

## Inked

I'm sitting in a coffee shop down by the road. The table is wiggly, and I feel my weight pressing against the chair, antique. I keep coming back to my breath, concentrating on it a great deal. A barista comes and asks what I'd like. In a way it's nice. It's nice and warm to sit here.

The daily chatter of folk passes me as I sip the coffee. Outside it rains but not in a fierce way, not like in the movies. The rain is subtle.

There comes a man and, in a few seconds, he is sitting opposite of me on the table. He is somewhere around thirty, lean; as he lifts his coffee and drinks it down, I can see the ink on his arm as his sleeve rises up a bit. It's a cross, but as I take a closer look, I see it's actually a plus sign, painted black. After a while, I get the courage.

"What does it represent?" I ask.

"What?" He says and looks at me, quite startled at first, but soon relaxing.

"The tattoo," I say, "what's it about?"

"It's a warning. It's a symbol," he says, lowering the drink on the table. He meets my eyes. They are big and blue.

"A symbol of what?" I ask.

"Honesty. Realities. Being vulnerable. Love."

"Community."

I'm intrigued, and I order more coffee for us. "Do you drink it with milk?" I ask, and the coffee girl brings us more and I pay. We talk for a while. After a while, I understand.

"It's strength. Real strength," I say

"That's right. I felt dirty," he says and lifts the newly brought coffee, "now I'm alright. I'm alright."

I start to tremble a bit. Perhaps because of the coffee. I usually don't quite drink so much coffee. One cup a day usually does it for me. No reason to go overboard.

The coffee hits and travels in my veins. The sensation feels like a bullet train as he opens his mouth again and speaks. I try to listen to him as good as I can.

"I haven't seen you around here before? Are you new?" He asks, and I feel my barriers coming down with force.

After a while goes, I show him my own, a scorpion drilled down in my ankle.

I remember it hurt.