

Honey Milk Coffee

by Eric C. Wat

Honey

The October heat wave has brought out the ants. I find them by the kitchen sink, underneath the bathroom cabinets, next to my computer. They climb out of the chasm between sofa pillows and onto my skin. The day at its hottest, my sweat drips slow like honey, and the ants scurry away. Their legs graze my soft hair the way your fingers once did. That's when I noticed them: little itches on the forearm or the thigh. I grind them between my fingers because I'm afraid of their procreation, though they may just be reconnaissance ants. Twice, I showed mercy and let them find their way back to their nesting. Maybe they would tell tall tales of giants and sticky lava so the rest would stay away.

Do ants have sense like you? Can they detect addiction, too, and know to avert danger? Or would they come back, thinking I would not crush their hearts again?

Milk

Tonight I strolled down to the burger joint at the street corner and ordered the #2 – double cheeseburger and fries – with milk. The man behind the counter, with his broad shoulder and mean look, is the kind of man who should be wearing a hard hat and toiling under the sun with other men like him. Yet there he was, short order cook and waitress all in one, alone after normal dinner hours, shooting his evil eye at me for my prissy choice of a beverage. I asked him to heat up my milk. He told me to take my seat and charged me fifty cents extra.

I had told you once that I was raised on formula. You remarked how strange it is that poor people would pay for powder when the real thing flows freely from a mother's breast. That night, in bed, you said it all made sense. You understood now how I could lie and cheat, how I could scratch your favorite mirror with a razor blade, how my craving could be constant through your leaving and coming. It didn't matter if you were the real thing. You said I had lost my senses and couldn't tell the difference between love and addiction, anyway. My nose bled, I was numb to it, and my tongue could only taste roots' bitterness. The next day, you left for the last time.

The man brought me my dinner and retreated to the next booth. His head pinned against the wood-paneled wall, he closed his eyes to the ranchero music blasting through the speakers. On the wall were photographs of David, the Venice canals, the leaning tower by a purple dusk, all belongings of the previous owner he didn't take down. Only after I devour my burger and fries did I get to the milk. I was lukewarm by then, but I could still smell its burn.

Your leaving was like milk. The sight of your back reduced me to a child, wanting more. But you never saw me cry for losing you. That's what hurt you. When I was in withdrawal, I wailed so loud you wrapped yourself around me and muffled my mouth in your chest to keep me from waking the neighbors.

Your coming will be like milk. You will wash me and leave me soft as new. You will leave your mark on the ridge above my lip, so I can smell you in my sleep. I will breathe you in and you will swim in my blue streams, always towards my heart.

I've been eating more than I should, now that you're gone, sometimes five, six times a day. If I can grow fat and fill my cheeks, if I can hide the skeleton of a derelict, maybe then you'll think I've changed.

Coffee

The last night we were together I was on the edge of the bed and you asked me in that half asleep voice of yours, Are you mad? I said no, all the time thinking how strange your body looked under the blanket, or rather the contour of your body, curled up liked a snail's coil. I thought strange things when I was high and couldn't sleep, like how a snail can be born with textures as different as slime and shell, and why the shell is so fragile even though it looks like a cargo on the poor snail's back...what could it protect? And that was what I was thinking: how formidable your posture seemed against me, though I could penetrate it if I wanted to, like a few minutes before when I had spooned the curvature of your back and grabbed your private. It grew hard, immediately. I knew then you still wanted me but you would not unfurl yourself and I grew miserable realizing that it was only a part of you that wanted me...your body...and that was your weakest part. I stroked your bare shoulder in a round massage motion and you didn't move. I was coming down, I knew, because there was no magic in my touch anymore. I walked over to the dresser and snorted another white line, one up each nostril. Before it caked like dry snot in my nose, it hit my brain and made it float. I climbed back onto the bed slipped my arms underneath the blanket rubbed you all over crazy mad. I was looking for love.

