

Frank Mazer

Pram power. A quiet moment meets coffee in Berlin.

I seek to wipe the coffee stains from my crotch. They were placed there by a four year old moments ago. Coffee House Starbucks, a place of momentary refuge? I have arrived here seeking a place to write and to think. Perhaps to be taken by the hand by some jazz or soulful lyrics. I am wishing that at least this stain were hard-earned. Perhaps the tall athletic woman standing near-by taking offense to my offering a smile and a hello by bumping my table. No, there is no truth in that. Fortunes were not to offer such a swarthy tale of greetings or romance. It was simply the pram terror.

The young monster was pushing the pram through the Starbucks careening from one small round table to the next. Here I sat minding my own business. Writing paper in hand. A cup of mocha perched on my tiny round table. I have chosen the corner so as to be innocuous and out of the way. Thus, it was, mocha in front, that the stroller struck. I saw him coming. The little toddler applying more and more force to the vehicle as obstacles presented themselves. Chairs became enemies to be met directly and sent screeching across the floor. The pram had a mind of its own as to which direction it was headed at times. Clearly, this simply enraged the young fellow to apply more energized efforts to propel it with force enough to launch it the length of a football field.

One may wonder where the mother was during this continuous bumper car journey. I am considering this same mystery in the seconds before the great spill struck. A search of the premises reveals that she is seated across the room a few paces away on the sofa near the window. Next to her is the younger of her progeny. In her hand, at her ear, is her handy/mobile phone. She is clearly “present”. Just not present at “this” particular location. Handy phone public gossip had been captured. I picture her feet sticking out the end of the phone wiggling as she is sucked up into it body and soul. Parenthood responsibility had apparently escaped her after she had launched these schooners from her thighs. She is oblivious to their doings. Kablam!!

The pram makes the acquaintance of the chair next to my table. As this presents an obstacle it calls for a surge. With extra force the creature plunges the stroller into the chair knocking it aside and crashing into the table in front of me. In an instant I have the joy of seeing the mocha become a part of my wardrobe. My attempt at moving aside is a failure. I may be considered an athlete of some coordination but I was no match for the force of gravity in union with pram power. My awkward move arrives too late.

Now don't get me wrong. I enjoy pramming. I have frequently delighted in the feeling of cruising along behind the pram I am pushing. Enjoying the moment with the little passenger and the sense of gliding forth. I have been thrilled to push my young grandson along not so long ago, in this instance such a sensation does not encompass my mini-world.

The pram plunges off to careen its way across the room. My exercise in futility is to look toward the mother creature to see if she had taken notice of her beloved's rampage. Not a chance. She grins as he landed his craft into her table while she journeyed through her phone. I try to determine my next move.

Dare I stand and proceed to the restroom to wash off the stain across the front of my pants? I can see the scenario becoming worse in that event. No matter, there is no restroom in this place. I consider standing for a gracious quick exit. I take a deep breath to gather my wits I stand up, dab at the wettest of the stain as I prepare to walk out as unnoticed as possible. As I am about to walk I look up and note a young mother seated in the table in the center of the room three meters away with her infant in her arms. She is suckling her young one. She is looking directly at me. Our eyes meet. There is disgust in her eyes. I look away not wanting to appear to have noticed her or to be in the least interested in what she is up to as I had to navigate my way between tables. She seems to have assumed otherwise. Yet she is also seated in the middle of the room for all of us to see. She is clearly looking around proudly pursuing her motherly duty. I do not want to seem to have noted the mothering in our midst. I find myself feeling awkward and utterly self-conscious as I quickly turn right trying to act casual as I pass this woman glaring at me with her shirt pulled up over her shoulder.

I hesitate. I must focus on a composed exit in the direction of the doors past a number of people seated at tables. A crashing

sound brings me back some perspective. The stroller stalker is coming around the room for another circuit. I leap into action, tugging tightly on my half-opened back pack. I stride toward the door acting dignified, proud and cavalier as if the people staring at my coffee crotch see nothing. The effort fails. I push and push on the door which needs to be pulled. In the misguided effort, my nose becomes almost intimately acquainted with the glass door. Eventually, I plunge out into the busy pedestrian zone and the two kilometer walk home telling myself to focus on the joys of pram power which I have shared in the past. I carry with me the ever present appreciation of a rare quiet moment now and then in the coffee house.