

## Over Coffee

By Laura Maisvoreva

The soothing melody of the jazz in the background made for the typical atmosphere in Jim's usual morning spot, occasionally interrupted by the clanging of dishes behind the counter as the chefs hustled to produce the town's best quality breakfast. The ding of the doorbell as someone eagerly entered the shop to bathe their tastebuds in a creamy latte. The smiles that draped the coffee shop as people's mornings were transformed by the delectable fresh sandwiches. This was what made Jim's mornings that much better, before he headed to the dreadful place he called his workplace – a place that many people would kill to work at but where Jim felt drained of life and anything he really thought was worth doing.

But today was odd, a little out of routine, lacking some of the seemingly miniscule details Jim observed as he frequented this café. The atmosphere just felt different, and everything somewhat out of place. Jim seemed to have suddenly developed hypersensitivity to the sound of the dishes in the background, which he now perceived as excruciating to the ear, and the sound of the doorbell a nuisance. Bothered by this newfound irritation to what he had managed over the years to adapt to, he quickly figured the antidote to his problem – ordering his usual chai latte which never failed to lift his mood. Hastily, he signalled to Molly, the waitress who usually attended him, to bring him the usual.

As he waited anxiously in anticipation to cure this unsettling feeling, he felt the cooling breeze as an unusual customer swept past him, plonking himself in the seat opposite Jim. As he slammed his coffee on the table, making a mess, he crossed his arms and stared right into Jim's eyes, piercing his soul. Jim did not know the man, but a sinking feeling connected their souls as Jim scanned the man's face, perplexed as to who he was and what he wanted.

"You know Jim, I've seen you here a couple of times, and I've been able to observe you long enough to know that you're a man of habit", the mysterious man said. Jim, still stunned, was fixated on the unusual appearance of this man – clearly, he wasn't from around here. "I know you're going to order a chai latte and this waitress will bring it to you, and you'll drink it slowly while observing those passing by on the sidewalk, then you'll call the waitress back before giving her a tip then you'll pick up your jacket and walk on out of the café," he continued. Jim was amazed yet afraid of the detail and accuracy in what the man said. The mysterious man smirked, took a large sip of his coffee, slammed the cup carelessly back onto the table, exhaled, and continued. "So, here's what's going to happen, you're going to continue doing what you do best, and I'll be waiting for you outside. It'll take you approximately 16 minutes to finish your routine in here before you leave. Don't make me wait any longer." And at that, the man straightened his jacket, stood up and swept past Jim and out of the café.

The cooling breeze as he walked by sent chills down his spine, as the memory of the man rapidly faded as fear crept in to Jim's mind. Just then, Molly brought his chai latte, just the way he liked it. As she walked off back to her station, Jim shakily pulled his chai latte close to him, and drank it, while his mind was racing to piece this all together...