

Over Coffee

By Rukudzo Mapara

Rooted to the spot, face blank in expression my gaze was transfixed on observing the surface of the water. As the bubbles slowly simmered to the surface so too did the emotions I had kept buried rush to the surface threatening to upset that façade of tranquillity that I had spent hours forging before I had set foot into this building. By the time the water had reached boiling point my fist was so tightly clenched and yet I could not recall at what point I had felt the need to contain myself to that extent.

The very familiar beep of the doors finger print recognition system pulled me out of my daze prompting me to pick up the kettle and as I look to my left the brightest, “Good Morning Mr Ndlovu,” came spilling out of my mouth and was met with a very lukewarm “morning young man.” I couldn’t fault him for his lack of enthusiasm he was overworked and that takes a toll on you but I could not understand where that cheer came from. I walked into the conference room just as the second kettle came to a boil and now all I could do is hope that my employers would show up before I had to re-boil the water for their convenience.

I could finally take the time to my own coffee. I grabbed a bottle of cold water and dissolved my powered milk and coffee in it before adding in the hot water. I was a rather convoluted process but it was how I liked making coffee and it made it mildly more enjoyable given the context of where I was drinking it. I took the seat nearest me. I was hyper aware of my posture in the moment. My hands were so close to me, legs crossed although no one would notice that and I was actively avoiding eye contact. I was aware of how inferior I was at this table or at least that’s what I myself. I still don’t understand why this is necessary.

Coffee with the partners sounds like a good idea in theory but it is honestly very intimidating. You end up feeling so small at the table and your voice feels so insignificant. If I could push myself deeper into this chair until I was invisible would. I find myself retreating further back into my thoughts as I analyse the irregular pattern of what is supposed to be woods grain on the table. I vaguely pick up on political commentary that is far beyond my understanding and the discussion of concepts I barely remember covering during the previous semester. All of a sudden the managing partner casts his gaze upon me, “Young man. How are you finding your time as an intern?”

On the inside I am dying as I look into my coffee and the murky brown resembles the imaginary brain fog that I have. All of a sudden I am incoherent but that just happening in my head. On the outside I reply, “I am very grateful for the opportunity to be here sir. I dare say I was tired of this degree and I was ready to quit and then I came here. My time at the firm has been so pivotal in revitalising the passion and excitement I once had.”

He seems satisfied with my answer and I exhale releasing a breath I did even know I was holding. I wonder when I learnt to be so effective at faking confidence. Or maybe it was the caffeine making its way through my system. I still felt small. I think I will always feel small in the face of such gatherings where my intellect feels so insignificant in the face of decades of experience. Perhaps one day I will find a voice. But as they continue they chatter I look back at my cup and let it all pass over until it's time for the work day to start.