

Chapter 10

WOMXN

Edited by Serendipity

The two things I dislike most, are traveling and taking pictures. As a Queen, I am expected to travel on a lot of diplomatic missions. Rafiki has always offered to go in my place several times but I always turned him down not because I didn't trust his abilities but letting him go in my place would have set my mission backwards, I wanted to show that women can lead and women can have a voice. I was fortunate that Mfariji joined the family and agreed to take on the lion's share of the travels.

I enjoyed taking pictures as a child because it was my father's hobby. He told me, if he wasn't King, he would have wanted to still be my father but also a photographer. When he passed on, taking pictures became something I disliked.

Being in the public eye doesn't really give one the freedom to avoid cameras though.

Despite my dislike for both, I found myself in South Africa for a feature in a magazine. I was invited to be a part of an issue for the launch of a new start up magazine. It was a woman's issue, focused on the different roles women play and how each contributes in their own way. It featured myself and 3 other women; Lonwabo, a primary school teacher; Sophia, a chartered accountant, and Vanessa an event planner and brand strategist.

It was my first time meeting Lonwabo and Sophia but Vanessa was someone I was acquainted with. She was synonymous in

many circles. I also liked her personally. She was not moved by wealth or status, and always stated her opinion. It is why I hired her to be my wedding planner. I knew with her in charge of the vow renewal, everything would go smoothly.

Being in South Africa was bitter sweet. This was going to be the first time since the twins were born. South Africa is where Imani calls home. I gave into temptation and googled his school and where he lived before I boarded the plane, it was a 40 minute drive from where the photo-shoot would take place.

The plan was to have a simple shoot and interview. Everything was supposed to take place in one day but Vanessa's plane was delayed and we were all asked to spend the night and do the feature over two days. Day one would focus on the photo-shoot and on day two, we would all participate in the interviews.

We were booked into the same hotel. The publisher suggested we have dinner together, since we would be spending the night. I was hesitant at first because I was not ready to have small talk or listen to conversations about women complaining about men, I agreed to join the ladies because Mfariji said it would be a great way to build a network with women who have influence.

The hotel was chosen by Vanessa, she had used it frequently for business meetings and as a venue for hosting events. The hotel owners were also very fond of her, so much that they upgraded all of our rooms and arranged a penthouse room to be the place where we would have dinner.

I knocked on the room door and Lonwabo opened. She was wearing her pyjamas and behind her on the couch, Sophia was wearing nothing but her lingerie and a bathrobe from the hotel.

“I didn’t bring any clothes and I am not fortunate enough to know anyone here who can bring my pyjamas.” she said sarcastically while looking at Lonwabo.

Lonwabo laughed, *“No one told you to leave your boyfriend in Cape Town.”*

“Cape Town?”, I asked.

“Yes”, Lonwabo nodded. *“I am from the Vaal, it’s about an hour’s drive away and Sophia just recently moved here from Cape Town”.*

“We were never formally introduced earlier. My name is Mapenzi Muujiza, I am from Kufuatia Mwanga”.

“I am Sophia Ngcobo, pleased to meet you.” she said while shaking my hand.

“My name is Lonwabo Zwane. What do you think they will ask us tomorrow?”, Lonwabo asked.

“Probably the same old questions”, Sophia answered, *“Have you never been interviewed before?”*

Lonwabo blushed and shook her head.

“Wow. You must have done something amazing for your first feature to be so big. Well, it will probably be stupid questions. Typical things they feel will sell women. We will be paraded as role models and used to make them seem like they support women and feminism”.

“Feminism.”, Vanessa said as she walked in. *“I agree with Sophia, magazines normally pick who they think will bring traction and increase their readership. We are definitely here to help sell copies, also it is their first issue.”*

“You both seem to not like the message they are portraying. If that is the case, why are you here?”

“Money.” Sophia responded, *“I am here because they offered me a huge sum of money. Also it will be great for my reputation. I am starting my own accounting firm. The publicity would be great”*.

“Is that it? What about you two ladies”, Lonwabo asked.

“I am here because I was promised a feature that would uplift women, if it isn’t that, then I will be very disappointed.”, I said.

“Your majesty, things are different on this part of the world”, Sophia responded.

“Pardon?”, I asked.

“I researched you. All of you, there wasn’t much on Lonwabo and as for Vanessa, there isn’t anything on you on the internet beyond 6 years ago and even then, all of it focuses on your work and not your personal life.”

So I am curious as to how you launched such a huge business in such a short period of time and no one knows virtually anything about you.

You on the other hand, are Queen Mapenzi, one who rules with an iron fist and an event planner. A wife and a mother, you are trying to save the world, one girl at a time.

I think if anyone here is being used as a poster girl for female role models, it's you."

Maybe Sophia was right, I was probably brought here because I would sell issues. A woman running a kingdom is something new for people of colour.

"Is that such a bad thing? As long as her message is put out there?," Lonwabo asked. "Women are hardly given a chance to speak. We aren't invited to the table on most conversations, is it wrong that she will inspire someone somewhere?"

"Inspire them to what? To be the face of something that will never happen? How many women are made leaders of companies or political parties and all their decisions are

governed by men? Name one woman you know that is doing well and she isn't somehow benefiting the pockets of a man?"

"Do you hate men?", Lonwabo asked while looking around the room.

