

## The Line Lady

(Or "Incident at Starbucks")

So, I'm on way to work and running late as usual.  
There's too much blood in my caffeine system, so I stop at Starbucks.

Now, if I'm only going to be 5 minutes late, I won't stop. But if I know I'm going to be more than 5 minutes late, I figure "Hey, what the heck? What's another 5 minutes?"

Anyway, I walk into Starbucks and there's only one customer,  
so I'm thinking "Great... we can do this."

You know, I'm originally from New York.  
I gotta tell ya, in the Big Apple, people know how to form a line.  
You never hear anybody say, "Hey, are you in line?"  
But here's this woman - the only customer - and she's wandering back and forth in front of the counters like a tourist trying to get a better look at the monkeys.

So, I just gotta ask... "Are you in line?"  
... and she says... "I'm trying to decide"  
... so, I ask her, "You're trying to decide what, whether you're in line or not?"  
"No," she says, "...I'm trying to decide what I want?"  
And I'm thinkin' "Huh?... What is this, a 5 Star Restaurant?"

Now, all the other coffee zombies sleepwalk into the place and order the same damn thing every day without incident or fanfare - there are... rules. But no... not this lady... not only is she seemingly unaware of the coffee zombie etiquette, but she also happens to be "line-formingly challenged!"  
She can't order until she weighs her options!

Now, since I moved to the West Coast, I've tried to... 'blend.'  
The West Coast enjoys a more laid back culture, so instead of being a Type A,  
I've tried to be more of a type "B positive." It's like an anger management thing.

So, instead of saying something like,  
"Are you flippin' kidding me?... Just order something!", I just nod politely, as if I'm wearing corduroy, polar fleece and Birkenstocks... I don't say anything... but inside... I gotta admit - I'm gettin' a little steamed!

Now, she orders this drink which I'll call a *Meg Ryan*...

She orders a “tall, not grandé, rooty-tooty, fresh and fruity, raspberry and sugar free vanilla, 3 pumps only, wild strawberry, banana daiquiri, lite soy, triple shot, hold the mayo, half whip, no foam, room temperature Carmel Macchiato.”

And the kid behind the register repeats it!

Twice!

“A tall, not grandé, rooty-tooty, fresh and fruity, raspberry and sugar free vanilla, 3 pumps only, wild strawberry, banana daiquiri, lite soy, triple shot, hold the mayo, half whip, no foam, room temperature Carmel Macchiato?” he asks her...

She emphasizes... ‘room temperature’ ...as is if the kid missed that – which he didn’t because now he says, “One tall, not grandé, rooty-tooty, fresh and fruity, raspberry and sugar free vanilla, 3 pumps only, wild strawberry, banana daiquiri, lite soy, triple shot, hold the mayo, half whip, no foam, room temperature Carmel Macchiato, coming up!”

Now, I gotta admit, I’m impressed with this kid, ‘cause I figure he’s got a better memory than a Chinese waiter at a Jackie Chan convention... but I digress...

Unbeknownst to me (I just love that word – ‘Me’) Line Lady is just warming up...

So, now she asks, “...where do your scones come from?”

I fight the urge to scream “From the Mamma Scone’s tummy!!!”

... meanwhile, I’m thinkin’ – maybe the Keebler elves sneak into each and every one of the 12,000 or so Starbucks worldwide in the dead of night...

and, while I’m lost in thought and can’t find my way back, I hear voices... one of which is this manically happy young girl behind the counter. She’s the one with the ring through her nose like a water buffalo and she actually proceeds to go into a detailed description of their scone supplier!

– meanwhile a line is forming behind me like a casting call in New Zealand for the next Lord of the Rings epic, and I’m beginning to lose feeling in my toes...

Nose Ring is putting the scone in the microwave when Line Lady says “...and what do most people put on it?”

Oh... so many obscene thoughts flash before my eyes that I’m beginning to feel like Hugh Hefner in a self-induced coma from an allergic reaction to rabbit fur...

Even the bright-eyed, caffeine-wired, green apron-wearing, perky to the point of madness little blonde with the nose ring behind the cash register is starting to show a momentary loss of composure when she answers the question with a question...  
“Cream cheese?” she says...

...as if she’s solving the puzzle on Wheel of Fortune as the aging Vanna White acquiesces to her request to buy a vowel and turns up a gaggle of the letter ‘e.’ and Pat Sajak wonders if it’s not too late to become a dentist.

By this time the crowd is getting ugly.

Caffeine-starved drones are beginning to buzz like somebody’s in bed with the queen, and I’m feeling like if I don’t kill this lady myself, I may wind up as collateral damage when the crowd attacks. I feel like the first guy behind the farmer’s pick-up truck on a two lane road in rush hour, and all the other drivers behind me are thinkin’ to themselves, “Why doesn’t that first asshole do something so the rest of us can get by?”

And, I gotta admit, that’s what I’d be thinkin’ too, as a Type A... which I’m trying not to be... but, as a *B positive*, I’m still trying to dodge the bullet by repeating the two mantras of Anger Management 101:

“How long can this go on?” and “Surely it can’t get any worse.”

