

# **In a World Gone Mad, Drink Coffee**

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How I Accidentally Started a Movement by  
Ordering Coffee

**Swen Mercer**

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# The Catastrophic Coffee Spill

It was a normal Tuesday.

At least, Timothy Spindle thought it was, until the moment he stepped into "Brewed Awakening" and found himself caught in a social phenomenon so ridiculous, it could only exist in the modern world.

People were shouting. Not just the kind of mild complaints you hear in the background of a busy city, but full blown, teeth gritted, neck veins popping shouts. Tim stood frozen in the doorway, his hand tightening around his reusable coffee cup like a lifeline. His heart began to sink into a pit of dread as he scanned the scene before him.

*"We've run out of oat milk!"*

That was all it took. Four simple words, and society collapsed. The patrons of the coffee shop had reached levels of panic he had only ever seen on apocalyptic survival shows fitting, since that's what this moment had become for them. Every single customer seemed to be in crisis mode, as though oat milk was the only thing keeping the fabric of reality from unraveling.

Tim's fingers fidgeted, already sensing the tidal wave of memes, tweets, and hashtags waiting to spill onto the digital landscape. He imagined the headlines that would follow: *Local Coffee Shop Out of Oat Milk: Is This the End?* or *Milk-Gate 2024: A Nation Divided*.

He could almost hear the over the top voiceovers from the news channels playing out in his mind.

*“ And in today's top story, the great oat milk shortage has sparked debates across the country. Is there a national conspiracy? What are the environmental impacts? And is almond milk, the supposed alternative, truly as toxic as some activists claim? Tune in tonight at 8 for the full report! ”*

Tim felt a chuckle bubble up in his throat, but he swallowed it down. Not here. Not now. This wasn't the time to find humor in the absurd. Not when there were people preparing for battle.

Across the café, a young woman in high-waisted jeans and a floral blouse stood in front of the counter, trembling with indignation.

“This is unacceptable,” she hissed, clutching her MacBook as though it was her shield from the chaos surrounding her. “I come here every day for my *oat*

*milk latte. Every. Day. And now you're telling me you don't have it?"*

Samantha, the barista who, despite looking like she'd been through a war zone, still managed to display the dead eyed weariness of someone who had experienced this before nodded stiffly. She was the kind of person who radiated a sort of dull resignation, as if she had accepted that her life was one endless line of oat milk complaints, late lunch rushes, and spilled espresso shots.

"We didn't get our delivery," Samantha said, in what Tim assumed was supposed to be a calming voice. It had the opposite effect. "But we do have almond milk or soy milk."

The woman recoiled as though Samantha had suggested she pour bleach into her coffee.

"Almond milk?" she screeched, her voice reaching a register that might have made dogs bark several miles away. "Almond milk is disgusting! Do you have any idea how much water it takes to produce one almond? I can't *believe* you would even suggest something so—so— *irresponsible!*"

Tim had a fleeting moment where he considered leaving. But his feet remained planted to the ground, as if some perverse curiosity anchored him in place. He needed to see how this played out. It

was like watching a slow motion car crash, you couldn't look away, even if you wanted to.

The man next in line, with a scruffy beard and the sort of woolen beanie that screamed, "I write poetry but have never shown it to anyone," stepped up to the counter, scowling at his phone. Tim could practically hear the angry tweet forming in his mind.

He glanced up at Samantha. "Are you sure you're out of oat milk? Like, *really* sure?"

The barista exhaled through her nose, narrowing her eyes. "Yes."

He sighed heavily, as if the weight of the world had suddenly landed on his shoulders. "Fine," he muttered, in a tone that suggested nothing was fine at all. "I guess I'll have a latte with... I don't know... *regular* milk. Full-fat."

Samantha raised an eyebrow. "You want cow's milk?"

The question hung in the air like a sacrilegious accusation. Tim could see several people in line behind the man exchange horrified looks. Cow's milk. The taboo of the coffee world.

"You realize how that affects your cholesterol, right?" a woman in oversized glasses interjected from behind, clutching her purse. "Do you even

care about your body? Not to mention, the methane emissions from dairy farms are—”

The man held up a hand, silencing her. “I know. I know. Don’t lecture me about the planet. I just need caffeine, okay?”

