

**12 CUPS
OF
COFFEE**

A NOVEL BY DAVID GOOSSEN

Copyright © David Goossen, 2007

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of the copyright owner of this book.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

David Goossen
PO Box 45064
RPO Dunbar
Vancouver, BC
Canada V6S 2M8

www.12cupsofcoffee.com

Cup 1

*"No one can understand the truth until
he drinks of coffee's frothy goodness."*

~Sheik Abd-al-Qadir

Cappuccino

Victoria, British Columbia

15 years ago

My first time was when I was 15. It lasted for hours and was with an older woman. I can still remember it like it was yesterday. Who does not remember life altering, profoundly moving experiences? It is the moment I became a man.

I am talking about my first Cappuccino, not sex.

There I was, fifteen years old, cutting loose in a foreign country, on an exotic island in the Pacific Ocean. Victoria, British Columbia, on Vancouver Island, is a cute slice of England on the west coast of Canada. Well, a slice of Disney England, with horse drawn carriage rides, double-decker busses, quaint shops selling tartans and grandmother quality knick-knacks, cobblestone streets and ever-present afternoon teas. How I ended up there was solely due to my

parents insistence that I learn to play a musical instrument, so, with clarinet in hand, I had travelled with my high school class to compete in an invitational jazz band competition.

Unfortunately, most of our time was spent with the boring required school stuff; relentlessly practicing our songs, and being led on teacher-guided fieldtrips to museums and historical sites that would all result in double spaced two thousand word essays when we got back home.

But one day, while my class was hiking from one art gallery to another we passed this little hole-in-the-wall restaurant called 'Pagliacci's'. It totally oozed this funky and cool vibe. I'd never felt anything like it. So, in an impulsive act of defiance and never before seen initiative, I slipped into the foyer. I watched thru the window as my band turned the next corner and was gone, no one even noticing my disappearance. I took a deep breath knowing I would get in trouble later and a deeper breath realizing I did not care.

The restaurant was narrow and deep. A huge mural of the skyline of New York City covered the top half of one wall. A tiny balcony looked down on the bustling scene below. There were three times as many tables as was physically possible in the space. Romantic couples holding hands were inches away from impassioned artists debating existentialism, neither aware of the others proximity.

Waiters and waitresses, arms precariously full of food, were performing amazing acts of juggling and acrobatics getting around the tables and customers. The noise level was a constant din, table discussions battled with waiters calling orders to the kitchen, all complemented by some boisterous jazz music playing over hidden speakers.

I soaked up the bohemian atmosphere from my seat at the back of the restaurant - not that I really knew what a bohemian atmosphere was, it just seemed like that was the atmosphere in the place. I craned my neck around, looking at everything and anything. Behind me were framed autographed pictures of celebrities with the owners and staff. Tom Selleck, Ed Begley, Jr., a framed and signed Sandy Koufax baseball card. I stared at them in awe since no one famous ever came to my hometown.

Having absorbed as much as I could from the wall behind me, I turned back

to find a woman sitting at my table, looking at my menu. She was a perky, nouveau hippie woman, with her hair was racing off in all different directions, the occasional strand colorfully beaded up. Perched on the bridge of her perky nose were a pair of tiny granny glasses.

“Uh.”

Yes, I was that smooth back then. She looked up and smiled at me. A bright, sparkling smile.

“You don’t mind, do you? There’s no other space.”

I shook my head and looked down at my hands. What is going on? What is she doing at my table? WHAT ON EARTH AM I GOING TO SAY TO HER? I looked up over the top of the menu she was holding up in front of her. She was easily twenty years old and she was sitting at my table. My table! I had never been this close to a twenty-year-old woman before in my life.

She was biting her lower lip, chewing off her bright red lipstick, as she pondered the menu. I could not stop staring at her. She was gorgeous. Freckles on the bridge of her nose, her full lips, her soft skin. She glanced up and I looked back down. Finally she lowered the menu. As soon as it hit the table the waitress appeared beside us, crammed in between the two tables, staring at me.

