

Caffeine-Fueled Revelation Machines

by R. Daniel Lester

So she leans over the patio table like that model in that magazine ad and then takes a sip of her blended coffee drink as if a director had said to pretend the straw is a penis. As if this director only just shouted, “And you’re a dirty, dirty girl, and you love dick. And blended coffee drinks. Go.”

And her foot is tapping a rhythm against the patio chair leg. That song on the radio that is also her ring tone. And he is a little jealous because he wanted that ring tone too, but it would be stupid for both of them to have it because then how would they know who was getting the call? But even now, as they lounge on this outdoor patio looking even more beautifully tragic than two horror movie torture porn victims, he is thinking he still wants that ring tone, screw logic.

She turns to him, pauses.

“What?” he asks.

“Nothing,” she says. “I forgot what I was going to say. It might have been something about your new cargo pants.”

And it is neither light nor dark, day nor night. That in-between time, twilight, an eerie glow in the sky and on her skin, even though she uses a moisturizer that is also a self-tanner. He decides not to tell her that suddenly she looks to him like the ghost of the animal they slaughtered to make her belt because it would break her heart and she paid a lot for it—the belt, not her heart.

Instead, he sips from his own blended coffee drink and then tells her he thinks that couple over there in the corner is the one from that viral video gangbang.

She turns around. "What, the one on top of the clown car?"

"No, they're sitting over there. The one in business class of that plane going to Stockholm."

"Maybe," she says. "I don't know."

"Yeah," he says. "Me neither."

And he also doesn't know if it's the undecided nature of the light, or something else, but all of a sudden he's not only wondering how to ask the hot barista to join them in a three-way for their website. He's also remembering that dead horse he saw on CNN. So he tells her about the flood somewhere, and the dead horse that was floating in the water beside a beach ball and what may or may not have been a Happy Days lunchbox.

"Well, was it?" she asks.

"Was it what?"

"A Happy Days lunchbox."

"You're missing the point."

"Am I?"

"Maybe not."

Her perfume rides the slight breeze for a moment before fading away. She smells like that pop star in that music video that is also a

fragrance commercial, or is it that fragrance commercial that is also a music video? Then her cellphone is blasting another ring tone, the one for incoming photos, and she says it is probably her friends that are at the mall shopping for those Spunk jeans that are all the rage now.

"You know the ones," she says. "The designer guarantees a little bit of him in every pair." She holds up her phone so he can see her friend's ass in the \$500 jeans. "I think she looks too hippy, don't you?"

He has no idea how to answer that question, so he says, "No matter how small cellphones get we're all still going to grow old."

"That's a funny thing to say," she says. "Well, not funny funny. And you shouldn't keep frowning like that, you're getting a line."

"I mean, what was it like before? I can't remember."

"It was awful."

"Was it?"

"Totally. For example, I couldn't do this." She makes a call. "Hey, it's me...I'm great, how are you?...That's great...No, I'm not with them, they're at the mall...Yeah, those jeans rock...No, no reason, calling to say hey...Okay then, bye." She flips her phone closed with a sense of smug victory. "See?"

"Yeah, I guess," he says. "It's..."

"What?"

"Oh, nothing."

“Okay.”

He watches her brush away a stray crumb of low-fat muffin off a low-fat thigh, seeing how she is built to the exact specifications of this life. She is a perfect twenty-first century being. A nubile nymph of a new world order. A sex-crazed, surface-skimming shopaholic with holes in her jeans in all the right places and not a single neuron that occasionally wonders if the whole parade called Life is completely effing futile. “It’s that...” he says. “Well...”

“So you are going to tell me now.”

“Probably.”

“I can’t wait.”

“See, the horse was floating there, really not doing much, because, you know, it was dead. But they kept showing it and showing it from all these different angles, and the lady even talked about it, and then, I don’t know, it seemed like all the CNN people knew something I didn’t. As if there was a chance, like an outside shot, that, maybe, just maybe, this dead horse was a harbinger of the apocalypse or something. ”

She lets all that sink in, studying him for a silent moment as if he’s an underweight catch dangling on the end of her fishing hook. “Boy, you’re a sad machine today,” she says.

“Think so?” he asks.

“Aren’t you?”

“I don’t know anymore,” he admits, as outside, beyond the twilight world of the coffee shop patio, a child in a stroller cries, a police siren wails, a car honks, another car honks, a man yells, “Watch

where ya goin' a-hole," a pedestrian steps off the curb, twisting her ankle, a black squirrel gets run over by a green SUV, a homeless man with no teeth and a cardboard belt asks for change for "sumptin to eat," a bird lands on a tree branch, a garbage landfill reaches capacity, a Styrofoam cooler, buried in the sand, waits for the human race to go extinct, an old woman with lung cancer coughs in a hospital room with brown-and-orange curtains.

And he gets that he can't really know these things, but he does, somehow, on a deep, profound, molecular level. But such understanding is a lot for him to handle at this particular juncture of time and space, so he shuts his eyes. He plugs his ears with his index fingers. He holds his breath. He listens. He hears the flow of blood through his veins. He considers his caffeinated heartbeat. He opens his eyes. He unplugs his ears. He takes a breath.

She is staring at him. "What were you doing?"

"Try it," he says. "It's the sound of yourself."

And it almost seems like she will, but instead she shakes her head in exaggerated dismay. "What has gotten into you today? You're scaring me."

And he's scaring himself, to be honest, his concerns threefold:

- (1) The dead horse thing and
- (2) During their live webcast yesterday, how he screwed up the camera work transitioning from splitting-the-crossbar to the reverse-pack-mule—a total rookie mistake, by the way—and
- (3) That, prior to the webcast, he spent a decent chunk of his ever-dwindling lifespan shaving his balls.

But he doesn't express his concerns about (2) or (3) because add them to (1) and it would be the straw that broke the camel's back because she hates even thinking about camels due to their questionable hygiene practices. Plus, she finds their humps to be "disconcerting."

"Maybe you need to eat more flax seed," she tells him. "I told you you should."

"I'm not sure this has anything to do with flax seed."

"Really?"

He shrugs. "I suppose it would be hasty to completely rule out the flax seed factor."

"I'm glad you're finally realizing that."

"And do you realize that except for the hair on our heads, we're both completely smooth? Does that seem natural? I mean, when did hair become the enemy?"

"Wow. Random."

"I'm just saying."

"Anyway, I thought you were worried about dead horses, not body hair."

And he knows he's all over the place, but he can't seem to help it. He feels like a train that switched tracks. And the passengers have a lot of questions about where the train is headed now. And the conductor's nowhere to be found.

"Oh, I got it!" she says.

He turns to her hopefully.

Because he wants something he's said to make an impact.

This way, she can tell him what the hell he's talking about.

"I remembered what I don't like about your cargo pants," she says.
"All those pockets, they're freaking me out. They didn't look like that when you bought them online."

"But I think there really is something more..." he says, feeling lost, broken, small, raising his hands to indicate the entire Universe of Fuck-All Cosmic Soup that he's suddenly fairly confident their lives are floating in. But she is ignoring him now and sending a text back to her friend's ass in the \$500 Spunk jeans, and it is dark, twilight is over, and he has lost the thread of what he was trying to say.

And then he is thinking he should probably send someone a text message too, but he can't find his cellphone, and begins to panic. He knows he had it earlier when he checked the sports scores and downloaded his next-door neighbour's impressive, record-breaking money shot.

"You're right," he says, nodding. The train is back on track. In the brand new darkness everything makes sense again. "These cargo pants do have too many pockets."

"Told you," she says.

And finally they are agreeing on something.

