

A Subtle Moment in the Coffee Shop

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I shiver as I hurry along the city street through the torrential rain. While I hide under my purple umbrella, I muse over this typical winter day in the Pacific Northwest. I know where I am going, as I have been there many times before. I approach the campus and peek out from under my umbrella then run towards the coffee shop with the round, green and white logo on the window. Outside the entrance, I lower my umbrella and shake off the excess water. For the first time this morning I think of the delicacy I will order to accompany my coffee.

The wet door handle sends chills through my cold body; I pull with both hands to open it. The aroma of coffee and warm air that fills the foyer envelopes my entire body and soul.

I wave to Lisa, Doug, and other friends sitting snuggled up to tables scattered around the coffee shop. Fellow students lounge comfortably on the sofas that surround a giant coffee table smothered in newspapers. They engage in lively conversation that rises above the grinding and hissing of the espresso machines. Their discussions become more animated as they prepare to face the trials of the day. Students and faculty often come here to linger over coffee while they solve the problems of the world and review class notes. For some, it seems to be the ritual before early morning class.

With my cold hands, I shake away the raindrops on my jacket and join the line at the counter. I anxiously search the case for the special treat I had promised myself. I spot them lined up on a tray like little toy soldiers—almond biscottis with luscious chocolate tips! I am over-whelmed with pleasure knowing I have arrived before they were consumed. My mouth waters in anticipation of this tasty little treat.

The familiar voice of the Barista rolls over the countertop, “Will it be the usual, Vernice, a short decaf latte?”

“Oh yes, Stephanie,” I reply. “I would also love to have an almond biscotti with a chocolate tip, please.” She slides the dessert across the counter and I feel the warmth of the room begin to seep through the pores of my skin. I step around to the pick-up counter and wait for Peter to hand me my latte.

“I see it’s still raining out there,” he says. “This should warm your soul.” I smile at the thought and thank him. Hurrying to join my friends, I pass the condiment station and grab a couple of napkins.

Settling into a chair at the table, I interrupt their energetic conversation and chime in with an old Brazilian coffee proverb from our textbook, “As strong as the devil, as black as ink, as hot as hell, and sweet as love.” We laugh and I cuddle the hot cup with my still cool hands. The heat seems to diffuse through my skin to the very marrow of my bones. It feels wonderful. I remove the lid from the cup and inhale the aroma of the Brazilian blend of the day. My right hand reaches out and touches the biscotti. It feels hard and coarse. I twirl it between my fingers like a baton and study it carefully for several minutes.

I contemplate which end I shall dunk first. Shall I dunk the coarse cookie end that will soak up the coffee's crema, or shall I dunk the end with the silky chocolate icing? I pause and twirl it again, and then, I dunk the tip heavy with chocolate in my hot coffee. I stir it and inhale the warm chocolate aroma. I hesitate only for a moment then gently take a bite. The sensation is terrific. The crisp biscotti feels soft and moist. It slips easily down my throat into my tummy. In my cup, the melted chocolate swirls on the surface of the dark liquid. The combination is an elixir to my tongue. I dunk again and take another bite, then another and swallow. My body warms and my cheeks feel flush. I am in heaven.

Suddenly I hear Lisa saying, "Vernice! Hey kiddo, come to your senses. Are you okay? It's time for class. You haven't heard a thing we've said have you." She shakes my arm. "How did you get so toasty warm?" She laughs and grabs my hand.

"Look at those rosy cheeks," I hear Doug's voice teasing me. "How about sharing with us. What's in that coffee anyway?"

I blink a few times and slowly come out of my daze. "Chocolate, maybe?" I murmured softly—not wanting to break the spell.