“Well?”

I looked at her, my mind completely blank.

“Hey Melody.”

“Kate! How’s your mom?”

“She’s good thanks. Still the same.”

“What can I get you two?”

Kate looked at me. My mouth was hanging open like a dead fish. She shook her head, amused, then looked back up at Mel.

“Two caps, make mine dry, and a marble to split.”

“You got it.”

Mel grabbed the menu and was gone. Kate looked at me, a twinkle in her eyes.

“You don’t mind me ordering?”

I shook my head.

“First time?”

I nodded. She nodded back.

"I'm Kate."

"Jamie. James."

"Hi Jamie James."

"James, just James."

She smiled and I could see all of her bright white teeth. She had a really nice smile. She also had a sheer cream blouse on and I could, at certain moments, catch a glimpse of the curve of her breasts hidden beneath it. At one point, while she was looking in her purse for something, I thought I saw her nipple! I hope I don't get caught staring but I had never been this close to breasts like that before. I was in love. Or a reasonable facsimile. If only my friends could see me now. Sitting with a beautiful older woman, her laughing at my jokes, then kissing me passionately. I stared at the front window of the restaurant, puckering up in an imaginary tongue kiss, willing my classmates to walk by.

"You waiting for someone?"

I instantly stopped puckering and shook my head.

"You don't talk much, huh?"

I shook my head again. She nodded but kept looking at me, curious. Nervously, I looked over at the framed picture on the wall beside me. It was a huge photo of a joyful crowd at a concert in the street outside the restaurant.

Kate pointed at the picture, to a clump of people off to the side. A little pigtailed kid on her dad's shoulders.

"That's you?"

She nodded and smiled.

"Was it a good concert?"

"It was Etta James. Of course it was good. And I got to stay up way past my bedtime."

Then she started talking to me like I was a person. Not a kid, not a teenager, like I was a real person. I listened to her talk about growing up in the restaurant. I didn't have to say a thing, just listened and nodded attentively. And I was attentive, hanging on every word, even while I sneaked sly glances at her chest. Her parents met while both working there as waiters, and all it took

was one boisterous late night staff party she showed up nine months later. She was one of those kids you see being carried around restaurants while their parents worked. She was a baby who couldn't sleep unless she was in a noisy restaurant.

"I still can't stand quiet, you know? I've been biologically altered so that my body wakes up if it's quiet. Like something's wrong and I've got to be awake. I'm all backwards. God help me if I fall asleep in the forest, I'd sleep right through the bear attack."

Cue my nod. I was doing my best to keep up with what she was talking about, but the subject seemed to change with every sentence. How exactly did we get to talking about bear attacks? I noticed she had started talking again, about something totally different and I tried to catch up to what she is talking about, with no luck. So I nodded again and fantasized about her kissing me.

•

The waitress arrived, placed a cup in front of each of us then disappeared again. Kate continued talking about having her first date in the front corner booth, with her mom as their overly attentive waitress and her dad working behind the bar. If my parents were present at my first date, I would have given up right then and gone into the Convent.

I glanced down at the cup in front of me. Coffee. Why didn't she just say 'coffee' when she ordered? Why the fancy names? A coffee covered in what looked like whipped cream. I glanced across the table.

"She'll be back with the marble."

"Sure. Right.", I still didn't know what she was talking about.

I picked up two packets of sugar and tore them open. Kate's hand grabbed me before I had a chance to pour it into my coffee.

"What are you doing?"

"I like sugar in my coffee."

There was an audible gasp from her.

"This isn't a coffee, Jimmy. It's a cappuccino."

"Ok, chill, maybe I like sugar in my cappuccino."

“Maybe if you’d ever had one before.”

Busted. Apparently, I had transgressed some sort of unwritten rule. Maybe the arcane covenants of the restaurant were printed in the menu and I had not seen them.

