

# Old Habits

*at the coffee shop*

Had he been Clark Gable smooth  
or Charlie Chaplin comical,  
it might not have been so bad—  
at least that way it would have seemed  
a movie—the leads, the customers as extras,  
the background music, lights, and all.

But since his flannel shirt  
was brain-dead grey,  
and the bristled flesh of his face  
the colour of cold sink water  
on its way down the drain,  
even a documentary was incredible.

And she? She was busy as all heck,  
with coffee pots running on empty,  
and the drive-through backing up  
nine cars deep, and the new part-timer  
ladling soup slow as an iceberg  
melting at the pole.

She was just getting by to quitting time,  
then rushing home to get the dinner on,  
so I was glad she didn't flinch  
but simply stared him down, curled a lip,  
blew out a little puff of air,  
then slapped his change upon the counter top.

And he? He slid the coffee from the glass  
and left a muddy smear,  
like the smirk that spilt across his face  
when he loudly cracked for us to overhear,  
“They don't even say ‘no’ any more,  
when an old fella asks them for a kiss.”

*Brent MacLaine*