Cocaine made me snap my jaw and formed strange shapes with my lips. I would've given you a tongue bath if you let me but when I touched you, you shrank and retreated so I started talking because my mouth needed the exercise. I told you things from the long gone past...I was biding time...about Cousin Winnie who made me stick my finger up her twat and all she did was grimace until I wiggled my finger on my own, which seemed to be the thing to do even though I was only thirteen. Her muscles started to contract and she barked directions at me like a drill leader. My finger disappeared in her; it didn't belong to me anymore. When she started breathing heavy, I was back in control: when I paused, she screamed, Don't stop! She is a nurse now with three kids but every time I see her I just remember her spreading her legs and being real demanding. She wouldn't look at

me at family dinners except when I played with her youngest. She stared like she was remembering something and I knew then that I was the best sex she's ever had.

I lost my train of thought for the moment though my mouth didn't stop itching. With your back to me I rubbed your belly and pinched your nipple but all you wanted for me was leave you be. You had a meeting the next morning...nine o'clock sharp. You couldn't stay up with me though you knew you were welcome to my stash because after all I loved you and I wanted you to grope me like I was groping you. I ignored your plea and my finger ran circles around your areola and moved in on its hard tip. That is what you like or what you used to like. Still I couldn't turn you around and do what I wanted to do. I slithered across your side. Does the snail move slow because of its slimy bottom, or is it the cargo that it couldn't shake off its back? You flung your arm before my mouth could reach your nipple, and I was banished again. I played it off and went on about how I had never known a woman's breast because I was raised on formula. Hell, we watered anything we could back then to make ends meet: milk powder, Tang, Campbell's, Sanka...We once thinned a can of paint to make it stretch three rooms. Poverty makes a man resourceful. You said that's why I was so fucked up; you finally said something. I didn't tell you the stories to explain myself but because I wanted to brush my tongue against your man-wall and paint your inside. My tongue was dry from the drug but if I had to, I'd make it enough to cover all your skin.

Which I grew tired of in another twenty minutes because you retreated into your shell and I ran out of stories to seduce you with. I went into the bathroom to fix that fan that I had always meant to fix...unscrewed the vent and took the blades apart. I whistled while I worked, pretending things were normal and why couldn't a man take care of his house three in the morning? It took me all but twenty minutes to put the fan back together so I took a shower too. The whirring sound cut through the waterfall and I realized the fan was not any better. The hell with it. Afterwards I went to the kitchen, naked, put new coffee in the filter for you and set the alarm on the new machine.

The sky began to lighten as I went back to the room. I drew the heavier curtain close and took another hit. Feeling amorous again I went to claim my prize. You faked snore when I approached but you didn't know that you didn't snore in real life and I could tell the real kind from the imitation because I had grown up and tasted the difference. I removed the blanket, you jumped up like a ghost and snatched it off my hands. I pinned you down, you pushed me away hard I almost fell to the floor but I came back stronger. I locked your two hands with your back, your legs still kicking. I kissed your neck, wanting to leave a mark on you so you couldn't go to work but you cried, I can't do this. I let you go and crawled to the other corner of the bed and sulked, but you couldn't hear me sulk. So I added a sigh. Your face turned away.

You asked in that half asleep voice of yours, Are you mad? I said No, but I think you want me to be mad. Your toes danced on my leg, your foot hooked mine and tugged it. I was not grateful for your change of heart. You could smell the coffee brewing in the kitchen. I had fooled you into getting

up with your expensive blend and your complicated machine that you should've never taught me how to use because a poor man with skills is more than just resourceful. I had come a long way, no longer a prepubescent boy sipping instant decaf behind my parents' back knowing that I would go further in life than them because my taste was more sophisticated and that I would have a rich man's habits. But the morning was not that far off, if truth be told. It was coming: even the thick curtain couldn't hide it and you couldn't go back to sleep, anyway. You'd just drink an extra cup of coffee...black, no sugar...like you usually did when we used to stay up together. In the morning I would find your cup almost empty except for the puddle where the coffee grounds settled like drowned ants. This was might-as-well sex, and in the end I was going to take it. You might be gone the next day or the day after next and might never come back this time. But I would give in because I was addicted to you above all. So I slid over between your legs and made this one count, all the time trying to keep Cousin Winnie off my mind.