

Waiting for the work on my old truck to be completed, I nurse a cup of green tea (for a change) in a Tim Hortons on Albert Street in the North end of Central Regina. We should all have to do such once a week until compassion replaces our rejection of so many hurting people shamefully lost in our society.

The young Indigenous woman sitting across from me has all the components of classic beauty. Yet on those long legs she has open sores that she keeps fussing with; do you think she has seen a doctor? The tattoos showcasing her bosom, though better quality than most, do not make her look more beautiful to me. Her tied-up hair is unkempt. She projects spiritedness continually, but her state of mind is shaky. Forgive me if I am wrong—I would not hurt her for the world—but the reasonable question (I'm sure she encounters too often) in Regina North of the Tracks is if she could only make “real” money turning tricks, mostly for unsavory White men, yet is in such an unstable/unhealthy state that she wouldn't bring top dollar for her pimp. Give her respect and dignity I beg, but isn't she (maybe-likely) tragic? When outer beauty is under duress this is easy to notice. But what about when that violated beauty is only inner, and obscured? When that beauty is frail and faint, seemingly history?

Beside her, a couple of tables away, uneasily sits an older Indigenous woman who looks: (a) FASD (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder), and (b) high, or burned out from drugs, or both. Beside her a feeble older White man tries erratically to be congenial; they obviously share a life space somehow. He too looks buzzed, or burned out, or both. She erupts regularly cursing, angry that “My daughter is dead!” She jumps up and kicks the “Wet Floor” sign on the way out.

The Filipino staff cleaning the tables, determined to remain professional in this volatile mix, erupt in frustration with her antics after having likely endured similar every day. All the staff, except for a dissociated-looking big White guy, apparently a supervisor doing his best to not see things (he doesn't want to deal with), are immigrants. One, an energetic young African woman with long braided cornrows (extensions?) tied up serves the drive-through window; clearly the preferred workspace and clientele in the shop. At the table beside me an older East African man silently cradles his coffee cup till he (thinks he) can sustain his welcome no longer, shuffling out in his sneakers and shabby sweatpants maintaining his dignity in a rumpled Value Village suit jacket. I suspect people scarcely see him. He was in no danger, and might have sat there all day long; only his own sense of meaning in the world told him he needed to move along.

Heading out to cross a busy thoroughfare at the lights, I witness two young Indigenous women, high and/or borderline psychotic, heedlessly crossing the intersection diagonally, not even trying to dodge traffic. (One had been in Timmy's earlier to finagle use of the locked washroom.) Drivers, mostly male, dodge them, blaring their horns. This prompts middle-digit dramatic responses with profanity, a pleasing outcome for these angry souls. The only power they have left is to obstruct traffic annoying people, swearing back at them. Risking their lives in traffic adds excitement, puts an exclamation point on their (uncertain) existence, saying perhaps (defiant to the world that has no desirable place for them) "I don't care if I live. Run me over, you \_\_\_\_, and make us both feel better!"

This is what we have ended up with in too many places with too many people. They should not anger us. Rather, this should break our anguished, grieving hearts.