

# Checkout

By Pete Malicki

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## Checkout

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### Cast

Corinne: a retail worker.

“How are you today sir? Just these?”

My name’s Corinne. I’m a cashier at Coles. A “Checkout Operator.” People hand things to me and I hand them back and take their money. Beep. (*slight pause*) “Do you have Fly Buys? Fifteen sixty thanks.” My name’s Corinne and this is my thirteenth minimum wage job. I say hello and scan groceries. “Four forty change. Have a nice day.” And yeah, yeah, yeah. I know it. Straight away, you’re looking down at me. Dumb bitch should’ve gone to university or even TAFE and got herself a real job. What’s a thirty-two year old doing working at Coles? “How are you, ma’am?” Beep.

At university, they’d tell me I have low SES. They’d say it’s statistically unlikely I will change my socioeconomic status due to my income, education and occupation. And I have a kid, so that’s about all there is to it. “Eighty-two dollars, please.” Hey, I dodged the bullet if you ask me. I should be fucking fat like Sheree over there. “Do you have a two by any chance? Thank you.”

Truth is, I *have* climbed to the top. Job one was at the butchers. I got twelve twenty an hour and cleaned guts and bone off Perspex when I wasn’t selling red-faced men and their pram-pushing wives steak and sausages. “Enjoy your lamb shanks.” You think that’s better than this cushy job? I tell you, this is the upper management of the service industry.

*Beat.*

If you can hear that voice over there, it’s the Coles robot bitch who took five of our jobs. They brought in the self-checkout machines a year ago, or as we call them here, the ‘free fruit’ machines. See, you put your fruit straight into your bags... “Sorry? I gave you seven eighty, ma’am, it cost twelve dollars twenty and you gave me a twenty. I’m certain, ma’am. It says how much change to give you on your receipt.” Sorry. Posh bitch can’t count. You put the fruit and veg straight into your bags and walk away and no one knows you’ve nicked it. Still costs them less than five wages so they don’t much care.

And that’s the problem with the minimum wage circuit. We’re nothing but robots being phased out by robots. I’m not just talking about the scanning and the giving of change, I mean the whole thing. We have a script, for chrissakes: “My name’s Corinne and I’ll be your Subway sandwich artist today. Would you like wholemeal, five grain, cheese or Italian herbs?”

Everything we say to you is word-for-word off the script and small talk beyond “How was your day?” is rarer than a customer who tips. My conversations aren’t much broader than the ones had by that electronic piece of shit over there. “This was four sixty five and not four eighty, you reckon? One moment, please. Price check on Red Bull twin pack. Price check on Red Bull twin pack.”

You know, it's amazing how much you can tell about someone in the one minute they take to pass through my checkout. This guy here is into porn and video games. No one else buys nothing but energy drinks. You can tell if someone's married, has kids, you can tell their income from their brand choices. How smart they are. How good they are at maths. "Sheree reckons it's meant to be four eighty. Maybe you looked at the wrong price tag?" You can tell half these women don't get fucked near as often as they want. Most people think they're better than people like me but I can see everything that's wrong with their lives in a second. The only difference is they get paid triple what I do to hate their jobs.

A few years ago I hated what I was doing much more than I do now. Job four was delivering flyers in the *suburbs*. Worked out to be four cents per house. Dogs would chase me and it rained all the fucking time, and those hardcore metal letterbox flaps that were impossible to cram flyers past... Job seven was the bakery. Didn't get paid extra for starting at 4AM and the prick of a franchise owner fired me for taking a bag of old bread from the skip. Next stop: Maccas. "Would you like fries with your unfair dismissal?"

Point is, I did a lot of shitty jobs and it hasn't been any better than Coles. Only place I can go to from here is... Aldi. Those foreign bastards get to *sit* all day and their scanners are the total business. They're the Checkout Princes and they know it. "Welcome to Aldi, my name's Corinne. I finish in ten minutes but I'm not grumpy 'cause my feet aren't killing. You want a plastic bag for that bag of bread you'll actually have to *pay* for one."

Here I am at the peak of the low-SES world, worrying about another redundancy. I have it made here. (*mimes scanning items*) Thirty to forty hours a week. Beep. Few bucks per hour over minimum wage. Beep. Decent manager. Beep. Close to home. Beep. Always know the specials. Beep.

The free fruit machine doesn't have a kid to feed or a lazy husband to cook for when it gets home. It doesn't have to feel bad for being a robot because that's exactly what it is. "Cigarettes at checkout four only, sir. Well there's no point yelling at me. I didn't design the store layout." Go and fuck *myself*? "Have a nice day."

Why's it "store policy" never to swear at a customer? Guys like this angry bogan here get to say whatever they want to me and I have to bite my tongue. As cool as my manager is, he'd have me out on my arse if I dished out what was dished to me. "Cigarettes at checkout four. And why don't you take them home and stick one up your de facto wife's cunt so she gets to feel something bigger than a matchstick up there? Have a nice day."

Those thin-lipped Weight Watchers Woman's Weekly cows who sneer at you when you ask them how they're doing. "You know what, ma'am? Why don't you head on over to the club on Queen Street and get a few of the regulars to take you out back? You quite clearly need a good hard fucking and (*with fake cheer*) you don't even have to say hello!"

We need to learn to speak our minds before 'progress' takes our livelihoods. Let's say what we damned well mean for a change!

"Here's your burger, cutie. Would you like to cum on my face with that?"

"There's no sticky date pudding left because the manager's a fucking idiot and didn't stock enough, but if you're so totally devastated you're going to kick up such a fuss about

it I could go out back and scrape some shit off the toilet bowl for you. Might go nicely with all those arseholes you licked today before you came here to pick on the wait staff.”

“And you, ma’am. You need to realise that Diet Coke isn’t going to make a difference to that humungous arse of yours. If you don’t want to be so fucking fat then run around the block a few times and *stop drinking Coke!*”

*Pause*

Will you look at that? I got myself all worked up. I guess it bothers me that it’s only a matter of time before they give my job to a machine. It isn’t faster than me. It isn’t any better or worse. That automated checkout station is no different to a human cashier. Do they really need to wipe out thousands of jobs so people with shit miserable lives like mine can go back to the bottom of the bottom? These bastards could afford to keep us and it wouldn’t make a difference. It’s pocket money to them. Keeping us is... pocket money.

*Pause*

Alright, well, my shift’s over now so I’m going to head home and cook. Whatever happens tomorrow, I’m happy enough to be standing at the *top* of the bottom.

“I hope you enjoy your evening sir, ma’am. Thank you for shopping at Coles.”