

## Over Coffee by Shylet Chabata

Sliding out of bed, she rolls down to the floor, gets up and tiptoes barefoot to the door. As she reaches the door, she looks at the twins curled up together on the bed. Chenai quietly opens the door and again looks back for movement. Success.

She has managed to escape the twins. She detests waking them up early. Morning time alone has been such a precious lifeline.

Chenai heads to the kitchen where she opens the cupboard door and gets out the tin of Ricoffy. Once upon a time being a coffee connoisseur, she would have never been caught drinking, what she had once thought of as disgusting watered-down suspension, but this was her life now. The Nescafe range that had been stocked in her cupboards was out of her price range now. Ricoffy is better than no coffee at all.

With the hot coffee in her hand, she takes her bible and devotional book and relaxes on the sofa. She starts reading the devotional but soon realises that she hasn't been absorbing anything from the page.

Chenai starts reading the day's devotional again. Paying more attention, she sees the devotional is talking about joy.

Joy.

Joy is elusive in her life. Once upon a time, she had joy, but it had been stolen.

The Cancer had snatched Jonathan away from her along with her joy.

With the limited resources that the hospital had, they had fought to save his life. From the beginning, the odds had been against them and by the end it was clear that it was a losing battle.

She takes another sip of coffee and gives up on the devotional. Today is not the day for an intellectual dive into the bible. Today is a day that she must mentally armour herself. Today is a day of survival, each moment fighting to keep moving forward. Today is a day that she must sit with the grief, sit with the pain and get strength for the day.

She whispers a prayer.

*God today is one of those days. I don't know how to go through it. but what I know is that today my children need me. Today I must be strong for my kids. Today I must be able to make this thing work. I cannot afford to falter; I cannot afford to break down. Lord protect my children, guide them and give me strength. I want to return to bed and forget the world exists, but I cannot. I still must face this world without my Jonathan. Oh God, why did he have to go and leave me? Why do I have to be alone? They say at the end of time we shall be together again. Give me strength until then. Amen*

As she finishes the prayer, there are tears on her cheeks.

She looks at his handsome portrait on the wall.

Dark, smooth skin, great teeth, a smile for the ages and a thick beard he took great pride in tending.

*Jonathan, I wish you were here so that I could have the strength to face the day. When you were here, I didn't have to think so hard about each day. I would just go out and live. Just waking up next to you and your attractive smile made all the difference. We would go out into the world together and conquer but now I am barely hanging on.*

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*Now I must share my bed with the twins. They don't want to sleep in their bedroom anymore. They are scared. Gloria has taken it upon herself to be the twins' second mother always looking after them, but I can see the pain in her eyes. She misses you so much. She was Daddy's girl. Gideon is trying his best to be the man of the house. I tell him not to worry. I am the adult. I will take care of them, but he doesn't listen. Yesterday I found him calling the plumber to come sort the blocked bathroom pipes. You would be proud of the man that he is becoming.*

*Sweetheart, I am trying my best. I promise you that although this is the hardest thing I have ever done I am going to make sure that I look after our kids. They will grow up to be amazing adults and they will never forget you and the amazing husband and father that you were. I am so lonely and heartbroken without you. I feel like a zombie sometimes just passing through the day.*

*I hope my sadness does not affect the children. I want them to have a good life just as you said.*

Her thoughts again shifted to the memory of the last conversation she had with her husband before he slipped into a coma

'Chenai, I know my time is up. The doctors have done all they can, but I don't have much time. I will not see the children grow up. I am sorry, I am going to leave you to raise them all alone. We had big dreams for them, and you also have big dreams for yourself. I don't want you to stop chasing those dreams, but I know God is with you and you are a strong woman. You are going to do good. Keep your faith and love. God will see you through. Don't try to do it alone. Our families are good people, my brothers will help you and even your parents and your siblings. Don't isolate yourself. Don't let pride get the better of you. You and the kids will need other people.'

'You don't have to say sorry it is not like you chose this to happen to you or our family.' she said as she stroked his hand.

She couldn't think of words to comfort him. All she could do was reassure him that she would try her best.

'Don't worry about the children. I will try my best', she had said with tears choking her.

Chenai remembered Jonathan's advice. So, she took out her phone from her dressing gown pocket and texted her sister.

*Today is another one of those days. I don't want to wake up. I don't look forward to this day. Just thinking of doing a school run, going to work, doing another school run, and watching the twins at their football match in the evening. Gideon has a presentation at church and then we come back home. I must help all the kids with their homework, after all that at the end of the day there is no one to smile at me. No one to talk to and just enjoy having the companionship of my husband. It is one of those days.*

Her finger hovers over send and then she deletes the whole message.

Instead, she texts

*Feeling a bit sad today. Call me when you can.*

With the cell phone still in her hand, she opens her photo app and opens the album labelled Family, and she starts scrolling through the pictures of her husband, and their family. Tears still streaming down her face.

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