I put down the sugar packets. Kate took and moved them away like they were live grenades. So, with her watching, I picked up my cup. As I let the cappuccino move around in the cup I realized it is only half full! What a rip off. Half a cup of coffee? Probably would charge me two bucks for it too. What kind of a place was this?

Just then Mel arrived and put a large piece of cheesecake on the table between us. Oh, that’s what ‘marble’ is. Again with the secret names for things. I held up my cup to her.

“Could I get this topped up, instead of half full?”

I didn’t think an entire restaurant could stare at me at the same moment. It was like I had asked for a bunny to be killed at my table just for my pleasure. The world went silent. Birds dropped from the sky. Five billion pairs of eyes looked at me.

“You’re kidding, right?”

Kate put her hand over my cup and pushed it back down to the table. Mel looked at Kate.

“He’s kidding, right?”

“He’s a joker. We’re fine, Mel. Everything’s good.”

Mel left, looking back at me over her shoulder, wary. Kate turned to me.

“Have you ever had one of these before?”

“Of course I have, come on.”

She just looked at me. Stared at me. Over her shoulder I could see Mel talking to the rest of the staff at the bar. Too many of them were looking over at me to make me think she was talking about something other than what I just said.

Why was I trying to pretend I knew what I was talking about? What was the big deal anyways? I realized I had nothing to lose by telling the truth. Except that I was a fifteen-year-old boy, and I’d never really told the entire truth in my life. Everything I ever said was run through a filter to ensure it fit with the

situation I was in. But this was different. Kate was a total stranger and even if she did freak out on me for what I said I would never see her again. I figured this woman wouldn't come to my high school and tell everyone I was an idiot. Besides, she was the one who chose to sit with the idiot and that made her an idiot too, by association. If I actually was an idiot. Which I wasn't.

So I took a deep breath, took the biggest chance I had ever taken in my life and told her the truth.

"Ok. Here's the truth. I didn't know what you ordered and I didn't know what it was until she put it in front of me. I'm fifteen years old; this is my first time being outside of the United States."

"That's better. Much, much better."

I felt much better so I continued talking.

"I'm way over my head here, and I'm really intimidated by you because I've never, ever talked to a girl who is so much older than me."

"So much older? Thanks a lot. I'm only twenty."

"You know what I mean. And you're the most pretty girl - woman, I don't even know what to call you, I've ever been this close to. So I'm afraid I'll act like an idiot and you'll laugh at me."

Kate leaned back and laughed at me. Well that's just great, I thought, sulking.

"Yeah, exactly like that."

"Jimmy James, I'm not laughing at you, I'm laughing with you. It's rare for me to meet a man who is that honest."

I perked up immediately. She had called me a man!

I picked up the cup again. Put it to my lips and took a sip. It is difficult, even after fifteen years of life experience, to really explain that first sip. Because it was a sip I would never have again. I was taken completely by surprise. Not whipped cream, but steamed milk. Totally unexpected. Another surprise I would never get again. That thick, almost gritty, earthy, smoky, coffee taste, the heady smell when the espresso broke free of the shelter of the foam, everything. Time stopped for me. I felt this rush of adrenalin, this surge of awareness, and the electricity in my taste buds, at the back of my throat. It was better than sex. Granted, I had yet to have sex, but that was exactly how I thought it would feel.

Around me, the frantic sounds of the restaurant melted away.

I thought I had had coffee before but I was apparently wrong. What I had had were a few cups of incredibly bad sludge, made from old grounds, in a rusty tin using dirty water. There was absolutely no comparison to what I was experiencing now. Night and day. Black and white. Heaven and hell.

“Jim? You like?”

I nodded, took another sip and savored.

“Oh yeah. This is amazing.”

And so we talked. We talked about all sorts of things, about life, and school - she had dropped out in Tenth Grade and now she was trying to finish her equivalency so she could get into the Department of Education at the local college - and sex - she had a scare recently and thought she was pregnant, but it turned out she wasn't. Unfortunately she did find out her boyfriend was going to bolt when she told him, so that was pretty bad.

