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Title : Over coffee

Armed with my CV and glowing references, happy to be alive and to have the opportunity to be interviewed. More than 30 years since my last job interview. Despite being very confident that I can do the advertised job well, I'm very apprehensive as "JR" has a reputation of being ruthless and brutal yet I'm totally prepared to be messed around, treated badly and expecting to start at the bottom again.

I'm there at 0930 early to ensure I get a quiet table, giving my prospective employer the best view, set all my papers down on the chair next to me with everything laid out in order, to eliminate any fumbling during the interview. At 0958 I see him approaching, I stand up and make eye contact making it obvious who I am. I take a few strides in his direction, put my hand out to shake his and introduce myself. The palm of his hand is facing down, forcing mine to face up, then I feel the power of his vice grip fingers crushing my hand. I thought I had a firm handshake but he is obviously making a silent opening statement. I act like nothing is amiss only to see him move the empty chair with all my papers to one side, replacing it with another chair. Without missing a beat, I pull the chair next to me and move over so I'm on the opposite side of the table to JR. A waiter hurried over to our table where JR turned to him and said "same again" and nothing more, the waiter hurried away knowing exactly what to do.

"What have you been doing in the last two years" JR asked. This threw all my well rehearsed line of answers out the window. "I have been taking care of my sick wife, which took all my time and resources", I answered. "No what did you make a living".

Not wanting to do into detail or appear to invoke sympathy, I briefly explained that I had my own very successful business but my wife got a rare form of cancer and needed treatment that was not available in Zimbabwe. The long and the short meant that I had to sell my business, my house, assets, everything to pay for the treatment and in the end my wife died. JR glared at me and coldly said "I'm no charity and sob stories don't go down well with me, I don't need any complications, I just need someone I can count on 24/7 without any bull".

"Then I'm your guy, you can count on me, I have no distractions or dependents. I may be down but I'm not out and I'm prepared to do whatever it takes to get back up". He was busy pouring the coffee handing me a cup of very strong and black coffee. My hand reached over towards the sugar tray when like a bolt of lightning (twack) his vice grip latched onto my wrist squeezing it so tight that my fingers sprung out like a peacocks tail. "No sugar, it's poison and while we are about it, you need to shave off your mustache and you will need to wear the company issue khaki uniform at all times and you will be married your radio, never more than one meter away from it 24/7. You will be issued with a company vehicle and you will be referred to by a number, not your name. I call once on the radio, don't ever make me call

your number twice. You will get one week off per year, the other 358 days belong to me. Any questions so far?”.

I was still trying to process everything when he said “You seem to have a problem with something. I thought you said you are prepared to do whatever it takes, well this is only the tip of the ice burg, I’m going to demand a lot more from you, so spit it out, if you’re not happy with anything or if you can’t handle the pressure, don’t waste any more of my time”.

Lost for words, desperately thinking to say or answer, all I could come up with was “No”.

A hot flush pulsed in my neck, I could hear my heart beating fast, thinking what am I getting myself into. Should I tell him to take a hike but also remembering my predicament where I don’t really have any other options. Before I could say anything more, he continued “You have to prove yourself, the only reason why I’m willing to give you a chance is because I’m presuming you’re past hunting for women, I’m sick of these young bucks who are always chasing fluff behind my back, thinking I’m stupid”.

“Whats wrong with my mustache? I blurted out in some sort of defiant defense. His answer was immediate “I want all my staff to be clean shaven, got a problem with that?” it was like time was standing still, many things went through my mind I was wondering about so many things, wanting to ask if I would be put onto a medical aid, what my salary would be, what the job entailed, do we work on all public holidays, what else I was not allowed to drink or eat apart from sugar.

“I hope you don’t have any pets because you will not have the time in the day or night to look after them so if you do and you want the job I suggest you make a plan, put them down or get rid of them, I don’t give a sh**”. You will need to have an overnight bag, a sleeping bag, tooth brush, soap, biltong, biscuits and lots of water as one day you will be in Beit Bridge and the next in Chirundu spending many nights on the road or in remote places, sleeping in your vehicle. Don’t even think about hotels or restaurants, this is not a holiday camp, it’s about getting the job done without any rubbish excuses”. The pet comment did it for me. I silently reached over and took a sugar, stirred it into my coffee, added milk and sat back and looked at JR. No words were necessary, he stood up and left leaving me to pay for the coffee. Wow, what a cup of coffee.