

# CROSS-EYED WIRES

I had a cross eyed customer in today. A woman in her mid-forties. You don't meet many cross eyed people in life. These days laser surgery and the like can fix just about everything. She was a lovely lady... but by crikey it took a while to serve her.

Our retail shop is set up so that the spirits are behind the counter. This means that people stand in front of you, across the bench top, and point to what they want. Sometimes though people are dazzled by the selection, get a wee touch of ordering stage fright, and simply cannot make up their mind.

That's what the cross eyed lady was doing.

I have found in my vast life experience that when you meet a cross eyed person, if you don't keep your mind under control, you can lose focus very quickly. You don't know where to look anyway, and doing your best to stay polite, you try not to look at the cross eyed person too much. In the stare-y sense anyway. If you are not careful however, you can become mesmerised by their affliction and find yourself looking at nothing other than their cross-eyedness.

To avoid this, many people look at anything other the cross-eyed one. Their feet, the floor, the roof. This, however, is rude. We are all taught to look people in the eye... but which one? Ahh, the million dollar question.

Whilst I pondered all of this, and the lady finally made up her mind, she eventually nodded at the wall of spirits behind me and said 'I'll take that one.'

Woh... talk about a curve ball! You have in front of you a severely bung-eyed lady vaguely motioning to a wall of liquor that has about a thousand choices available, and the woman says 'I'll have that one!'

'What one? Which one is she talking about?' My brain screamed at the rest of me.

'I don't know!' I think that was my stomach replying. 'How the hell am I supposed to know?' That was my foot getting involved 'It's dark in these runners.'

Meanwhile the lady had her head down, rummaging through her purse. Not even a clue for me... no matter if it was reliable or not.

'Just pick something!' My freaked out conscience squealed. So I did. I took a lovely bottle of Bundy Rum - Underproof - and put it on the counter.

Cross-eyed lady looked up fractionally, shook her head and said 'No, not that one. The other one.'

'The other what? What other one? Give me something!' This was my sense of Justice getting involved. 'Just ask her' my sweet voice of reason cooed. I loved the sweet voice of reason. Very sexy.

'Um... would you mind repeating which one you wanted.' I found myself asking like we were at a school dance and she was the last hope of a public disco partner I had a chance with before the ugly lights came on.

'The Vodka.' She was still digging through that purse. It was the size of a child's palm but with the stuff she was dragging out and clinking through you'd swear it went all the way to China.

'Well that helps ... we've only got about 17 different vodka's.' This was my butt speaking. He'd always been a real smart a...

Voice of Reason soothed me into plucking a bottle of Absolut and plumping it on the counter. Once again cross eyed woman briefly raised her eyes, before going back to work on her coin carrier. 'Not that one, the other one.' She tossed her head at the wall.

By this stage my being's inner tenants were sending my pressure gauge through the roof. All argued their differing points of view, driving me nuts in the process. Voice of Reason was drowned out and nowhere to be found. This was trouble.

'Well now!' I heard my words grow in volume. This was not good. I had a cross-eyed woman at my counter; frustration poured like lava over everything within me; and now, just to top it all off, I was having some sort of out of body experience. Wonderful!

'You want to give me a clue of some sort?' It's not Pin-The-Tail-On-The-Donkey you know. You could cut me some slack and maybe give me a brand or something. It all gets easier from there you know!'

I don't know if I actually said these words out loud. It felt like I may have. The woman continued rummaging through her purse. She mumbled something that ended in '.off'.

Well now, I'm not a big friend of rudeness. My philosophy is we all live in this world, together, and the least we can do for each other is extend a touch of respect in the form of courtesy. Rich, poor, short, tall... manners is one thing we can all buy and sell for free. So when a cross-eyed customer tells me to '... OFF!' Well let's just say there has to be a line drawn somewhere, and this woman had drawn it across my brow. My job was to erase it quickly.

'Oh really... is that what you think!' The dirty part of my being was very excited with the furore unleashing. 'I have been nothing but considerate and kind to you since you have come into my shop. You wouldn't tell me what you wanted. You only huffed and mumbled and here I was the whole time feeling sorry for you because of your cross-eyedness and all you can do in reply is tell me to 'OFF!'. I won't have it and I must ask you to leave immediately.'

The woman continued to ignore me. Rummaging, rummaging... This sent me over the edge. How dare she blatantly ignore me, tell me where to hop off, and then ignore me again.

I couldn't help it. I reached across the counter and snatched the purse that went all the way to China from her. It startled her... shocked her even, and she reeled back with a look of object horror on her face. I had her attention at last.

It was time to dance the dance. Deliver the quiver... and I let it all out.

'How dare you cross your shadow across the step of my shop. You've done nothing but cause me grief. 'That one there. 'Not that one... next one'. And then you won't even give me a solid hint on what you want! I'm doing my best to be polite, to not look at your crazy eyes and...'

The tirade stopped when she put a solitary index finger across my lips. It could have been sensual in any other setting, but it most definitely was not on this occasion. She pushed my face with that same finger, sideways, until my gaze was blocked by nothing but one vodka shelf.

This shelf contained large bottles, small bottles, miniatures and large format. All were filled with the same Russian syrup. And all of the them were branded exactly the same – 'Smirnoff'.

I could feel my face flush with embarrassment. I probably paused a fraction longer than required, gathering myself for what would be one of the most profuse apologies I had ever given. I would have to look the lady in the eye (which one... the conundrum started all over again), and bow low in my ego's loss. One deep breath and I rotated back...

Whack!

I'm not sure what hit me, but it felt like copper's truncheon. Before I knew it I was flat on my back behind the counter. Stars circled, mingling with Bluebirds from a Walt Disney movie.

'Ahh-haa!' I felt a boot land flush on my sternum. Cross-eyed lady had launched herself off the counter, over the counter and landed bang on my solar plexus. Her purse flew out of my limp hand before she backed off, tapping me on both legs with what looked like a torch.

'Now you!' I heard her voice – or at least I thought it was hers (I hadn't really heard her say anything. Not at this volume anyway). 'You a twirp. I trying to get ma cash for you and you snatch my purse. Look at me when I talking to you.' She flicked my face with the torch. 'Don't you faint on me!'

'Then you give me hard time. My eyes not good, but my ears worse. I deaf. It not until I lip-read you I see what you saying. You an angry man. I was going to get Smirnoff off you – lots of it – but now I think I take my business someplace else. Idjit!'

With that she jammed the torch/truncheon thingy into my groin. Only one part of my body screamed this time. Actually three parts in one place. Like Batman she flew the counter, cardigan flailing, and trotted off.

Thankfully I didn't have any customers for a few minutes. As the pain ebbed away eventually and my senses returned, I vowed never to make a similar mistake again.

A week later, close to day's end, an aggressive woman with bodgy eyes stumbled into the shop and told me where to go. I grabbed a bottled of Smirnoff for her. She grabbed me by the shirt, dragged me close and mumbled through her drunken slur 'I didn't say Vodka you moron. I told you to...OFF!'