

Next in Line

Written by

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INT. COFFEE SHOP - MORNING

A popular joint. The line to order has TEN PEOPLE waiting, if not more.

A COUPLE flirt. A TEEN huddles over his cell, face aglow.

Corporate clad RITCHIE cranes his neck towards the counter, looks annoyed.

In front of him, JOSE steps aside to clear the view.

Ritchie grunts. Eyes meet. An instant, impatient bond.

RITCHIE

How long has this place been open?
Don't they know people have to get to
WORK?

JOSE

We're a captive consumer base. What
else can we do but wait?

RITCHIE

Or grab a cup at Dunkin' Donuts
across the street?

The two share a laugh, amused by the idea of sinking THAT low. Jose wipes away a tear of mirth.

JOSE

Just kidding. This ain't no Bronx
bodega.

RITCHIE

And no-one's *that* desperate for Joe.

JOSE

Yeah. This is America. We got
standards. A few, at least!

The line moves forward. Ritchie and Jose step up, enthused.

JOSE

Whew! One down.

He counts customers ahead of them.

JOSE

With five or so to go.

Ritchie checks his smart-watch. Groans.

RITCHIE
I can't stand here forever.

JOSE
Boring, but wait - I gotta cure -
Jose digs in a pocket for his phone.

JOSE
Surfs up. That kills time!

RITCHIE
Twitter all YOU want, but my
meeting's in twenty. I've got to go.
Ritchie glares towards the counter.

RITCHIE
You'd think they'd hire better staff
for rush hour.
The line moves forward again. Jose and Ritchie boo-yah!

JOSE
There's your problem. Gen-Zers are
lazy fucks. Half of 'em don't bother
to even show up. And those who do
still don't wanna work.

RITCHIE
Then there's the immigrants -
Ritchie catches himself mid-sentence, eyeballs Jose's Latin
looks. Jose's smile sets him at ease.

JOSE
Pal, you're talkin' to a dude who
does stuff by the book. I've had a
VISA from Peru for five years. And my
citizenship's coming through... real
soon.
The two fist-bump.

RITCHIE
Welcome to the American Dream!

JOSE
Much obliged. No place I'd rather be.
Jose shoots a side-eye towards the counter.

JOSE

Though not this line. It's way too slow. But this country. This CITY -

He waves at the sprawling MENU of drinks overhead.

JOSE

Where else in the world can you find so much choice? Man, check out these extras! Soy. Almond Milk. Oat, too.

RITCHIE

Caramel. Hot Chocolate. Kai...

A cough behind Ritchie interrupts. He swings around to see:

AMIR behind him. Dark looks. Decorative clothes. When Amir speaks, his accent's thick. His voice: soft.

AMIR

I'm sorry to overhear -

RITCHIE

(snaps)

And yet, you still do.

JOSE

Kinda hard to avoid. We are packed in like caffeine deprived sardines.

AMIR

I think the word you're looking for is "Chai."

RITCHIE

Excuse me. The man said "sardines".

Amir smiles, points up towards the menu.

AMIR

No. I mean, a CHAI latte. See? It's C.H. Pronounced like CHHHH.

Ritchie tenses, voice abruptly cold.

RITCHIE

Whatever. Not my style.

Turning his back on Amir, Ritchie rolls eyes to Jose.

RITCHIE

Who wants exotic, imported crap? Gimme a double espresso. Something American -

JOSE
Uh, espresso's originally Italian.

RITCHIE
Whatever wins the Boardroom and gets
me through my day!

Ritchie stage whispers, points back towards Amir:

RITCHIE
Speaking of UNAmerican: what do you
figure HE is?

Jose peeks around Ritchie. Squints.

JOSE
Dunno. Middle Eastern-something...?

RITCHIE
Now, THOSE kind of immigrants-

JOSE
Terrorists?

RITCHIE
Exactly! THOSE we can all do without.

Overhearing again, Amir recoils at Ritchie's racism. But
Jose gives Amir the once-over. Nods.

JOSE
Hey, I voted for the guy who promised
to clean up... that stuff.

Suddenly...

TWO UNIFORMED MEN dive on Amir, who yelps in fear. The thugs
drag Amir out of the line. Then out the door!

Jose, Ritchie and other customers watch the trio disappear.
After awkward silence, Jose clears his throat.

JOSE
He must have done SOMETHING wrong.

RITCHIE
Yeah. Good they got him off the
street!

