

Barbara Bialick

Saturday Afternoon

Why does the donut guy seem so disappointed when I order decaf tea “with no sugar or nothin’?” But today was a nice day in the boring neighborhood coffee shop...There was a handsome middle-aged man typing on his computer. A lawyer on a case?...Two Chinese men reading Chinese newspapers and conversing in their dialect...and a gaggle of meter maids talking about travel and food. It was practically Starbucks!

So I decided to make the donut guy happy. I got “Equal” in my tea. I put my change in the hospital charity box already rich with quarters and pennies. I took off my shiney coat and charcoal hat so the police ladies could approve of my lapis beads, my baby pink turtle neck, my baby blue sweater and my indigo pants from QVC.com! But the tea was so sweet! And it occurred to me that most people in here come away with a sweet flavor in their mouth, not “nothin’” or black coffee that tastes like ashes!

I also realized you can’t stare at meter maids without one of them eyeing you back with one-inch around disapproving brown eyes. So here I was forced to keep on looking down at my writing as long as possible without pausing, except to sip sweetness. No wonder we’re a nation of sugar-toting diabetics. Was I having a revelation? No, I was having a lesson from the tribe. It’s against the law to nosily stare at people. I wasn’t a journalist writing a feature story; I was a poet writing a feature poem and must “re-learn” how to sit alone in public.

So I must not stare at the guy who looked like Paul McCartney in his 40s who took the ladies’ table. No one else was staring blatantly at me! You must be discreet and only take an occasional glance up at the people who entered the room, then back to work....

Then two blonde women speaking in Russian took the table the Chinese men left when I wasn’t looking. Where was I from? Newton? Detroit? Somerville? Eastern Europe? The holy land? Did I stem from Greek Jews, Russian Jews, Polish Jews, or Hebrew semites? This is what I was pondering as a spy satellite filled with toxic fuel passed over Boston and

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Seattle. Would Bush nuke it down with the “star wars” missiles from “the Reagan Revolution”?

There was nothing I could do to control any possible destiny with the bus-sized hunk of heavy junk. I just had to live happy as long as I could, so thank goodness the computer guy was still there so I could jot down a few more lines. I thought, “I think I’ll go home and read this to my mother...Or I could go read Mary Oliver...But what language did I look like to the Russian ladies? If only they’d told me! But they didn’t and then it was time to leave...

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