"We Are the Last Minority" Say Surrealist Poets

by Con Chapman

BOSTON. It's a typical busy morning at Popsie's, a hole-in-the-wall coffee and muffin shop in an alley off Devonshire Street here. "You got to be fast," says Popsie Demotropoulos, the 48-year-old grandmother who has run the place for two decades, and who can recite her customers' orders the moment they hit her doorstep.

"Talk to the hand, or pull my underpants over your head!"

"Regular light with sugar, cranberry," she shouts as she recognizes a businessman in a grey winter coat as he crosses the threshold, but then her face clouds over. "Uh-oh--trouble again," she says wearily.

Behind the man whose order is now ready and waiting in a paper bag on the counter is Alphonse X-Lautrec, a surrealist poet who makes his living as a security guard at the Boston Public Library. "I

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need this like I need a hole in my head," Popsie says as she waits for the little man in the bowler hat to reach the counter.

"I'll have the knockwurst with a side of gypsum and a sense of ennui, thanks."

"My sister's parrot admires your armpit," X-Lautrec says, as Popsie simmers. "Would you be so kind as to nail an avocado seed to a cup of black coffee and . . ."

From the kitchen emerges Demetrios, Popsie's husband, his face red before he speaks a word. "You, I told you--out! No coffee here--go someplace where they understand you."

A line of patrons has formed behind X-Lautrec, and some are already looking at their watches even though the delay caused by his flight of fancy has added at most thirty seconds to their commute. "C'mon pal--this is no place for you," growls a burly stockbroker who needs to be at his desk to check European stock prices before U.S. markets open.

Boston City Hall: "You only got 5 outta da required 2 forms. You gotta go to da Dada department."

"Fine," X-Lautrec snaps, clearly annoyed that he must leave while others are served. "But remember this--a fountain pen is no substitute for a pair of earrings, unless you are trying to dig a cesspool!"

"Same to you, man--whatever that means!" yells a young man who works at a sunglass store on Washington Street. "Why don't you just talk normally instead of screwing things up for other people!"

X-Lautrec and his fellow Surrealist poets say they are the most neglected minority in Boston, which officially recognizes both garden-variety ethnic and racial groups in its anti-discrimination laws as well as others, such as Eskimos and Aleutian Islanders, whose members within city limits rarely break into double figures. "Don't get me wrong, some of my best friends are surrealist poets," says Al DiScalzo, the city's Director of Licensing and Enforcement. "But this isn't something they're born with, like the transgenders goin' into a different public bathroom dependin' on which day of the week it is."

Some surrealists say they will take the path chosen by many young parents, who leave the city for the suburbs once their children reach school age. "My weasel is gifted," says Normand Benarksy, who decamped to leafy-green Needham last fall. "Also,

your nose hairs tell me the sky has its submarines that we cannot know."

"Did he just say my hatrack had violated his ancestors?"

Benarksy remains "out and proud" about his craft, however, a fact that makes things difficult as he tries to purchase snow tires at a metrowest service station. "What kinda car you got?" asks Ed Dwelp, the assistant manager on counter duty.

"To know my car," Benarsky says with a sigh, "is to know your aunt's sofa cushions have squirrels under them."