

Full name: Courage Munopaishe Nyoni

Age/Category: 19 and Above

Word Count: 904

Telephone number: +263782224686

The rain lashed against the coffee shop window like a disgruntled lover. Inside, the warmth was a stark contrast to the tempest outside. Alex, a young man in his early twenties, was drenched to the bone, his once crisp attire now clinging to his body like a second skin. He had been waiting for Grace, his girlfriend, for what felt like an eternity.

At the far end of the shop, an elderly man sat by the window, a newspaper folded neatly in his hands. His gaze was fixed on the street, but his mind was elsewhere. The rain seemed to have triggered a gloomy reverie. He was old enough to have witnessed the world transform from black and white to technicolour, from horse-drawn carriages to supersonic jets. His reflection in the window, juxtaposed with the young man outside, was a stark reminder of the passage of time.

His eyes drifted to Alex, and a flicker of recognition ignited within him. Something about the young man's posture, a certain defiance in his dampened appearance, resonated with a forgotten part of himself. He lowered the newspaper, the world outside blurring into an indistinguishable gray.

When Alex finally stepped into the shop, the bell above the door jingled a melancholy tune. The warmth enveloped him like a comforting embrace. He chose a table near the window, his eyes scanning the room for any sign of Grace.

The old man watched him, a faint smile playing on his lips. He had seen countless faces pass through those doors, each one carrying a story as complex and intricate as the coffee beans he roasted. There was something about this young man that intrigued him.

"Perhaps a cup of coffee?" The old man's voice was gentle, like a soft summer rain.

Alex looked up, startled. He hadn't expected to be addressed, especially by a stranger. A brief moment of hesitation passed before he nodded, his voice barely a whisper. "Yeah, sure." And he looked down and glued his eyes on his phone.

As the waiter brought their coffee, the old man studied the young man. Particularly struck by his demeanour, he was there but not really there. It broke him to learn how much things had changed over time, back in his days, the young were known to be vibrant and respectful. For a moment they remained enveloped in silence, but the movement of the old man's eyes caught Alex's attention and he looked at him.

“Why does your generation care so much about open-mindedness? What is the fuss all about? I do not get it.” The old man broke the silence.

You could tell he was filled with words unspoken, questions unanswered and perhaps unexpressed emotions. These were not the questions Alex would expect from random strangers, it took him a while to ponder on and weave a response.

“It’s a free world everyone should be allowed to live how they want and express themselves in any way they feel, and everyone should accept that and them for what they think they are” Alex responded.

“Interesting view, young man, interesting.” The old man replied stroking his beard visibly getting deeper into thoughts. He eventually stopped and stared at him, with words unsaid, reinstating the once-broken silence. Grateful for the coffee, Alex would have been shivering hysterically. The silence was not peaceful; it was charged, a prelude to a storm of words that might never come, a moment stretched thin by the weight of what was not being said. For a moment Alex had dropped his phone and had his hands wrapped around the mug looking at this old man.

“I think the whole idea is a hoax.” The old man said.

“You have done so well to take a beautiful concept and twist it for your good and not necessarily for its true cause.”

Alex took a sip of the coffee, trying to fathom the words the old man was saying.

“We are all open-minded. That's the basis of thoughts and that is why we have them. More often the one to call someone out to be open-minded stands to gain from such as he says forget what you know and accept what I'm serving for you to be acceptable before men. It is nothing but a subtle way to control the narrative, suppressing critical thinking and dissenting voices. Why is it so important to you that I open my mind? Why do you care so much that I do? Am I really the one in need of acceptance or it's just you are pushing your agenda that maybe you get to be acceptable?” The old man stopped, then rolled his newspaper gently and looked at him again.

“I am sorry I did not get your name..”

“Alex, my name is Alex,” He said.

“Okay Alex, these are the underlying dynamics of power and control that can be at play when someone demands open-mindedness. By asking these questions, you're asserting your autonomy and intellectual independence. There is far too little we know of this world. Do not follow the wind but be the wind. Have a wonderful day”

The old man stood up and left the table. Alex was still in awe of what had just happened, and all he had just learnt. Grace? She was standing outside calling Alex who was now paying less attention to his phone.

Who knew a course correction encounter would stem over coffee?