

The bottle was small and unassuming, colored in a very subdued gray, and yet the very sight of it sent a wave of shivers down Merope's spine. Picking the bottle up off the windowsill and feeling its cold, smooth surface between her fingers, Merope looked around the deserted room and slipped it into her pocket. It was her secret, and she intended to keep it that way. Creeping slowly down the hallway from the kitchen, Merope peered around the corner of the doorway and into her bedroom. There he lay, looking so serene in his deep sleep that she did not dare wake him, but just stared at his sleeping form. The blanket wrapped around him rose and fell in tandem with his chest and the movement had a hypnotic effect on Merope. She stood motionless in the doorway, her eyes never once leaving his chest, her thoughts roaming further.

Contrary to popular belief, Merope took no pleasure in keeping him there. He was restricted to the house, and only the house. She feared that if let loose, he may encounter an old friend on the London streets who would spirit him away. That was the last thing she wanted, him being taken from her against his will. Not that his will had been part of the equation for a very long time. Keeping her eyes on him, Merope fingered the bottle in her pocket, wondering at its contents. How she had even believed she could concoct such a powerful potion was beyond her power, but she had done it. She had done it not only once, but she had continued to do it for the last few months, only to pour it into her lover's morning porridge. As of late Merope's potion had begun to grow weaker, and she was forced to order the potion from less credible sources. But it had gone well so far.

This lack of free will was not only disturbing, it was sick. Merope tore her eyes from her love and pulled the bottle out of her pocket. It seemed so innocent laying in her palm. After all, it was not the fault of the potion, it was the fault of the giver. Merope's eyes began to water as she contemplated the potion in her hand and the man right in front of her. She had worked so hard for his love, she had contributed not only time and effort, but soul and body. She wondered at her own daring, and at her own idiocy. Something that seemed so innocent had leaked into her very being and poisoned her to the core.

As she stood in her bedroom doorway, holding her only chance at happiness, all the events of the past months flashed through her head. Every time he had held her hand, stroked her distorted cheek, kissed her crooked lips flashed ever so quickly before her eyes. The images gave her hope, something she had never dared keep in her heart. Tom stirred in their bed and Merope shoved the bottle back into her apron, placing a half smile on her face. She walked into the room and sat herself at the foot of their bed and watched him wake. He opened his eyes, blinking furiously as his pupils adjusted to the small amount of light entering the room through the two dirty windows. Merope turned to him and waited for him to notice her.

"Hello love," He said with a grin, "You're looking devastatingly beautiful this morning." She blushed and forced her malformed face into what she hoped was a joyful expression. Sitting up fully, Tom crawled to her side and placed his arm around her waist. As Merope looked at him he placed a delicate kiss on her crooked lips. "I love you." He said plainly, as though it were the only true part of life. Merope felt the tears well up in her eyes and held them back as best she could.

"Do you really mean that Tom?" She asked skeptically. Tom gave her a large, handsome grin and pulled her in closer.

"Of course. I love you. I have always loved you. I will always love you." As Tom tugged her backward onto the bed, Merope withdrew the bottle from her apron and tossed it in the wastebasket next to the table. She should have read the fine print.

*Love potion will not induce true love, only infatuation and obsession. Use within reason.*