

Naked Coffee

by avocadoben

My wife makes coffee naked. Didn't used to. Back then, before the accident, she hated her body. Says that's why she gave it to me.

She's serious about it too. The coffee, I mean. Developed a whole ritual around buying, measuring, pouring. Every day it's the same. Has it down to a science. No, not a science, more of an art--a ritual. Drives me crazy. Not the nakedness, I like that. At least, I did.

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"Sin," she said one night back when we still slept together. Spoke in a whisper, as if telling the moon. Said it again, but the second time, her voice was softer and much, much sadder.

I rested my hand on hers. She didn't pull away. "You mean, Zen?"

"Huh?" she questioned softly.

"You know, Zen--ritual."

She said nothing and I felt stupid. Of course she knew--we met in philosophy class. "I thought you meant--"

She leaned against me and lifted a finger to my lips. "Shhhhh."

Blonde hair rested on my cheek. She pressed against me, allowing her breasts to nuzzle close. Gently, encased in moon-lit darkness, her hand crept across my chest. I hungered for her and she lightly pressed a knee to my thigh as if asking permission. As she slid her leg over me, the salty smell of her desire filled my senses.

Long, soft fingers moved down my torso as her lips neared mine. Her eyes were alive with willing lust and I longed for her kisses. Her vulnerability melted me and I whispered, "thank you, my love."

She closed her eyes and rolled away. Two minutes later, she left without a word. Next morning, I found her on the porch asleep in the hammock. Not long after that, she started plucking her eyebrows.

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"The farm's dying," she said. It was summer, around July 4th. Corn, beat down by drought, stood only ankle high. The rest of the crop had already submitted to the heat and turned as brown and

lifeless as the dirt. Our thirty paltry acres looked like a malnourished orphan among the surrounding acres of professionally maintained farmland.

To be honest, it wasn't really our land to work because she inherited it. When the lawyer read the will, it was a shock, but after awhile, we decided to give it a go. Neither lazy, nor lucky, we worked and saved to make the move. The mutual goal webbed us together and for the first time since the accident, we were happy.

The wreck crushed the possibility of having children and driving past the scene grew so painful that we actually looked forward to leaving. After the last garage sale, we dropped the rest at Goodwill, closed the door on Chicago and drove to our new home in Oklahoma. She cried the whole way.

"The crop's lost," she said again, without looking up from her ritual.

I shoulda told her everything would be fine and that I'd piss the corn green if it would make her happy. I shoulda held her in my arms and danced the misery out of her. I shoulda done a lot of things, but like usual, I just got mad, slammed the kitchen door, and drove to town.

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"She making naked-coffee again?" Wilma says, not really asking. Bunn coffee pot in hand, she walks to *my booth* in the corner and pours out a cup Folger's. Everyday my wife made coffee in the nude but I lost interest. Once I loved to watch her sashay across the kitchen while she worked. "You'll get bored," she said. "My boobs will droop, my ass will widen and when you see me as I am, instead of how you need me to be, you'll stop looking altogether."

"Never," I promised, but she was right.

Now I look at Wilma. In fact, I saw her last night, and the night Brooke slept in the hammock, and countless times since and before. In my dreams, Wilma's always glad to see me. Sometimes we talk, others we make love until my pain disappears.

"You know," Wilma says, apron stained with dabs of jam and pieces of egg, "Brooke's gonna drive you crazy. I knew her in high school. She's---."

I work the crossword and pretend not to listen. Hank Miller and Ben Peterson sit in *their booth* talking quietly about last year's crop. Frank and Zeke and Tony play three-handed Canasta on the other side of the dining room. Betty used to play but died one day after getting drunk and falling down the basement stairs. The group didn't want anybody else from town replacing her, so they invited God. They say He stops in occasionally and tells a good joke. Wilma acts like no one's in the restaurant and simultaneously talks at and ignores me. "Mark my word, I've known her a long time." Her voice fills with venom as she speaks. "And if you knew her daddy, you'd know that farm is double-barrel trouble. Her momma, God bless her, was a saint, but he still managed to drive her crazy. That man was poison. So's his daughter." She spun a napkin around a set of silverware, "Ask Zeke, he's a retired cop. He'll tell ya."

