

Two Poems from *Night Coffee*

By Wanda Coleman

NIGHT COFFEE [3]

1

the devil is in my desire

i go to the kitchen. it is cleaned raw in
my frustrations. there is nothing here
for me. nothing i want

i dress slowly, deliberately
make a ritual of removing my nightclothes
shower slowly, sudsing, let the tensions
wash coolly from my blackness, feel
the water drench the edge of my scalp/
that place Mama called "the kitchen"
above the nape of my neck

the years flow drainward
the youthful twist returns returns to my hips
and shoulders. i step onto the icy tiles
and let my feet drink the memories

2

his eyes find me sideways
looking yet not looking/feeling
hand to his joint, jerks slowly
summons a passionately angry hunger

we meet outside the diner by chance.
there's a juke box inside that plays
our favorite oldies. Sinatra slays him.
Strayhorn kills me. the waitress wears a

smirk as she takes our orders as if writing
obituaries. the man at the counter rolls
his shoulders, then turns to offer us a stare.

it's obvious. we don't belong here.

3

i watch the steam curl to his nose
he likes it strong and black with sugar

4

the hands move counterclockwise

i lay beside him in the dawn, listening to
his snores and the noise of occasional traffic

this is a dark city with people full of
bleaknesses with eyes that blaze like suns,
a city at the beginning of timelessness

NIGHT COFFEE [5]

excelsa, liberica, racemosa

the Queen of Beans and me are rooted
in the same Africa, shade-grown, generations
back/a common blackness and pungent
aroma, an earthy warmth that attracts

no wonder it is treated like gold in places
where it's less plentiful. no wonder the bars that
sell it, and the rooms that specialize proliferate.
no wonder rituals have evolved around it

ask Cagliastro. weavers of spells cast it to
complement meals, before or after- both,
relaxing aggressions, soothing fears,
summoning spirits, casting deeply mythic

here-and-now enjoyment/this strangely delicious fruit of slavery

the charm works through the nose as well
as the tongue. the body becomes alert
even as it eases into a softer posture. the
eyes glisten as talk and remembrance flows

excelsa, liberica, racemosa