

NAME: NONKOSI CHELSEA-ROSE TAZIBONA

AGE/CATEGORY: 21

WORD COUNT: 1000 (inclusive of the title)

PHONE NUMBER: +263 71 627776

ALTERNATIVE PHONE NUMBER: +263 775 561 505

EMAIL ADDRESS: chelserosetazz@gmail.com

Over Coffee

His eyes were ringing as he remained strapped to his seat. The car had been flipped upside down. It had all happened so fast. All he remembered was the loud crash. There were shards of glass littered on the gravel, twinkling underneath the night sky like millions of diamonds. The gravel was sullied by crimson red blood. Likhwa's vision was blurry. He could feel sharp stabs of pain in his chest. He looked down at his chest and cried out in pain when he realised that a long shard of glass had punctured his chest and a torrent of blood gushed out like a waterfall.

He tried to speak but couldn't manage a single word. Summoning all his strength, he looked beside him. His mother's mangled body was still. Her head lay on the dashboard, eyes wide open, unmoving. Tears rolled down Likhwa's face as he reached out to touch her, but he couldn't reach her. He knew the pool of blood on the roof of the car was his mother's. Likhwa could only cry as he stared at her lifeless eyes.

Likhwa was pulled out of the memory when a cup of freshly brewed coffee was placed in front of him. The smell of roasted beans wafted in the air at the Roasted Bean café, blanketing all the customers taking refuge from the assault of the cold weather outside. His mother had loved this quaint coffee shop tucked away in a corner of town. The cafe was peaceful, with pinewood accents, a muted ambiance and great coffee.

Likhwa looked up from his coffee as a woman slid into the seat opposite him. She smiled, startling him with her dazzling grin. She introduced herself as Luba. Tall and lanky, with skin so dark it looked like the night sky and a head full of fluffy curls that resembled clouds.

"I wonder what ails you. You're so young yet you have the face of a man who has lived for eons." Luba said, her eyes brimming with curiosity.

Likhwa was taken aback by Luba's directness. He had only known her for an hour, but it seemed she often said whatever was on her mind. They talked for a while, with Likhwa ordering more coffee, which Luba politely declined. At noon, Likhwa downed his last sip of coffee, bid Luba farewell, and dashed to a lecture.

The next morning, Likhwa headed to his usual seat at the café, laptop in hand. He was pleasantly surprised to find Luba in the same seat she had occupied the previous day. She flashed him another brilliant smile. He returned it and ordered his usual black coffee. Luba scrunched her face in disgust as Likhwa sipped his coffee, teasing him about his dull and bitter preference. Likhwa chuckled as Luba talked about her love for cats and volunteer work.

Ever since his mother's death, Likhwa had hidden from the rest of the world. He avoided everyone including his family. He couldn't handle the looks of pity that they always gave him whenever they brought up his mother's death. She had died six months ago but Likhwa recalled the gruelling car accident as though it was yesterday. He remembered that he had to receive a heart transplant after the accident. He remembered that his dreams to be a track athlete had been shattered because of his new weak heart. He remembered crying in his hospital bed as his fingers grazed the large scar marring his chest. The scar was the bane of his existence. It was a stark reminder that his mother and his dreams were dead.

He clutched his chest when he felt a sharp pain shoot across his chest. Luba looked at him with concern etched on her face. Despite being reticent Likhwa found himself opening up to Luba. He told

her about the accident, his mother's death, his heart transplant, and losing his track scholarship. He appreciated that she didn't pity him or offer empty words of comfort. She listened, acknowledged his pain, and said, "You'll never get over your mother's death, but you need to learn to live with it. Avoiding loved ones doesn't help—they're all you have. Just because you couldn't be an athlete doesn't mean your life is over. It's just beginning. From what I see, you'll be fine. Live well and take care of my heart." Luba smiled then took her leave. Likhwa waved as he watched her retreating from. His heart stung because that sounded like a farewell.

As Likhwa was leaving the cafe a waitress asked, "I know this is none of my business but do you usually talk to yourself?"

"Don't you see the woman I am always with?" Likhwa asked, his brows furrowing in confusion. The waitress shook her head.

Likhwa sat by the balcony after his lecture. His surgeon had messaged him to ask how he was feeling since he had been missing his checkups. Likhwa didn't want to visit the hospital that pronounced his mother's death. Likhwa hesitated, then texted back, asking whose heart he had received during the transplant. The surgeon replied swiftly, including a photo of the donor. Likhwa gasped. It couldn't be, but he knew her face as well as he knew track. It was Luba. The picture showed her dazzling smile. Luba had died the same day Likhwa was rushed to the ER after the accident. She was a 20-year-old woman who had battled cystic fibrosis. Before her death, she asked that her organs be donated to those in need.

How? Luba had died last year but he had been talking to her over coffee for the past few weeks. Likhwa recalled how Luba had never drank any coffee or touched any coffee he offered. He had never shaken her hand or hugged her. Had he been talking to his donor's ghost the whole time?

He looked at the night sky littered with twinkling stars as tears trailed down his face. "I'll take care of your heart."