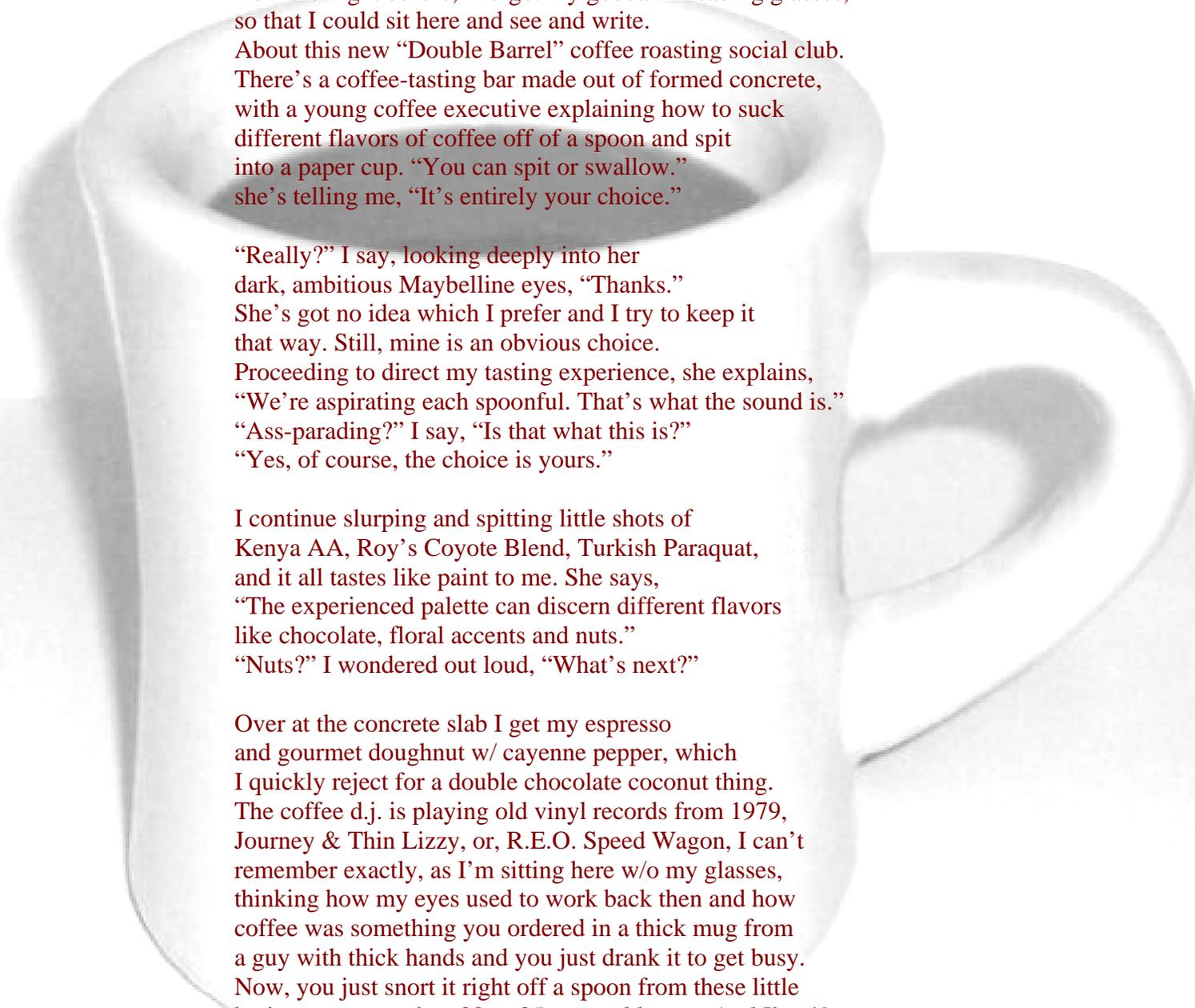


Spit or Swallow

by Tom Stolmar



Climbing down from my 15 minutes of fame,
from the night before, I forgot my goddamn reading glasses,
so that I could sit here and see and write.
About this new “Double Barrel” coffee roasting social club.
There’s a coffee-tasting bar made out of formed concrete,
with a young coffee executive explaining how to suck
different flavors of coffee off of a spoon and spit
into a paper cup. “You can spit or swallow.”
she’s telling me, “It’s entirely your choice.”

“Really?” I say, looking deeply into her
dark, ambitious Maybelline eyes, “Thanks.”
She’s got no idea which I prefer and I try to keep it
that way. Still, mine is an obvious choice.
Proceeding to direct my tasting experience, she explains,
“We’re aspirating each spoonful. That’s what the sound is.”
“Ass-parading?” I say, “Is that what this is?”
“Yes, of course, the choice is yours.”

I continue slurping and spitting little shots of
Kenya AA, Roy’s Coyote Blend, Turkish Paraquat,
and it all tastes like paint to me. She says,
“The experienced palette can discern different flavors
like chocolate, floral accents and nuts.”
“Nuts?” I wondered out loud, “What’s next?”

Over at the concrete slab I get my espresso
and gourmet doughnut w/ cayenne pepper, which
I quickly reject for a double chocolate coconut thing.
The coffee d.j. is playing old vinyl records from 1979,
Journey & Thin Lizzy, or, R.E.O. Speed Wagon, I can’t
remember exactly, as I’m sitting here w/o my glasses,
thinking how my eyes used to work back then and how
coffee was something you ordered in a thick mug from
a guy with thick hands and you just drank it to get busy.
Now, you just snort it right off a spoon from these little
baristas no more than 20 or 25 years old, max. And I’m 49,
for god’s sake. It’s their world now and they can have it,
it won’t last long for them either. Spit or swallow.

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