I had really gotten into this truthful sharing thing and told her I had never had sex and I didn't know what I would do if I did get the chance.

“Jamie, don't worry about the sex thing right now. It's better to find someone you really like and care for, and then get to sex. That's so much better than rushing out and having sex with the first person who will get naked with you, because that person is going to be your 'First Time', for the rest of your life. Trust me, you don't want that person to be someone you never want to talk to again.”

“But what if I only get one chance?”

“You'll have others. Trust me. If you were only a couple years older right now...”

She winked at me and put a forkful of cheesecake in her mouth. I stopped breathing. Did she just say she wanted to have sex with me? She did! She really did! And I didn't think she was joking.

“Stop thinking about sex - if that's possible for a teenager, and tell me about your parents.”

I took a deep breath, letting go of my fantasy - for the moment - and told her.

“Mostly I'm embarrassed by my parents, you know? They're not cool like

yours, they didn't take me to any concerts when I was little, they just moved me and my sister all over the States every couple years. And it totally sucked."

"My parents were only cool for a while, then they became old fogies too. And I'm sure your parents were cool at some point in their life. They probably even got drunk and had sex in the back seat of a car."

I almost spat out a mouthful of cake.

"Come on, that's really gross, and I'm trying to eat here!"

She laughed.

"It took me a long time to figure it out, Jimmy, but parents were people before they had kids. If you're up for it, find some old pictures of them when they just met. When they were in their twenties. Then imagine meeting the young them at a party, now. They'd probably be pretty cool."

"No, they'd be in Black & White and totally weird."

•

It was not until the cheesecake was long gone and our third cappuccino empty that I realized I had to get back to the hotel. I had disappeared for three hours. I had talked, actually talked, openly and honestly to a complete stranger for three hours. I had not talked to any of my friends openly and honestly for more than thirty-five or forty seconds, ever.

I felt so alive - it might be the cumulative effect of three cappuccinos worth of caffeine on my underweight body - so I paid for everything. I treated Kate to the afternoon. I treated. For the first time in my life, I treated someone simply because I wanted to. It felt good. I felt good.

We made our way out of the restaurant into the late afternoon brightness and stood on the sidewalk. A shift had happened. I did not know what, but suddenly I did not know what to say. I did not have words anymore. Maybe I was worded out. That had been a lot of conversation, a lot of sharing, especially for a fifteen year old. I looked up at Kate. I hadn't seen her standing and was surprised to see she was a bit taller than me in her clunky shoes. She smiled that smile I had become very used to.

"Thank you, Jim, for a delightful afternoon. So much more than I expected

when I came in.”

“Me too.”

“Well, I guess it’s time to get on with our separate lives.”

She took a step away then stopped.

“I don’t think I’m ever going to forget this afternoon. Thanks.”

I didn’t know what to say. I knew I wasn’t ever going to forget. Then Kate leaned over and kissed me. And she actually kissed me on the lips. Not that I was expecting a kiss, but if I was, it would have expected some sort of dry, dusty grandmotherly kiss on the cheek.

Instead, I got a lingering kiss on the lips. A kiss that lasted a raspberry flavored lip gloss eternity. And then she was gone, a final parting wave as she rounded the corner and out of sight. I looked around, hoping against all hope that there was someone, anyone from my school who had witnessed that kiss. No such luck. I was all on my own. I stood on the sidewalk for a few minutes drinking in the day I had just had, still feeling her soft lips on mine.

Some major structural parts of my life changed because of that afternoon with Kate. That first cappuccino forever changed my relationship with coffee from that of a grudgingly tolerated acquaintance into a full-blown passionate life long love affair.

It was also my first time for being totally open and honest, sharing my vulnerabilities and fears. Of being totally me. Being totally me with complete strangers whom I would never, ever, see again. And in that fifteen-year-old state of mind, synapses fired, fused and locked. For better or worse, on that day I had shifted into a New Way Of Being that could simply be summed up in two sentences.

Only over coffee can I be open and honest.

And only with people I will never see again.