

Slaloming the Siphoners

by Smiley McGrouchpants, Jr-Esq-III

"Spare any change?"

I dodge his attempt at making eye contact and narrowly slip past the door before it closes.

I'm inside.

Whew!

No time for that, though, because:

"Hey!"

Hipster-neutral dressed simulacra-person offers a glance and a wave, sudden as a ping-pong serve, designed to crowd your space and "pal" you but I dodge it — I'm practiced at this.

I order.

"How's your day going?" dude says, too old for this job, not grateful for a second start on life, but pointlessly & overcompensatingly overconfident, instead. (He's "been around!")

After pretending not to hear him . . . pretending still . . . pretending yet still again (shifting my eyes to the artwork on the wall, then fazing out, I apparently must not have heard him, it would seem) . . . the echo of his hailing dies away, like a lone, unheard note in an empty music hall . . .

My mocha's ready.

I sit at a table, dodging en route couples coupling for comfort, like swarms of bees, like everyone's set on "default."

At last, I open my book.

Only to find:

You are not about to begin reading a copy of Italo Calvino's If On a Winter's Night a Traveler. For reals! The printer fucked up the leaves! It's actually . . . TOM FUCKING CLANCY!

Is this a joke?

SO SORRY!

Wait: doesn't the book actually incorporate tha—

THE END

