

Myles Gordon

Franz Wright Comes To Starbucks

There I was in Starbucks, headphones plugged into my Macbook listening to the special I-tunes soundtrack I played when I tried to write, watching the flow of customers' mouths smiling, talking, laughing while my music spilled into them like echoes through a stethoscope, I was trying to let the day and the music seep into me, and spill it back out defined somehow and ordered in some way, when I walked Franz Wright, tentatively, with that air of peculiarity he has to have given who he is and who his father was and what he writes about... incongruous to say the least that he walked into this particular Starbucks, in upper-crust Chestnut Hill, frequented by businessmen and soccer moms, assorted local celebrities like Red Sox manager, Terry Francona, Jonathan Kraft, son of Patriots owner Robert Kraft, Pat Lyons, who owns all of Lansdowne Street, that klatch of otherworldly wealthy guys including one from Iran and one from Israel who shmooze every morning over Wall Street Journals, their cell phones spread on the table receiving calls from international markets... there is an unwritten rule here to leave the celebrities alone when they come in, so nobody bothers Francona, except those times maybe when the Sox are in the playoffs and if you catch his eye in line you maybe just whisper *good luck*, still there's a lot of pretending not to look... But there wasn't even that with Franz Wright, there wasn't that subtle lifting of the eyeballs from Caramel Macchiatos, there weren't the assorted whisperings that *Franz Wright* is here and he won the Pulitzer Prize and his father was James Wright and as remarkable as Franz may be as a poet he'll never live up to that legacy and what pressure that must be... There he was at the counter, his hair slicked back, black and grey and thinning, a slight depressive shuffle ... There he was, Franz Wright who stood at the edge of the stage at the Middle East club in Central Square just a few months ago and said he wouldn't read until everyone was quiet and stood and waited - like Mufasa in *Lion King* standing on the edge of the cliff sternly looking over his assembled forest minions to make his pronouncements - until the clatter eventually stopped and the forks and knives stopped plinking against the porcelain plates and the bartender stopped adding seltzer to the drinks, and he recited and read - and I drank it in, not daring to touch a utensil... now here he was in the last place I'd expect him to be, looking at the barista with that cold meticulous lizard eye I imagined he looks at half the world, half smiling in the bemused

way at the phenomena that is Starbucks, particularly one in a neighborhood that one can assume isn't readily touched by poetry, glancing, looking at the pretentious beverage names like Caffé Americano, Starbucks Doubleshot, at the informally well dressed clan of patrons, the ease of their entitlement and unquestionable affable superiority, while he in a worn out, blue cardigan, black jeans and black shoes was recognized by no one but me ... When all of a sudden I saw he was watching me with that same little half grin he had reading the names of the drinks, his brow furrowed a bit into curved rows of wrinkles that looked like worms beneath the skin of his forehead, looking at me sitting in my shorts and sandals and red jersey on a work day plunking my Mac computer, and I panicked; I felt like a head of lettuce in front of a rabbit because I knew he was making those computations in his head sizing me up and lumping me in with the rest of the crowd here and I wanted to say to him, no, I'm not like these others here, I'm like you, strip mining the heart of the matter to see what wounds lay gleaming beneath, I'm like you, and besides, I stopped talking at your poetry reading and I paid attention and I even bought your book – not the one that won the Pulitzer – but that other one that those in the know say is much better

Myles Gordon is a writer and teacher living in Newton, Massachusetts. Prior to teaching, Myles worked as a television producer, earning four New England Emmy Awards for his work at Boston's ABC Television affiliate. He also co-produced the independent documentary *Touching Lives: Portraits of Deafblind People*. He holds a Master of Education from The University of Massachusetts, in Boston, and a Master of Fine Arts from The Vermont College of Fine Arts. He has published poetry in several periodicals and is a past honorable mention for the AWP Intro Award in poetry. He is a winner of the Grolier Poetry Prize, a winner of the Helen Kay Chapbook Competition from Evening Street Press (Dublin Ohio), and winner of the Patricia Bibby First Book Award from Tebot Bach Press (Huntington Beach, CA).