The line moves forward again. Jose and Ritchie high five.

JOSE
Almost there!
(beat)
You know what you want?

RITCHIE
More of what we just saw, of course!

JOSE
(chuckles)
Naw, I mean your CAFFEINE choice.

RITCHIE
Straight black. My drink, not my
orientation. You?

Jose sighs, scans the menu.

JOSE
I gotta confess, sometimes I get a
little homesick.

RITCHIE
You're kidding. With all these picks?

JOSE
If only they had some Peruvian
Arabica-

RITCHIE
Arab-who?

The two uniformed goons return! This time, they pounce on
Jose, who falls flat onto his back. Hard.

JOSE
Oooof!

They grab his feet. A panicked Jose reaches out to Ritchie -

JOSE
Heeeeeeeelp!

The uniformed duo drag him off the line. Ritchie and the
others wince as Jose's pleading voice fades.

JOSE (O.S.)
But we were bonding over cooofffffee!

UNIFORMED GOON (O.S.)
Stop resisting!

JOSE (O.S.)
...what???

With that, he's gone.

Realizing another spot in line's opened up, Ritchie brightens - steps forward with a bounce.

There's just one WOMAN ahead now. The two exchange looks.

WOMAN
Looks like ICE is in the
neighborhood?

RITCHIE
In their summer drinks, sure. But...

WOMAN
Sorry about what happened to your
friend.

RITCHIE
(shrugs)
He's not my friend. Just some guy I
shot the breeze with in line.

WOMAN
For them to grab him like that, he
must've done something.. terrible.

RITCHIE
Yup. He can kiss that VISA and
citizenship goodbye, for sure.

At the counter, a sign decorates the register: Niemoller
Cafe. Beside it, a LATINA BARISTA barks to the woman:

BARISTA
Next!

The woman bustles forward, full of sudden self-importance.

WOMAN
About time! I'll have a Pumpkin Spice
Grande, my usual. This time, DON'T
cheap out on the cream! Get it right!

The Barista grumbles, but assembles the concoction. The
woman taps her foot, more impatient with each machine WHIR.

WOMAN
It's already brewed. How hard could
it be?

She shares a look of disgust with Ritchie.

WOMAN

(whispers loudly)

Look how slow she is. No wonder she's
a barista. Bet she doesn't even have
a high school degree!

The barista makes a face, hands over the steaming cup.

BARISTA

Here you go.

(mutters)

Put a Karen.

WOMAN

I took Spanish in college, Missy. And
my name's not "Karen". It's -

Suddenly - the ICE thugs appear from nowhere. Diving over
the counter, they tackle the poor barista!

Who fights back like a banshee. Kicking. Screaming.

The woman customer screams, too - splattered by the drink.

Leaning over the counter, she snarls towards the Barista as
the girl's dragged off = leaving a coffee splashed smear
across the tile.

WOMAN

Come back! I wanna talk to your
manager!

Crickets. No reply.

Ritchie tiptoes forward and peers into the kitchen.
Everyone's gone. He blinks at the Barista's fallen HAT,
lying torn and trampled on the floor.

Behind him, customers grumble. Another delay? Shit.

RITCHIE

That... wasn't appropriate.

WOMAN

Sure it was. Her attitude needed
adjustment. And she got it. Good!

RITCHIE

You don't arrest someone for bad
service!

He swings around to the line of customers, scans faces for
some sympathetic sign.

RITCHIE

Did anyone get their badge numbers?
Record that whole ordeal? Because if
you did, email the news -

The woman swings towards Ritchie, her voice shockingly ugly.

WOMAN

Are you trying to dox Law Enforcement
Officers?

Ritchie backs away. He accidentally bumps a MAN behind him,
who shoves him forward again.

WOMAN

Don't you back the Blue?!?

The unease on Ritchie's face grows.

RITCHIE

No. I mean, of course I do!

WOMAN

Then don't interfere with their
duties. Is that your goal, you... you
extremist? To protect thugs and let
THEM run wild?

RITCHIE

Are you fucking crazy? She was
pouring you a Pumpkin Spice, for
Christ Sake!

The woman raises a shaking finger to Ritchie's face.

WOMAN

Help! Domestic terrorist!

RITCHIE

Maybe Dunkin' Donuts was a better
choice after all.

He turns to storm away...

Too late. The ICE men pop up out of nowhere, and drag
Ritchie down as he screams.

FINAL FADE OUT: