

## WHY HIM?

On the morning of June 9<sup>th</sup> 2001, Jakoba waited outside in his newly bought maroon Toyota Cressida. despite the chilly 3-degree weather the distant cries of newborns infused the freezing air with a touch of warmth and hope, him and Lesedi have been together for 5 years and married for 2 years in August. Growing up in families that often-welcomed twins, it was no shock to them when they learned that Lesedi was carrying twin boys. Amid a flurry of name suggestions, the boys were to be named after Jakoba's late father. At exactly 0645 hours Luka and Boikanyo took their first breath.

The known incompetence of government facilities bothered Jakoba even more when he was told that his wife was to deliver through a caesarian section, but being an average wage worker this and prayer was all he could afford. The delivery went smoothly, both babies seemed healthy even though one of them didn't let out a cry after taking its first breath. Yet, the hospital staff wasn't overly concerned. First-time mother Lesedi commonly called Sedi by family and close friends went home with the boys after 4 days in Lobadi Hospital, Luka was mute.

Lesedi was raised up in the suburban area of Gaborone North, her mother was a primary school teacher at Legae Academy where she attended school. Her father was never in the picture, not intentionally though. He died when her mother was 7 months pregnant with her and the untimely death led her into premature labor that almost everyone said was the reason behind her intelligence. She grew up as a kind and tenacious beautiful mokgatla girl, her mother's aspiration for her to fit seamlessly into the international scene at Legae Academy prompted regular visits to the salon to straighten her hair and the habit of speaking of English at home among others. After secondary school she pursued a degree in Public Relations and Communications where she met Jakoba who was just starting out as a Faculty of Education secretary, they dated and fell in love. On her graduation day he proposed.

Jakoba's upbringing was deeply intertwined with the village of Kanye, located in the Southern District of Botswana. Raised by his grandparents alongside his siblings and cousins, life was pretty mundane in Kanye and any form of excitement they experienced was during the Christmas festivities when their parents came back from the city laden with gifts. Whenever it was time for his parents to return, he would cry and wail for hours begging to go with them, to this he was always responded with a beating from his grandmother who would utter the words, "ithute o tle o tsamaye lwena" which loosely means do well in your studies so that you can also go. Jakoba took it to heart, he passed his Form 5 exams very well and left. He went on to study Business Administration at the University of Botswana and through his grandmother's prayers as he puts it, he got a job offer immediately after graduating. He started work and met a girl he liked.

As fate would have it, neither of them had encountered or developed relationships with children or individuals who were deaf, hard of hearing and/or mute. Consequently, the news that greeted them two days after the birth of their twins left them at a loss on how to respond. Returning home, Jakoba's

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mother adhering to the cultural birth traditions, stayed with them during the confinement period. The news of the birth of the twins spread like wildfire through their community, Jakoba being congratulated for being 'a real man', the congratulatory talks however always seemed to exclude Sedi. Only Susan, Jakoba's mother, learned of Luka's condition. Her reaction was met with shock from Sedi and some sort of relief from Jakoba. She advised the new parents to withhold the news, believing that there is something that can be done to undo what or how baby Luka is, Sedi struggled to grasp the negativity that enveloped the news of Luka's muteness. She too wasn't pleased when she realized that her beautiful baby boy had been crying for hours while she peacefully slept, unaware of him. But what jarred Sedi even more was Jakoba's concurrence with his mother's advice, to him it seemed justified given his skepticism that he for one would ever have or 'make' a child as such.

The ensuing two months were a whirlwind of hospital visits and medical consultations. Specialists and pediatricians devoured a portion of their joint savings, only to deliver the same conclusion: Luka was mute. They were urged to learn sign language to facilitate communication, an idea Jakoba found absurd. He remained steadfast in his belief that Luka would eventually begin to speak. Sedi, however recognized the importance of accommodating their child's unique needs, but her efforts to convince her husband were all in vain and she was in-fact hastily reminded of her place in the marriage, by her mother-in-law. Jakoba grew temperamental and when Boikanyo started babbling it drove him off the edge, the atmosphere at home became tense and with hope running out Jakoba turned to a more traditional approach in search of answers. His mother held on to the notion that they or rather he had been bewitched out of envy, so they went to traditional doctors clinging to the belief that Luka's condition could be reversed. Stage 4 of grief is bargaining. Nothing changed, no one changed.

The boys grew up in the same home with the same parents but with different experiences of both. Boikanyo stood as the favored son, he was polite, intelligent and athletic. He was part of the school football team, earning praise as 'a promising midfielder', as his coach once said and what his father told everyone whenever he found or made a chance to talk about him. Boikanyo was everyone's favorite especially his father's and he didn't make any effort in hiding it, this weighed on Boikanyo sometimes. He never understood why his brother didn't receive the same attention and affection as him, did it stem from Luka's muteness? Was it something worth the hate he got? He often pondered on such questions whenever Luka was sidelined and or ignored, but occasionally he found Luka to be tiring and demanding however he would remind himself that he was all Luka had.

Luka was merely 'Luka', existing at the periphery of family dynamics. No one bothered to know what sports interested him, what his favorite color was or what his feelings and thoughts were. He often wondered why God made him the way he was, was he a bad person in his past life? Why him? From a young age he understood clearly his place in Jakoba's household, present but invisible, there yet overlooked. His mother loved him but is it love if it is shown in secret? He loved his brother but begrudged him for being 'normal'.

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On the eve of their 13<sup>th</sup> birthday tragedy struck. A hit and run accident by the neighborhood playground claimed Boikanyo's life. Jakoba was inconsolable, Sedi was overcome with grief. Meanwhile Luka wasn't really aware of what had happened, one minute he was playing with his brother the next he went to get the ball by the roadside and now he was said to be 'gone', what did that even mean? Of course, he knew what it meant; the reality proved just difficult to embrace. The funeral was described as the most painful by most attendees, one would wonder what they're judging such off. Jakoba felt and behaved as if he had lost his only child, a sentiment Luka grasped. Sedi was urged to preserve, be strong and bear more children for her husband, a stark reminder of societal expectations. Conversations were longer about Boikanyo so dinner was eaten in silence, Luca struggled to communicate as the only other proficient sign language user was now gone. One would expect that Sedi and Jakoba over the course of 13 years, would have mastered sign language but then one would also expect that they loved him.

Jakoba went over the details of accident so many times and always found fault with why his boy had to be the one getting the ball? Why didn't Luka go get it? Why didn't somebody's son go get the ball? Why did it have to be him? His boy. Sedi grappled with guilt, she believed that God was punishing her for her complacency in the ill-treatment of Luka and so He took their boy, but she what was just a wife and mother. The problem with guilt is that it mostly remains as guilt and hardly ever as lessons learnt.

Luca went over the details of the accident so many times and always found fault with why his brother had to be the one getting the ball? Why didn't he go get it? Why didn't he go get the ball? Why did it have to be him? His brother. He felt so much guilt, he believed that God was punishing him for sins he didn't yet know or commit, but was just a boy. He was just boy who wished that God could have spared his brother and took him instead because his mere existence had felt nothing short of a crime.

It is so hard to put the blame on society for how certain things if not, all things are done, who is at fault here? The parents? They point at cultural norms. Culture? It points back at us. We are our own doing and undoing; everything is as it is because we have made room for it to be as it is. Luka was a boy just as any boy and so was Boikanyo, they were born on the same morning of June 9<sup>th</sup> 2001 at exactly 0645 hours. There was no disparity between these two boys until they took their first breath and one was made.