish I could? You think I don’t want a child?”. She looked down and shed a tear. Everything inside me wanted to hold her. Everything inside me wanted to tell her it’s going to be okay but everything inside me told me this is my fault and that I couldn’t expect her to trust in the one hurting her to comfort her.

“Lonwabo, I am sorry.”

She just looked at me. I could see she didn't know what to do with those words, she still had her fears.

“Do you want space Loni? Do you want me to move to the guest room, just for tonight?”. I knew it was the wrong thing to ask and the timing was off but after what she'd told me and expressing how she feels, expecting us to share a bed and pretend like everything is fine would do more damage than good. I also didn't want to force her to tell me how she felt about everything.

She shook her head. “The last thing I want is to be alone. I've done that for so long and felt like I need to hide from the world. I want you. I want you to have all of me and that won't happen if we start things off that way.”

I knew she was right. Distancing one another wasn't wise.

“I don't want to marry her. I just want my daughter. I want to make up for the time I lost”.

“And where do I fit in?”, she asked.

“She's our daughter. Loni, I gave up on having children and just like how you didn't give birth to her, I didn't know I fathered her.” Jokingly I said, “For the most part I see Namisa as a surrogate.”

She laughed, “A surrogate. Come on, your surrogate wants to marry you”.

“That's between her and her family Loni. You and I are trying to build a family. We always thought it would just be us but now we have Ora too. Come on, sit next to me”, I tapped the couch inviting her over.

“Can we please have some rules?”, she asked firmly. “I don't want her disrespecting me or her feeling like I'm disrespecting her. The sooner we set boundaries the better.”

I nodded. “Yes, we can do that”. I yawned. “I’m sleepy, can I sleep babe? We still have unpacking to do today and I want to rest”.

She smiled and nodded. She lay my head on her lap. Today was more than I bargained for but I learnt to appreciate Lonwabo in a whole different way. We still had a lot to work through but we were going to get through this together. It felt good being in a relationship where I had someone who would go through things with me and not someone who would put me through things.

I managed to sleep for about 15 minutes until I heard the doorbell ring. I sat up to find myself wrapped up in a blanket. I guess Lonwabo must have fetched a blanket for me. I sat up to see where she was. As I was about to call out for her, I heard a voice that sounded far too familiar at the door.

“Hi, my name is Namisa, is Angelo here?”.

It was Namisa, I couldn’t believe she was here. This was the last thing I needed. Loni had just confessed how she felt about Namisa and her arriving unannounced was not going to help at all.

I walked to the door, a walk that felt like a fast trot. “Namisa, what are you doing here?” , I asked.

“Hey. Sorry to come like this but I really need your help. Can you watch Ora for me for a few hours?”.

Her request left Loni and I speechless. How could someone who hid a child from me for two years just give her to me so willingly. I wanted to say no because this was the disrespect that Loni wanted to avoid this was also the first time I could spend quality time with my daughter. I was conflicted, do I please the one I love or get a chance to show my daughter I want to be a part of her life?

