

Voltaire Drinks Thirty Cups of Coffee

by Jason Lee Norman

Voltaire usually drinks thirty cups of coffee per day. There are two identical coffeemakers in the kitchen and they are both programmed simultaneously to begin brewing coffee at six in the morning. Each pot holds about five cups of coffee. Voltaire takes his morning coffee black. He likes strong black coffee. In the morning he drinks black coffee standing up in front of the microwave. He looks at his reflection in the microwave and sometimes pretends that his head is inside the microwave. Voltaire drinks his coffee standing up in front of the microwave and he likes to hold one hand on his chest where his heart is while he drinks. He likes to feel his heartbeat quicken and then he imagines that he is a machine or something mechanical. He imagines that he is something man made like a car or a lawnmower and that as long as he has enough coffee, he can live forever. Sometimes Voltaire will put his hand across his throat while he drinks coffee. He likes to feel his throat get hot as the hot coffee goes down his throat. If he closes his throat so that just a small amount of coffee goes down at a time then he can feel his head become very hot as well.

Voltaire does all these things because he loves coffee. He likes to think of coffee as fuel and he likes to believe (hope) that he is something that was made by man instead of by God. If Voltaire were mechanical then all he would need to do was make sure he had enough coffee and then he could live forever. If Voltaire was made by God, then that meant that he would one day die and it didn't matter how much coffee he had drank in his whole life. Voltaire never believed in Heaven and even if there were a Heaven, it probably wouldn't have any coffee in it.

Voltaire likes to spend the latter part of the morning and the early part of the afternoon in a diner with a buzzing neon sign. Outside of

his own house Voltaire loves to put a load of sugar and non-dairy creamer in his coffee. He piles the empty packets of sugar on one side of the table and the packets of non-dairy creamer on the other side of the table. He lays his spoon on one of the piles of empty packets and stares at the light brown colored lake that pools in the deepest part of the spoon. Other diners have glass containers of sugar with a metal lid and a metal flap that opens when you turn it upside down. Voltaire hates those containers of sugar. He's seen people who hold their spoons underneath the container and pour the sugar onto the spoon and he doesn't like that. The sugar in those containers sometimes hardens into little nuggets and Voltaire hates that.

When Voltaire drinks coffee in a diner (sometimes up to ten cups) he likes to think about where coffee comes from. He has never seen a coffee plant or a coffee bean before. He knows that coffee comes from South and Central America but he has no idea how much space a plantation would take up. All Voltaire thinks about is how much coffee there is in the world and how much surface area of the world is occupied by coffee plantations. In order to have machines in this world, Voltaire thought, one must have fuel for all of those machines. What happens when we run out of fuel? When Voltaire is finished drinking coffee in the diner he looks at the bottom of his coffee cup and all he can see is tiny sparkling granules of sugar. Somebody once told Voltaire that when some people drink tea that they can sometimes see the future written out in the pattern of the spent leaves at the bottom of the cup. When Voltaire looks at the bottom of his coffee cup he can't see anything.

When Voltaire comes back to his house sometime in the evening he likes to sit in his favorite chair and drink coffee. He cannot relax until he's had at least five cups. This is when Voltaire finally lets himself believe that he is anything else other than a machine. He allows himself to imagine his blood being replaced by black coffee and his bones floating in something other than hydraulic fluid. He reclines in his chair and begins to feel like he is in a very warm bath. He sips his coffee very carefully with one hand and puts his other

hand over his heart. He is a machine again, a machine that is powering down like a locomotive coming into the station after having traveled a very long distance. In the train station the sound of the engine chugging slows down and slows down some more until all that anyone can hear is a satisfied hiss and all they can see is steam.

