

Tea Talk

by F.R. Southerland

“You ever get tired of tea?” Casey made a face, staring into the cup. There was... stuff at the bottom of it. She hadn’t noticed it before when drinking, but now she could imagine those bits and leaves on her tongue. She pushed the cup back. “I couldn’t do it. Drinking it every day. I need caffeine or some shit anyway.” She flicked a piece of blonde hair out of her eyes.

“It has caffeine.” Neoma wasn’t offended by Casey’s aversion to the drink. It was actually kind of amusing. Her full lips pulled into a gentle smile. “It’s actually a blend. With black tea and different herbs.”

“And it tastes like dirt. Pass. I want a Red Bull or a Pepsi or something.”

“It doesn’t taste like dirt. It’s... earthy.”

“Translation: dirt.” Casey rolled her eyes.

Neoma tried to ignore the frustration she felt emanating from the young woman and instead took a sip from her cup. There was a taste at the back of her throat, something heavier than before. Now that Casey had mentioned it, there was definitely a certain flavor to the tea she hadn’t noticed before. She frowned slightly and put her cup aside, wondering if it was empathy that made her realize it.

Casey didn’t seem to notice the change in Neoma’s expression, her attention on the cookies she’d snagged from the plate centered on the table. She liked the girls from the magic shop and appreciated the hospitality, she really did. It beat sitting outside in the cold rain while she waited for Vinnie, but the refreshments... They really sucked.

There was no sense in them both being sullen, Neoma thought. After another minute, she stood, dark hair spilling off her shoulders and down her back. “I’ll grab some Twix from Andy’s candy stash,” she said. “And some Dr. Pepper’s from the fridge to wash out the dirt taste.”

Casey’s lips quirked up. That seemed more like it. “Cool.”