

A Sip Less Bitter

by sweetflag

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Chapter 1 of 1

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He had no trouble finding the shop. It looked worse for wear, but Snape considered it apropos... nothing was pure anymore. The frontage had once been scarlet with gold lettering. Now, both were faded and the windows murky. He felt a flicker of bitterness; had it closed down? It was unfair; he'd struggled with demons to reclaim the perfect cup of coffee.

However, the door opened under his trembling hand. The shop was as he remembered. He caught her voice and face on the cusp of recollection: how she'd laughed... how her lips had moved as she savoured her coffee. Beyond the same marble counter stood columns of familiar jars, where coffee beans shimmered softly. The darkest of them attracted his attention. They seduced him and nestled snugly in his pocket as he walked home.

Spinner's End wasn't far, but he found his feet taking a less direct route. He knew she wouldn't be there. Perhaps he tortured himself, hoping to find her there... alone and in need of a friend.

A few enthusiastic streetlamps flickered into life when he turned into her street. He could see her dark and empty window. His fingers delved into the paper bag, seeking the smooth beans. They were tangible and comforting... they were within his reach.

His melancholy was disturbed by the sound of muted 'pops'. Startled, he cast a charm, becoming invisible. The rapid tapping of heels heralded a woman's furious approach, which was soon followed by the slapping of running feet.

"Hey, Lily!"

Snape knew that voice; it ruined his days... haunted his dreams. The wait for *her* response snatched his breath and made his heart stutter.

"I didn't mean it. Please, come back home."

There was a desperate whine in James Potter's voice, and Snape fervently hoped Lily would make him suffer.

"James, leave me alone." Oh, her voice! Her velvet tones held such tempting sadness and disenchantment; he longed to soothe her. "Just go back home."

His mind had danced around this very scenario, teasing him with the possibilities. He ached from the weight of them, but it was impossible. He knew why he'd sought out the coffee beans. It was the closest he could get to her... the closest to peace he could achieve. His gaze lingered on her pained face, and his fingers tightened around his wand. When she pulled away, thwarting James' untimely embrace, Snape struck.

"Levicorpus!"

There was a stunned silence, and then Lily peered into the shadows; her hungry emerald gaze met his fleetingly as she sought him out in the gloom. He wanted to stay, but knew he couldn't. He could be content, recalling James' horrified expression and yelps as he dangled helplessly in the air. But he'd feel a deeper satisfaction—a glorious euphoria—knowing that despite the years and his choices, his name had tumbled longingly from her twitching lips. It would make coffee perfect again.

Original prompt: A determined search for the perfect cup of coffee leads to an even more satisfying discovery.

Author's notes: Many thanks to my beta for coming to my aid so quickly.