WRONG. Oh yes it can. After having the scone toasted – but “*not too much*” – and with me and everyone else looking for the hidden camera, the ordeal is nearly over when Line Lady takes out the ghost of Christmas Past - a gift card left over since last Christmas - and now she wants to check to see if she can get any more free stuff with it! (I quietly curse the fiend who gave her the card).

Just then, a boomerang comes wafting past my ear from somewhere back in the line, narrowly missing the cross dressing guy reading the New York Times in the corner, before returning from whence it came, and provoking Neo, the skate-boarder who never buys a coffee but rides the rails of the bike rack near the sidewalk tables to utter a profound, “Whoa.”

After a ‘tour of the keys’ worthy of a Billy Joel album, Nose Ring finally presses one, and the tiny gremlin in the cash register – the same one in Mattel’s Magic 8 ball - says the card’s no good.

So, Nose Ring announces, “Sorry, the card’s done, but you can renew it.”

At this point the Nun, three places back in line, smacks the guy in front of her in the back of the head, and *he* says, “Hey! What was that for.” The Nun says, “You look like a

grown-up version of kid I taught in school – and I never liked him.” You can’t imagine how scary this is to everyone...

Line Lady decides to renew her gift card, and after several failed attempts with her debit card, decides to pay cash...

She heaves one of those hand-bags up onto the counter that people use on safari on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue or Rodeo Drive, and somewhere in this ‘black hole’ pulls out a wallet the size of a wedding album and she undoes more zippers and buttons than a punk-rocker with the runs.

At long last she finally comes up with *nearly* exact change, but a little over...

This *not quite exact change* overage makes Nose Ring look more confused than a nursing infant at a topless beach.

She stares expectantly at the register screen like a gypsy gazing at a crystal ball as she waits for the cash register fairy to tell her how much change to give Line Lady...

She hands Line Lady her change in bills and pennies only to have Line Lady squawk, “Hey, I gave you a twenty!” I swear I see the letters OMG in the steam coming off of the espresso machine!

At this point some guy in line goes into caffeine withdrawal, and Nose Ring deftly throws a chocolate covered coffee bean into his gaping mouth from 6 feet away, saving his life and eliciting genuine and heartfelt applause from the gathering *caffeine free* crowd, and a 9.3 from the German judge.

So, Nose-ring calls the ‘manager’ over to open the register... he’s the kid with the bandana, the Oshkosh coveralls, the lip ring, and the phenomenal memory.

He’s just about to hand Line Lady some additional cash - so she’ll just go away, when she finally pipes up, “Oh, silly me, here’s my twenty, I must have given you the ten.” At this point we’re all wondering who’s trunk to put her body in.

She proceeds to put nearly everything on the counter back into the ‘black hole’ (only leaving a stack of Ray Charles CDs and one copy of The Best of Hootie & the Blowfish) – and seems to delight in affectionately closing every zipper, button and snap as if each is a favorite child and delighting in the corresponding little sounds they make.

It’s at this point that one lady’s goes into labor, the Nun starts break-dancing, and three people in line convert to Wicca, two of them being young men in white shirts and thin black ties, carrying bibles.

**Bandana** calls out in a voice reminiscent of Jack Nicholson in “The Shining”, “I have a tall, not grandé, rooty-tooty, fresh and fruity, raspberry and sugar free vanilla, 3 pumps only, wild strawberry, banana daiquiri, lite soy, triple shot, hold the mayo, half whip, no foam, room temperature Carmel Macchiato.” He does this in one breath like a pearl diver. “Honey, I’m home!” I hear inside my head as Line Lady triumphantly moves away from the register and I stealthily put away my axe.

Taking a step towards the counter, I finally order a *Decaf*, non-fat, Americano with Equal, fearing a stress stroke if I actually imbibe caffeine at this point. Nose Ring turns and calls out to Bandana, “**One Tall Why bother?”**

Drained, unfulfilled and cranky I’m about to leave when Line Lady looks at my shirt and says to me, “Oh, do you work for Harley-Davidson?”

Now, I’m wearing a black shirt with the words Harley-Davidson stenciled over the pocket, and a huge Eagle on the back, and I look down at the shirt and then back at her and I say, “No... I just ride ‘em.”

So, Line Lady launches into that story that every non-biker knows (as if it’s her own):

“Well, I heard about a guy who had a cousin who had friend who’s brother-in-law knew a guy who was hit by a tractor-trailer and knocked under a westbound Am-Trak train and he and his motorcycle were dragged across three state lines before coming to rest on a trestle at which point the guy fell to his death in the alligator infested waters of the Colorado River.”

And as I’m standin’ there with my chin on my Harley shirt and my eyes rolling into the back of my head, Line Lady sing-songly says, “Ride Safe.”

As she smugly heads for the door no doubt thinking she’s done enough damage around this popsicle stand, I finally revert to type A and scream after her, “Mayonnaise!”, because there’s nothing more frightening than a crazy man invoking the name of a condiment.

At this point, I’m thinking of calling in sick as I’m pacing back and forth in front of the counter doing a modified pee-pee dance/moonwalk and my eyes are frantically scanning the counters for the bathroom key, which is always tied to a stainless steel foam pitcher, so it doesn’t get lost, but the bathroom must be occupied because it’s nowhere in sight, and just then I hear a voice from some guy behind me...

“Hey buddy, are you in line?”