

NCHIMUNYA SIMBWEDELE

AGE:23

WORD COUNT: 751

TELEPHONE NUMBER: +260976765959

OVER COFFEE

Julia did not like coffee.

She knew she shouldn't have such a strong opinion for something that she only took in cold stolen sips from the staff room mugs when cleaning up after her bwanas. But still, she did not like coffee.

She let the warm rug that she had been furiously clutching in her hand finally touch her temple before she flinched.

The realisation finally hit her. *She could have died today.*

And for what? *For being a cleaner who never got into trouble.* She almost rolled her eyes.

This coffee shop was not her usual spot. Silly girl, she didn't even have a usual spot. It was in a better part of town, where there were no vendors crawling on every corner of the street. One would have even mistaken it for a Muzungu spot had the place not been full of blackies wearing pinstriped suits and one distressed cleaner, with her uniform in tartans.

"Coffee Miss Julia," Mr Kenneth interrupted her thoughts, casting her a sympathetic gaze as he placed a white mug in front of her.

She murmured a quick thank you and took a sip of the warm bitter liquid.

"What happened today, Kenneth?" a man, Kenneth's age and built asked from across the table, already sipping from his mug.

She watched Kenneth collapse in a seat next to him, scrub his face and finally place his hands on the round table in front of them.

"It was crazy, Harry," he finally spoke and took a sip of his own coffee.

Julia thought crazy was a good one-word description of what had occurred today.

She had woken up to her sister's loud snoring, like every other morning. She had washed her face and put on that cleaner's uniform she was so proud of; not many people from her community got good jobs like hers. Her uncle Martin had known a teacher at the school who put in a good word with their bwana for them. She had never missed a day of work, had never been late and had never complained when they had cut back their pay. She had simply showed up every day; minding her own business and ignored the murmurs growing louder each day. Cleaner and teacher alike.

Not her fight, she had thought when she had spotted the large crowd full of the blackie stuff that morning, protesting in front of the Muzungu staff room. Posters and pieces of writing high in the air.

“Care to join us, Miss Julia?” Mr Kenneth had spotted her. She had grown quite fond of the teacher. She always tried to sneak him an extra slice of bread at breakfast or a lump of nshima at lunch.

“No, thank you,” she had replied, trying to make her way through the crowd. She couldn’t even read and to lose her job over these people who wanted to complain about everything? *No*. she had a family to take of.

She wasn’t even halfway crossing the yard that connected the staffroom to her cleaning room when the police had made a raid on the crowd and hell had broken loose. She was lucky she was alive and not in jail.

“Bloody Muzungu principal called the police on a peaceful protest,” Kenneth elaborated. “Miss Julia and I are lucky to her made it out of there alive and not in cuffs.”

“It is getting worse,” a different man spoke up this time, coffee cup cradled in his palms.

“I say we do something. Really something,” Kenneth spoke again.

She watched the three men exchange ideas as she took sips of her coffee.

She had nearly died. Died for doing nothing.

“I want to be part of it.” she blurted out. “Whatever you are planning. I want in.”

The three men paused and stared at her.

“Are you sure Miss Julia?” Kenneth questioned.

“look,” she sighed, “I nearly died for doing nothing. If I must die, let me die for doing something.”
“great.” The first man smiled. “Welcome to the club, I am Harry. Harry Mwaanga Nkumbula.”

“And I am Simon Kapwepwe.” The second man spoke, adjusting his glasses.

“Since we are being formal, I am Kenneth Kaunda.” Mr Kenneth smiled.

Julia analysed the three people in front of her and took the last sip of the warm coffee that was not so bad. She did not know what she was getting herself in, but she was ready. Ready to die for something next time.

“I am Julia Chikamoneka.”