

Coffee Short

Commentary on Java
by Woody Schneider

Perhaps you could call it an addiction. I'm sure I couldn't stop, though I've never really tried. The little black specks are still stuck to my fingers, clinging to the edges of my nails. A few specks shake off as I type, dotting the keyboard. God, fresh ground coffee sticks to everything.

The electric kettle murmurs and bubbles its way to boiling. Soon the sound of water bubbling overtakes the tapping of the keys and a soft ding pulls me to the surface of thought. "Wait," I tell myself, as the bubbling calms and is then silent. Let it cool a bit.

This is a fresh bag, so I'm anxious. I'm probably also anxious because I haven't had a cup today. Just type a few more lines, lay out a few more thoughts. Soon the water will be cool enough. I've already ground the beans, that screaming little black cyclone. I dump them into the bottom of the press with a sound like a shovel digging a sandy grave. Enough. The water must have cooled by now.

I pour a little splash of cool, fresh water into the steaming kettle to "still" it. This is actually a tea thing; the Japanese do it when they whisk green tea. But I figure they're addicted to essentially the same stuff. And I like the aesthetics of it.

I pour hot water from on high, like a vengeful god. If you can hit the sweet spot right in the corner where the grounds aren't piled too high against the wall of the press, you can get one of those milk commercial style waves that hits a corner, rushes across the bottom of glass, hits the opposite corner, and is sent skyward, spiraling down, black tar. I find this method produces the finest golden foam on the surface of the brew and gets the grounds and the water mingling promptly.

Now: more agonizing. Intoxicating curls of vapor. Type a few more sentences, a brief glance out the window. Something in the entrails of the refrigerator shudders and clunks. My fingers tap the keys tentatively, sending bits of coffee grounds dancing into the spaces between.

Okay. Enough. Time to plunge. There is a slight hiss as the mesh plunger breaks the layer of foam and works its way into the black depths beneath. It dives silently, collecting the suspended grounds ahead of it and leaving clean uninterrupted blackness behind. I use a lot of coffee, so the plunger stops early, mashed down onto a wet pile of spent ammunition.

I can detect just the slightest quiver in my hand as I pour a thick stream of the fragrant concoction. I peer into the mug and pull in a long breath. I see no reflection, just a black pupil, edged with golden froth.

Someone told me once that adding cream to coffee takes away most of the health benefits. But who drinks coffee because it's healthy? I let a drizzle of cream in. Just enough to take crude oil on a starless night and turn it into the sun scorched deep brown skin of an old Costa Rican man's cheek.