

Starbucks by Steve Pottinger

Next Tuesday
what with the weather being lousy
and the nights drawing in
and the rent being due
and the electricity bill hitting the floor
and going through the roof at the same time
and feeling in need of a mid-morning pick me up
to shore up my morale,
I'm going to put on my rain gear
head into town
walk into Starbucks
and smile at the barista.

She'll smile back
because it's good to smile
and I'll order a grande mocha
with an extra shot
a whirl of whipped cream
chocolate sprinkles on top
and to get that sugar hit up and running pronto
I'll have a slab of Chocolate Crunch™
and no, I won't be taking it away.

When she sets it on the counter
I'll give her everything I have
in my pockets.
Sixteen pence in shrapnel,
three washers, one old bus ticket,
and the business card some psychic medium
keeps posting through my door
promising an end to all my worldly ills.
How a man of such prodigious talents
wasn't stopped dead in his tracks
the instant he smashed into the *I don't think so, sunshine*
wall of scepticism just inside the front gate, I'll never know,
but that's another story for another day.

Back in Starbucks
the barista looks puzzled.
She counts up the coins,
hands me back the washers and the bus ticket,
slips the business card into the pocket of her jeans,
smiles,
and tells me I still owe her £5.74.

I smile back
because no-one likes an angry poet
and I take a deep breath
and I tell her
that as Starbucks has paid no corporation tax
on UK profits for the past three years
I reckon they owe me a couple of hospitals
an old people's home
and an upgrade of our creaking transport system.

Minus £5.74.

The barista goes to get the manager.
I take a big slurp of mocha
and a huge bite of Chocolate Crunch™
to keep ahead of the game,
and when he arrives and asks what's going on,
and knowing no-one likes an angry poet,
I give him a big chocolatey grin
and explain about the tax.
Then, before he can whip it away,
I have another gulp of mocha
grab the rest of the Chocolate Crunch™
and stuff it in my gob.

He threatens to call the police.

There's a long pause.
Partly because my mouth's so full of chocolate
I can barely speak,
but mainly because my response
when it comes
is going to be so densely packed
with fury and expletives
we can't let it loose till well after the watershed
accompanied by some kind of warning
because all this smiling is hard work
and yes, no-one likes an angry poet
but I'm a poet who loves words loves people
and believes some things are worth getting angry about
and if you don't see the difference
between those two
then I probably lost you
soon after I put my rain gear on
back at the start.

And this is *my* poem.
And in my poem
the customers who've been in here with me
chatting, reading, sheltering from the rain,
they stand as one.
The baristas, tired of working
on their feet all day
throw their aprons to the floor
seize the takings
and march out of the door
and we make our way
from branch to branch
all through town
filling the streets
emptying the tills
into a large sack
which we deliver to the nurses up at A&E.

We hand out lattes to bus drivers,
fire espressos and carrot cake
into the mouths of homeless people,
give paninis to the unemployed.
Coffee mugs in hand,
chocolate smeared across our faces,
fired up by our belief we're all in this together
and that an injury to one is an injury to all
we storm Vodafone HQ and Amazon UK

for a quiet chat
about the money they owe us,
and as the winter sun
breaks through the clouds
and the windows of the City
are a seamless wall of gold,
I look around,
one poet in a sea of millions

and by god, we're smiling.

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