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## Over Coffee

"Why do you put up with this?"

"Why do you listen to everything they say?"

"When will *you* matter?"

Sigh... Mbali massaged her temples as she could feel a migraine coming. Why did adulting have to be so hard? As she sat in the ornate kitchen designed by her husband, she noticed a machine she had not tried out yet. "Let's discuss this over coffee, shall we?" she said perkily.

"Sure!"

"Why not? We have all day."

"Do you even know how to use that machine?"

Bummer! Of course, she had no idea how to operate the coffee machine, but YouTube tutorials were made for times such as these.

In no time, the distinct aroma of freshly brewed coffee filled the room. Mbali was intrigued by how that alone was enough to lift her mood before she had even taken a sip. While her general sentiment was that her husband, Tawanda, was a man of extravagant taste, this coffee machine seemed to be a great investment. And so it was, over coffee, that she found her moment of clarity.

Why *did* she put up with this treatment? For the past five years, she had told herself that she needed to work on her attitude of ingratitude. After all, Tawanda had never laid a finger on her. However, he sure knew how to use the meanest vocabulary against her, till she began doubting everything about herself. Looking back, she realised that she had gradually lost her identity over time just by listening to him. She even stopped wearing her favourite colour, yellow, because he said it did not go with her skin tone. When asked what her favourite meal was, she would mention his. Although she had never been a fan of red meat, she now claimed she loved a medium-rare ribeye steak! In truth, she missed sushi and Kariba bream because Tawanda mysteriously became allergic to fish in their second year of marriage.

Coming out of her thoughts to pour some more coffee, she looked at an unopened package on the kitchen counter. She knew it was from her friends Tina, Michelle and Vimbai but she just couldn't pluck up the courage to open it.

"Go on! What are you waiting for?"

Mbali hesitated. "Hmmm... Let me get a bit more coffee first." When she finally got round to it, her hands were shaking as she opened the envelope. Wow! Tears welled up as she saw her three friends on the covers of both *Rolling Stone* and *Vogue*, proudly

holding their violins. Once upon a time, this had been a group of four, but Tawanda had told her that he was not comfortable with her going on tour with her friends. Besides, he made enough money for Mbali to be a housewife. Young love... How very stupid! She had blindly believed that this was what she craved and gave up on her dream of being an acclaimed violinist. Wistfully, she looked at the two magazines again. How stunning and happy and carefree her friends looked! Could she even remember where she had packed away her violin four years ago?

Huge sigh...

"Don't let your coffee go cold!"

"You know what," whispered Mbali, "I could probably have put up with Tawanda if he didn't then drag his whole family into it." Five years into this marriage, there was no child. Apparently, it was all her fault despite the extensive tests she had undergone to confirm she was perfectly healthy with no cause for concern around her ability to have children. Smart comments from Tawanda were exacerbated by the constant scoffing from his parents and sister. As if that was not enough, Tawanda's mother had bizarrely bought a teddy bear that she would carry on her back each time she visited the young couple, in protest to the absence of grandchildren. Moreover, she was cut off from her family. According to Tawanda's family, who seemed hell-bent on enforcing the most oppressive African traditions, she could only visit her family if she got pregnant. Fat chance of that happening, she smirked inwardly.

"Ah well... Isn't it too late now? This is my portion, and I must make the most of it," Mbali thought out loud.

"Girl, take those words back. It's *never* too late!"

"And you are still young, Mbali. This can't be the life you dreamed of."

Mbali began to question what she was holding out for. For her man to change? For his mother to not plunge her into major depression, to a point where she nearly took her own life? For his sister to stop introducing Tawanda to other women so he could move on from his "barren" wife? NO! Enough was enough! She needed to take back her life, her dreams, her personality, her vibrance...her very essence. Although she had no plan, she needed to get out of that house. She would go home to her parents and figure it out from there, she resolved.

"I've bought some beautiful clothes and artwork over the years," Mbali mused.

"Is that worth losing your life?"

No, she needed to leave.

She took a page from a notepad and wrote:

*Dear Tawanda*

*I'd have written a longer letter. but I know you wouldn't read it so here goes...*

*Goodbye and enjoy the rest of your life.*

*My lawyer will be in touch.*

*Mbali*

As she looked around the kitchen, her eyes landed once again on the machine that had brought her to this moment. Over coffee, the voices inside her head had challenged her to rethink what she believed to be her truth and new normal. Over coffee, the future looked brighter, and she could feel positive energy permeate through her. How lovely it would be to catch up with Tina, Michelle and Vimbai over coffee, she thought with a smile. With that, she thought to add one more sentence to her letter before walking out:

*PS I took the coffee machine.*