

OVER COFFEE

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Word count : 1150

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Mudiwa, without hesitating returned Ralf's intense gaze which mirrored her own. Their deranged minds desperately trying to escape the chaotic thoughts the revelation has caused, ran the clock back to the day their paths had caused. A time where the two were obsessed with love in a world of their own. That moment when they bumped into each other in the small coffee shop around the corner and smiled at each other spontaneously in ecstasy. The memory of the aroma of freshly brewed coffee still lingered in their nostrils, the soft hum of conversations, neatly set wooden tables complimented by freshly picked flowers. Although the two had felt the undeniable connection, they had both before been destroyed by a love they were so sure was meant to last forever and had learnt not to get too carried away. That day they sat down, over coffee and shared a meaningful conversation that delved into their personal lives that were mutually exclusive yet so intrinsically woven together. From that day, coffee became their signature mark, using a freshly brewed cup as a peace offering whenever they had a fight. They complimented each other in many ways than one, making it impossible for them to keep a distance from each other. One coffee date led to another and another and each encounter revealed to them what they were both too afraid to admit. There, on that fateful day in that insignificant coffee shop they had step into many times, two longing hearts had finally found each other.

When he finally kissed her in the moonlight at the front gate of her house after a dinner date, Mudiwa lost all reason. Whatever she had felt in her teenage when her crush first placed a gentle kiss on the palm of her hands and sent her head reeling was nothing compared to what she felt at that point. This time, the feelings were too much of everything, something she felt powerless towards and it didn't help that his unusual resemblance to her father made her feel safer around him. Apart from the facial looks, his speeches just like her father's were highly spiced with sharp anecdotes and thoughtful proverbs. This was a love capable to wiping away all the pain she had been put through in the name of love before. Willingly, gladly, she let her guard down and unwrapped wholly into the idea of being with him forever. All she could do was wait eagerly for their next meeting, next kiss, or whatever he did to her whenever they met. Within a short period of time a fully blossomed romance had developed between the two and unlike other men, Ralf was so attentive, so free of restlessness. He was so gentle in his masculinity he even freely offered details about his life. his childhood and how growing up without his father had left a void in his heart. At first this confused Mudiwa, causing her to hold her breath, unable to figure out how someone could be so perfect. She paid attention, hoping his good guy act would soon tire him and he would crack open and reveal his sinister centre but he didn't. She thought he was going to be like other single, successful, good looking Harare who were so intoxicated by their own rarity, replete with romance opportunities, always holding out for the next better thing but Ralf had proven to be different. He was fully committed to the idea of being with her and he

particularly loved the attention she paid him as well as her unmatched beauty and attractive feminine features.

Ralf charmed her, always generously, harmlessly paying her lavish compliments. He was the kind of man Mudiwa hoped to spend the rest of her life with and although they rarely had conversations about marriage, they often planned a future together, a future they both deemed inevitable. It was after Mudiwa found out that she was pregnant that they decided to officiate their plans. Ralf had not expected to make the move so soon but he was certainly not the type of man to abandon the woman he had made a commitment to. Mudiwa wore a stylish loose fitting blouse that hid her burgeoning middle the day she went to meet his mother. She was surprised by his mother's effusive warmth and sly humour, something she had not expected after hearing rumours about the protective nature of single mothers towards their son. She hadn't quite expected to enjoy her company and to be at ease around her, but she knew yet again that her full approval would be determined by mother than just her appealing looks, doctorate degree or her wealthy family background. Ralf's mother didn't ask much about her family background, avoiding having to answer uncomfortable conversations about Ralf's father's whereabouts. Their conversation touched on my things and in her mind, Mudiwa hoped her own parents would also be just as welcoming towards Ralf.

She had already sent the news back home and her mother was ecstatic, ordering the house help to wipe away any speck of dust. The day they finally went to Mudiwa's house, their fate was sealed. As they walked through the doorway into the living room, they were struck by a strikingly familiar setting, on the wooden table were cups of freshly brewed coffee with an aroma that quickly reminded them of the day they first met. Mudiwa's father momentarily stared at Ralf and staggered. There was no doubt in his mind. He stood there flat on his feet, in the centre of the room, his eyes bloodshot with tiny wormlike crisscrossed in them. He backed out of the room, his eyes unfocused and glazed, looking into vacancy. His feet were light and he walked as if in a daze, not conscious of using those feet. He collided with the door, moved away from it and across the veranda on to the pavement that surrounded the house.

Mudiwa's mother although not fully aware of what was transpiring immediately noticed the undeniable resemblance. Ralf was dark and tall much like Mudiwa's father. His eyes were large, open and translucent and their facial features complimented each other all too well. Mudiwa had often jokingly teased him about resembling her father and in that moment the image became very clear. It couldn't be! A wave of shock struck through her, a disbelief so limp and bloodless she began whimpering like a frightened child. She was leaving her body. Her arms involuntarily went to clutch her bulging belly, then her aching breasts. The pain struck Ralf and weighed heavily on him, nearing his throat as if determined to squeeze the life out of him. Pain and anger fought inside him, sometimes anger came to the fore but the emotion pain always won. His father, right there in the living room he had hoped to meet his father-in-law. He took a quick glance at the cups of coffee, the fresh flowers at the table, the aroma, the unintelligible outpourings and humming and immediately frowned at the irony. At that moment he wanted to end very, very quickly. What now!