

Coffee Talk Construction

A Fair Trade play by Christina Dyrland Smith

The scene opens with a blank stage. There may be large buckets with boards laid across them, or other items commonly found at a construction site, forming a makeshift bench. Various tools, etc. might also be nearby. It should be apparent by the mens' clothing that they are construction workers. Each is carrying a lunch container of some kind. Al will also carry in two identical paper coffee cups with lids. Lou carries a thermos. Bob enters and takes a seat along the bench, or whatever is available. He calls up the aisle to Al.

Bob: Hey, Al! Hurry up with that stuff, will ya? We only got a half-hour, ya know!

Al: (entering from the center aisle) I'm coming, I'm coming! (hands a coffee cup to Bob) Here. (sits)

Bob: (holding up the cup) Aaaahhhh...Nectar of the sewers! (sniffs) Smells like roofing tar—must be from Rosie's.

Al: Where else you gonna get coffee around here?

Bob: I know...I keep dreaming that we're building a Starbucks instead of another bank.

Al: Yeah, another bank—with lousy coffee! (both laugh as Lou enters from SL)

Lou: What's so funny? (sits)

Bob: Well, if you hadn't taken so long in the john, you'd know.

Al: It's this coffee from across the street—it's a joke!

Lou: Heh—enjoy that, 'cause I brought my own today. (other guys make “ooooh” noises)

Bob: What?—did you get tired of drinking paint thinner?

Al: You're not switching to decaf, are you?

Lou: No, no—nothing like that. But this is better than that mud you guys are drinking.

Bob: Anything is better than this stuff (takes a sip, gulps hard) You practically have to chew it!

Al: So what you got in there?

Lou: Oh, just some new coffee my wife found. It's good. Here, smell...

Al: Oh, that IS good!

Bob: Wait a second...is that some kind of fancy frou-frou gourmet coffee?

Lou: Nah. Not really...

Al: What's so special about it, then?

Bob: (elbowing Al) It doesn't eat through the cup! (they laugh)

Lou: (laughing too) That's true, but there's more to it than that. It's Fair Trade Certified.

Al: It's what?

Bob: It's who?

Lou: It's Fair Trade Certified—It's, ah.....better for the farmers.

Al: Better for them? How?

Lou: Well, the beans for this coffee were bought at a better price for the farmer...

Bob: I get it—they get more, you pay more! C'mon, you can't tell me you care that much about what some guy in Guatemala is making? Anyways, these coffee companies have lots of money—I'm sure they pay just fine. And with all the coffee we drink? They're all getting rich!

Al: Yeah, I read somewhere that the good ol' US of A is the biggest consumer of coffee in the world. I'd say we contribute a lot, right here!

Lou: Guys, guys! You're right—we do drink a lot of coffee, but that's just it—we need to be responsible for making sure that all those cups of joe are coming to us fair and square.

Al: Huh? I don't follow...

Lou: Look, I've been learning about this at church. There was a lady who came to talk to us about it. She showed us a video about the coffee trade, and believe me, it is not good. Those farmers and their families are really struggling just make a living.

Bob: It ain't much better here. We're all struggling to make a living.

Lou: Maybe, Bob, but you have a house, a car, clothes and plenty of food on your table. They don't.

Al: Wait a minute...you mean to tell me that after growing and selling all that coffee to those big companies, those farmers don't even have a place to live? How is that even possible?

Lou: Oh, they may have a place they call home, but it's definitely not anything we'd live in. Leaky roof, dirt floor, all kinds of vermin just marching in and out...and all because those big corporations won't pay them enough to survive. What would you do if you worked hard on a job and didn't get paid your fair share?

Bob: Simple--I'd complain to the union!

Al: I'll bet they don't have unions for those farmers.

Lou: Nope.

Bob: Then they should walk off the job...or maybe grow something else so they can get paid more.

Lou: Some have switched to other crops, but it's not that easy for most. Many of them are so deep in debt, they can never dig out to start something new. They're stuck, and they're sinking.

Bob: I still don't get it—I mean, I see what coffee goes for in the store. That stuff is ten bucks a pound!

Lou: Yeah, but you know how much of that the farmers get? 50 cents. (other guys react) That's right—for every ten-dollar pound of coffee they sell to us, that farmer only gets 50 cents. How's anybody gonna live on that? Huh? That's like making 600 dollars a YEAR! You wanna try raising a family on 600 bucks a year? 'Cause I don't. And I don't want them to, either.

Bob: Ok... I get it now. You're right--Those farmers work hard, just like us. They deserve to at least be able to provide basic needs for their families.

Lou: Yes, they do. But most of them aren't even being paid what it costs them to grow the beans—so they go into debt, year after year. The people who work in the fields have it just as bad. They aren't paid a living wage, often have to leave their families for an entire season, or they have to bring their children with them to work. Kids as young as 8 have been seen working in the fields, and in terrible conditions, too.

Al: I've got kids—we all do. Can you imagine having them work with us?

Bob: No way—it's too dangerous. And anyway, there are laws against it. But...I guess they don't have those laws, either? What about school?

Lou: Lots of kids of coffee workers don't have access to education much or at all. Basically, they're going to grow up to do what their parents did.

Al: So the cycle continues...unless we help change it. Wow—I didn't know any of this stuff was happening.

Bob: So, this lady who came to your church—what did she say we should do? Just buy the right coffee?

Lou: She said that's the best thing we could do, right away—just look for Fair Trade Certified coffee in the store.

Al: That's easy. But is Fair Trade coffee a lot more expensive?

Lou: You might be surprised—most of it is about the same price as other coffees. It might be a bit more, but not much at all.

Bob: You mean I can pay about the same amount for my coffee in the store, get good coffee, and help some poor working stiff like me feed his family?

Lou: Better than that—you can triple his income.

Al: Triple?!? I'm sold! But what else can we do?

Bob: Yeah, there must be more to this Fair Trade business than just coffee.

Lou: Oh, yeah—there's a lot more. Like those bananas you've got in your lunches, or the chocolate your kids like to eat--

Al: My kids don't get much chocolate at home—my wife always gets to it first!

Lou: Well, there are a lot of foods that are Fair Trade Certified—cocoa, spices, other baking products, tea—

Bob: What about beer? Those farmers would really clean up if there was Fair Trade beer!

Lou (laughing): I don't know about beer, but my wife has found Fair Trade wine for sale here in town, so beer can't be far behind.

Al: Tell your wife, if she finds any to let us know! So, is it just food that's Fair Trade?

Lou: Not just food—there are a lot of other things, too.

Bob: My wife bought a lot of Christmas gifts at some bazaar at church. They had all kinds of Fair Trade stuff. Really cool stuff, too. She said it was "something villages"?

Lou: Oh yeah—we had that at our church, too. My girls liked the jewelry.

Al: So I guess, if we just look for it, we can find all kinds of things that are Fair Trade Certified.

Bob: And that's it? We do a good thing by just buying them instead of the regular stuff?

Lou: That's how I understood it. We just have to make the choice.

Bob: That's a no-brainer choice—the kind I like best. Well, I guess we oughta be getting back to it. Those walls ain't gonna build themselves.

Al: Maybe we can stick 'em together with some of Rosie's coffee.

Bob: Ick! No way! From now on, I'm bringing my own Fair Trade coffee. I'll pick some up on my way home tonight.

Al: Me, too!

Lou: Glad to hear it, guys. Now let's get back to work!

(all three walk offstage, ad libbing "Oh, really? Who died and made you boss?" "Well, Ok Mr. task-master"...etc.)