Coffee shops are among the busiest businesses in the early morning hours throughout the industrial and metropolitan communities around the world. One particular location, on an unmarked street corner in Moscow, Russia, to be exact, is no exception to this growing trend. The line of customers began spilling onto the sidewalk by the time two American journalists, Mike Virgil and Stephanie Wright, approached the establishment shortly before seven in the morning. The sound of machine steamers and raised voices mixed with the aroma of multiple coffee beans and roasts filled the limited space.

Mike and Stephanie inched slowly into the interior of the shop, with only four or five customers between them and the counter. The analog clock above the employees’ head read 7:15 a.m., still a little over an hour before their meeting is to begin at the university across the capital city. The line suddenly froze there, as the customer at the counter began placing his order for ten specific beverages. By 7:30, the journalists had only moved forward a couple paces.

“My God, won’t they pick up the pace already, that guy is taking forever up there,” Mike exclaimed in a loud voice as he stood on the tips of his toes, looking over the heads to the front of the line. He then fell back onto the balls of his feet with a loud thud. A few heads in line and at the tables turned around, but Stephanie kept her eyes firmly trained toward the counter.

“I swear, these people are going to make me, and you of course, late to the most important meeting of their journalistic legacy,” Mike continued, elapsing into one of his melodramatic speeches again, “and the best A.P. international correspondent can’t possibly attend for lack of fuel.”

“Relax, I think we can make it all right,” murmured Stephanie, just loud enough for Mike to hear.

Mike turned to face Stephanie, “What the heck are you talking about, kid?” he asked harshly, resentment lacing his voice.

Stephanie gritted her teeth before speaking, “We’ve got about 25
minutes ‘til the metro comes,’” she explained, choosing her words carefully, “I figure, if we can have our drinks in our hands within the next ten minutes, that should allow us to make the metro, and arrive to the meeting on time.”

“I don’t care for your half-hazard estimations, Wright!” exclaimed Mike at the top of his voice, arms and hands flailing wildly, “This is the biggest meeting of my entire career so far and I’m not going to blow it over some of the most incompetent service in this God-forsaken city! ‘Hope you’re proud of yourself, rookie!”

With that, Mike stormed out of the shop, shoving his way through the still gathering crowd, muttering under his breath. All eyes were firmly fixed in Stephanie’s direction by this point; even the customer at the counter balancing his ten drinks spread out on two cardboard trays took notice. Stephanie just smiled and replied, “Sorry about the commotion, folks. Just a strange mixture of lethargy and jetlag, I think,” was all she could manage.

Stephanie made her way to the counter within the next five minutes, moving to one side a couple steps to make room for the customer balancing his trays as he made his way to the door, repeatedly checking the split Seattle/Moscow digital display on her cell. Suddenly, an accented feminine voice broke her uneven ritual, “How can I help you, miss?”

“Oh, I need a sixteen, no, make it a 21 ounce, uh, white mocha, triple shot, please,” Stephanie stammered, still somewhat distraught from the flight and tension with her colleague.

“Right away, miss. Your total comes to 8.25, in rubles, of course,” the cashier replied. Stephanie paid the amount in full, adding a couple more rubles as a tip, and then moved to the side of the counter to receive her drink. A few moments later, a familiar voice caught her attention.

“Excuse me, miss,” the cashier said, “here’s your order.”

“Thank you, ma’am,” Stephanie managed as she grasped the steaming travel cup.

“No, thank you! I’m the owner of this coffee shop, and I would like to thank you on behalf of my staff and regular customers for handling the situation with that unruly gentleman as smoothly as you did,” the woman replied, “He was your co-worker, was he?”

Stephanie smiled, “Worse, travel mate. We’re both journalists with the Associated Press, and he needed someone to meet him out of New York. He’s
been an international correspondent several years longer than me, so he thinks he knows everything.”

“Are you from New York as well?” the owner asked.

Stephanie shook her head slightly, “No, Seattle, actually. I’ve been with the AP for about a year now. But I’ve worked in the food service industry before, as a shift supervisor, so I understand the pressure you’re under this morning.”

“Are you going to that big press meeting at the university this morning, by chance?” the owner asked.

“Well yes, actually, I am,” Stephanie replied, taken somewhat aback by the abrupt connection, “this morning at 8:30, if I can make it on time.”

“I might be able to help you out, after all. City taxis drive through this area often, to the left and down the street a little ways. It can take you to the university in about fifteen minutes. I guided another gentleman, the one with all the drinks, to that same location only a short time ago,” the owner replied.

“Thanks, thanks a lot,” Stephanie replied smiling.

The owner smiled back, “One kind turn can lead to another.”

Stephanie Wright walked onto the campus of the university and into the meeting place with almost a full ten minutes to spare. About thirty minutes into that same meeting, as disgruntled and slightly unkempt Mike Virgil fumbled into his seat, discreetly glaring in Stephanie’s direction. His eyes wandered to the front of the room just in time to notice the Vice President of the Associated Press headquarters in Moscow, the same gentleman balancing the trays of drinks at the coffee shop earlier, pointing him out in recognition to the rest of his supervisor associates.