

The stain

by: Melissa Greenwood

When Eric and I were newly ensconced in our relationship, he drank espresso, although it didn't agree with him. It made him anxious. Morose, even. And I don't mean that he drank it once—he drank it daily. It was part of his routine. Habitual. A ritual. It made him moody, but he drank it all the same.

One day, we were stopped at the plaza (Canadians pronounce the first "a" in this word the way we Americans say "hat") at Bathurst and Sheppard. This was back in 2014 or early 2015 when I lived with friends in the suburbs of Toronto. We were about to make a coffee-run because I also drank (and still drink) coffee, and Eric began to cry. "I've never been this unhappy," he managed through his tears, and it was the kind of weeping you don't easily forget.

Today, this line has become a running joke in our relationship, but at the time, that sentence was a noose around my neck, a large object stuck in my throat—the implication being that I was the reason for his abject-misery.

Here we are, six-plus years later, living together as husband and wife, so you already know how the story ends or at least how it quarters or middles. Caffeine was the culprit. Caffeine made him "this unhappy." And yet, since the start of quarantine, when I had to start making my own coffee (heaven forbid!), Eric has been joining me. He's even purchased a shmancy grinder and press, and he isn't a shopper or gadget-collector in the least. Yes, the pandemic has driven him to drink, only it's not booze—it's even deadlier: hipster coffee.

Every finished cup resting in the sink is a reminder of that weeping—the ring at the bottom of the mug a stain that takes me back to our earliest, fraught days. I instinctively rub my fourth finger and sigh in relief. My ring is still there.



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