Tim’s stomach growled, and he shuffled his feet, wondering how much longer this milk-based revolution would last. He considered sneaking out to the next café over, but the thought of starting his day without his regular coffee ritual seemed worse than enduring the chaos.

He stepped forward, hoping to slip through the cracks unnoticed.

“Excuse me,” he said quietly, his voice barely rising above the din. “I’ll just have a black coffee, please.”

The woman in the floral blouse, who was still recovering from the shock of the almond milk suggestion, turned her head slowly toward him. Her eyes narrowed, as if trying to understand how someone could possibly order a coffee without any sort of milk at all.

“Black?” Samantha repeated, blinking.

“Yeah,” Tim replied, shifting his weight awkwardly.

“Just... black. No milk.”

“No oat milk?” a voice from the back of the line called out, sounding scandalized.

“Not even soy?” another person asked.

“Nope. Just coffee.” Tim smiled weakly.

Samantha hesitated for a moment before wordlessly pouring the black coffee into Tim’s cup and sliding it back to him across the counter. It felt like the weight of the world had lifted off her shoulders. Tim gave her a grateful nod and dropped a couple of coins into the tip jar.

As he walked toward the door, he could feel the stares boring into his back. He was a man out of place. A coffee heretic. No milk, no foam, no extra shot of vanilla syrup — just a simple, plain black coffee. The kind of drink that people used to drink before the world got complicated.

Outside, the air felt cooler. Tim inhaled deeply, letting the scent of his coffee mingle with the crisp autumn breeze. The muffled sounds of the chaos inside faded as he continued down the street, the din of oat milk warriors growing distant.

For a brief moment, Tim felt at peace. He had his coffee. He had survived the oat milk catastrophe. The world wasn’t so bad, right?

And then, his phone vibrated.



With a sense of dread, he pulled it from his pocket. A notification from Twitter.

*BREAKING: Oat milk shortage sparks social media outrage. Is this the next major crisis of our time? #OatMilkGate*

Tim sighed. Of course.

The comments were already rolling in. People accusing the coffee shop of neglecting to restock, claiming this was indicative of a larger problem. Corporate greed, environmental negligence, poor planning. It was all there, laid out in digital ink, as though the very fabric of civilization depended on getting to the bottom of why oat milk wasn't available.

Tim's fingers hovered over the keyboard, wondering if he should add his own sarcastic take on the matter. But no. He had better things to do. At least, that's what he told himself.

He took another sip of his coffee and kept walking. Maybe today would still turn out okay.

A few blocks down, Tim passed the local grocery store. A group of people stood gathered around the entrance, peering into the display window with the sort of nervous anticipation usually reserved for election results. He had no intention of stopping, but curiosity got the better of him. It always did.

Tim moved closer, edging his way into the small crowd. A large banner hung across the window:

**COMING SOON: OAT MILK - LIMITED SUPPLY!**

People whispered excitedly to each other. Some checked their phones, probably setting reminders to be the first in line when the shipment arrived. Others discussed strategies, wondering if there would be a rationing system in place or whether it would be a free-for-all.

“I heard they’re only getting, like, 20 cartons,” someone muttered.

“Twenty? That’s it? Oh my god, that’s ridiculous. How are we supposed to survive on twenty cartons?”

Tim’s eye twitched.

# The “Breaking News” of Socks

Tim Spindle had seen many things in his forty something years of life, but never before had he expected that socks - yes, socks - could stir such frenzy. His life, which had once seemed perfectly ordinary, was becoming a running series of absurdities, each new event more ridiculous than the last.

It all started innocently enough, as these things tend to do.

Tim sat at his desk that Thursday morning, nursing yet another cup of black coffee, the nectar of the gods, as far as he was concerned. His office was a cubicle within a sea of cubicles, the air perpetually filled with the hum of outdated computers and the soft, rhythmic clatter of keyboard keys being halfheartedly tapped. The fluorescent lights above cast their cold, unflattering glow on the workers below, making everyone appear slightly more tired, slightly more disillusioned with the mundanity of corporate life.