



Query

I love coffee. An ode to coffee, a paean to the bean:

I need you in the morning. So much so that I get Coffee Machine ready the night before, so that you'll be ready in the least amount of time possible come the AM. Let's linger with Coffee Machine for a moment: it's a marvel of engineering. The trick spout only pours if the thermos is underneath it, so I can pour a cup while it's still brewing. No mess. And the thermos keeps you warm for hours, but who am I kidding? You won't last that long.

For I need another cup for the drive to work. I use Coffee Cup, a gargantuan receptacle that lasts for the half-hour it takes to arrive. I need this coffee, I need it to function, and I am an addict, unabashed. Right about now the first cup of coffee begins to take effect, and I feel energy, I feel awake, I feel alive, I feel ready to get through the morning.

Coffee Cup is empty. I'm pulling into the clinic parking lot where, if all is right with the world, my clinic nurse will have started another pot. Special instructions: only caffeinated, overdo it on the grounds, and fill up the machine to the brim.

It is full of my black elixir! Time to sample.

It's not as good as the mix I make back at home, with my deluxe machine, but it's utilitarian, a blue-collar kind of coffee, it gets the job done. What is the job? It's an airy state indescribable except to fellow addicts. It's the feeling of readiness, or preparedness, of quick reflexes and adaptability.

The alternative? To go coffeeless? To be like sludge in the veins, to be dull, deadened, slow? To conduct one's days —

especially the mornings, O the mornings — under a pall? Day's overcast? And coffee beckons all the while, it says I can take all of this away, I can brighten, I can sharpen, I can intensify.

And I say, yes, a dozen times a day. *Yes yes yes.*

I feel each hit, feel strengthened by each gulp, lug Coffee Cup around with me the entire day, drain the office machine, restart the office machine. It's not surprising to know that my colleague, when he went away on a trip to Australia, brought me back an Aboriginal coffee mug.

I've wondered: Is this too much coffee? Is it a necessary condition for my existence? Should it be? But then I think of those times where I've turned my back on coffee, and I've paid the price: headaches, torpor. And really, I love that first cup in the morning, the first one is always the best, it rejuvenates. Coffee only gives; it doesn't take.

I drink coffee as I write this. I drink as I watch my little girl play soccer; I drink as I feed the guinea pig; I drink. Pictures of me in albums show coffee stigmata: the monstrous mug in my right hand. And me smiling.

Do I discriminate between beans? Well, I love my Sumatran Roast, a smooth and complex coffee. Dry-processed, please, not the semi-washed variety. But really, I'll drink anything, from the swill that's served from industrial-sized machines at church meetings to the fricasseed fraputapped concoctions served by expensive coffee bars.

But, really, the machines at work and at home do just fine. It's my one vice. Well, my biggest vice.

— *Dr. Ursus*