"Don't look at me.", Vanessa responded, *"No man will ever get pity from me."*

"Do you know what real double standards are?", Sophia asked, *"A man can sleep with every woman in an office building and call it searching for love but a woman does the same and she is labelled a whore."*

"That's not true.", Lonwabo said. *"Things aren't as bad as they used to be."*

"You're right, we aren't called whores anymore.", Vanessa jumped in, *"They found nicer synonyms. Now they say we aren't loyal or we struggle with commitment or we don't know what we want. It is just another way for them to call us whores, something more politically correct. A woman can't have the same values as a man or explore her sexuality."*

“Women are fooling themselves thinking that because it trends on social media and we are claiming our bodies and our lives, it has an impact. They don’t respect us more when we tell them to be upfront if they just want sex and we will be okay with it, all we have done is make their job easier. Now they know they can have it all without working for it. In the end, the power is still theirs.”

“So are you saying we shouldn’t be as sexually liberated as men are?”, I asked.

“No, not at all. I love sex and I will sleep with who I want, when I want. What I am saying is, just because I understand it, doesn’t mean a man does. Men can post in support of women but it doesn’t mean they believe it or even understand it. After a week or two they go back to their normal. They have never been objectified or even limited in terms of what they can or can’t do with their own bodies, how can they understand something they have never experienced?”

Sophia’s words reminded me of something my mother used to always say. *“Not all men are bad but they will also never understand what it feels like to be a woman. They don’t understand the psychology of being victimized and then expected to love a replica of your oppressor.”*

“I agree with Sophia. We have the right to do what we want, we deserve to voice our opinion. However we should stop expecting men to be part of the journey. We should not thank men for opening doors that should have never been closed to us in the first place. We should be able to do what men do and live free of consequences”, Vanessa said while taking a sip of her wine.

Lonwabo exclaimed, *“Men have consequences too!”*.

“No they don’t”. Sophia spoke with a bit of annoyance in her voice. I could tell she was getting tired of Lonwabo’s nonchalant mind-set. I suppose she was one of those, ‘If you’re not with us, you’re against us’, type of people.

“Is it wrong to want to believe there is some good in them too?”, Lonwabo asked.

Listening to her speak I wondered if she was like me, hoping that there was some good in men because one man was good to her. Honestly, if my father had never shown me love, I would have never seen any need for men other than being sperm donors.

It's wrong to paint all men with one brush because one did a bad thing but is it okay to now give every other man the benefit of the doubt because you met one really good man?

“Do you know how it feels to be raped? If you had you wouldn't be so quick to jump to their defence”, Sophia lashed out. “Men rape us, kill us and our children and the worst they get is bad publicity and they get away with it.”

Her words silenced everyone in the room. The passion in her voice showed that she had been through something traumatic in the past but Lonwabo's reaction showed she had her own secrets. Something in her died, I saw it in her eyes.

Lonwabo quietly got up and excused herself. She said she was tired but I could see Sophia's words upset her.

“What you did wasn't right”, I said. “You shouldn't have spoken to her that way.”

“Sophia”, Vanessa said, “You don't know her past. You put her on the spot, what if she had been raped in the past and was working on healing? Was she then supposed to force herself to tell you her story, just so you could try understand her perspective”.

“No, I wasn’t trying...”, she said.

“Trying to what?”, I asked

“Really? Are you two going to gang up on me now?”

“No”, I responded, “I am just highlighting a problem women have. We have so much self-hate for ourselves, if someone can’t agree with us, we have to make them feel small or like they have no right to have a say in the conversation. It’s a trait we learnt from men.”

“I was an ass wasn’t I?”, Sophia asked.

“Yeah, Just a little”, Vanessa said sarcastically.

“Let me go apologise. I’ll be back ladies”.

Sophia took a big sip of her gin & tonic and went to Lonwabo.

We sat in silence for a bit, with the music playing in the background. Vanessa occasionally checking her phone and me starrng at the ceiling.

“So, are you going to see him?”, Vanessa asked.

“See, who?”, I responded.

“Your son. You put me through the trouble of keeping track of him. Aren’t you at least going to talk to him?”

“No. I saw him at the hospital, we didn’t speak but I saw him smile and that was enough for me. Thank you for helping me out”, I said.

“Don’t thank me. You are the one paying me to maintain a fake bursary so he can get a great education.”

“Yes”, I said, *“But not many people would agree to such. Then again you aren’t many people, are you? Everyone thinks you make your money from your events company but I know...”*

“Your majesty”, she interrupted. “You have secrets and so do I. Walls have ears and we don’t want them to hear any of our secrets, secrets like how you plan to cheat on your husband again. Are you really going to do it?”

“I want to. I really do, but I can’t just do it with anyone or anywhere. 13 years ago, things were different. Now everyone has a camera on their phone, before I even take my bra off, it will be on front page news.”

We both burst into laughter.

My friendship with Vanessa was different to that of many people in my life. We spoke every so often and most of the time it was to offload but she knew my past and I knew hers. She never judged me.

I never feared she would expose me, maybe it was as she said, we know too much about one another, that we won’t risk the exposure.

“Speaking of secrets, how do I cheat and not run the risk of getting caught? Last time my donor was drunk, I’m not doing that again. I am also not looking to get blackmailed either.”

“Well, it’s simple. Kill him.”, she said.

“What? Kill him?”

“Yes, sleep with him and then kill him”, she responded, *“Dead men, tell no tales. Don’t you know that?”*

“Let me guess, you know someone who can help me get him killed?”, I laughed.

“I know a lot of people Zee”, she said as she stood up. *“You know I have your back, whatever you need I will get it for you. One piece of advice though, if you are stuck in the past you won’t move forward. You shouldn’t do this if it is just to have a son, what happens if you have a daughter, do you cheat again?”*

She took one last sip of her wine, kissed me on the forehead and made her way to the door. She turned around and gave a playful bow, *“Goodnight your majesty. Also, don’t mind what Sophia said, what you are doing matters. Every step you take for women, it has an impact”*.