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### **An Afternoon Dilemma of Tall Proportions**

“What happened to the usual barista who works Tuesday nights,” I ask the pimple-faced juvenile behind the counter. “I come here every Tuesday after my literary society’s weekly poetry reading. You know, the blue haired girl, tattoos, black nail polish. She fashions the optimum Burundi Kayanza – far superior to the other Starbucks next door.” Charlotte, my favorite barista, is the only one I trust to make my exotic blends. I suppose Chad here will have to make do. While browsing the menu, I notice the Pumpkin Spice latte is back. Must be autumn again. I order a Guatemalan Casi Cielo to take it easy on him. Of course, though, he doesn’t get it right. Not nearly enough character and that deep flavor I’m used to.

I sit down and open up the most recent copy of *The New Yorker*. I page through to find my favorite article – “Talk of the Town,” obviously, to find a monotonous article on McCain. Those simple minded conservatives are always so brash and short sighted. But no longer can I focus on my article due large in part to the boy sipping at the table next to me. His *Flaming Lips* blare far too loud from his Mac for me to concentrate. It drowns out one of my favorite *Iron and Wine* songs playing throughout the room. Doesn’t he know everyone listens to *The Flaming Lips*? They were so last year.

Of course, his distraction cannot compare to the gossip echoing from the group of teenage girls looking for a warm drink after a volleyball practice. What are they doing here? Don’t they know this isn’t a locker room? This is *my* Starbucks. The leader orders a Peppermint

Mocha - amateur. It really is a pathetic attempt to leach on to a refined coffee culture. In walks the next Andy Warhol and I feel much more comfortable.

I continue to browse the literary magazine and come across an article that shakes my Guatemalan tea. Something so dreadful, so overpowering it hit me like a grande espresso (chilled, naturally). Starbucks is said to close over six hundred coffee houses nationwide. How counterproductive! They really need to start expanding. I already have to drive ten minutes in my hybrid to find the closest café. My hot drinks won't be at optimum temperature if I utilize the drive-thru. Ridiculous. Completely ridiculous. Maybe this isn't the end of the world though? It could open my horizons to other café outlets. Starbucks has been a bit too mainstream lately. Corporate trendiness.

I suppose I could test the new local coffee house down the street. I hear they have this new blend called Fair Trade Coffee. My literary society says it's the new "in" thing. Perhaps then I won't have to spend my afternoon with the rest of these imposters. They probably have never heard of the Fair Trade blend.

Its not easy being unique in a world of bland. Shaping the coffee culture is not any easy task, but someone needs to stand up for what's right. Otherwise we might have Chad here setting the standard. My father often asks why I put a daily five dollars on a starving artist's allowance towards what he calls "a cup a joe." A cup of *joe*?! Folgers makes "joe" for absent minded average Joes. I don't drink "joe" – I drink latte.