



ILLUSTRATION BY MORGAN BLAIR

# LADIES IN WAITING

A sympathetic male observes the plight of the opposite sex at intermission. **MATT KEEFER** walks the bathroom line.

I just waited in another line the other day; I was at the deli with my mother, and she was picking up meats. Pretty basic: take a ticket, wait your turn. You wait at a red light, or you wait for the TV guy at Best Buy, or for a pastrami-cheese sandwich; in any case, you should be familiar with the minor inconvenience of waiting for something.

But not all lines are created equal. A recent college girl-laden Jason Mraz concert found me observing a particular line that only affects one segment of the population: the woman's restroom line.

It's something we men take for granted. If you need to pee, you pee. But for women, if you need to go, you have to first wait. I have never waited in a bathroom line longer than two people, so I felt it as my journalistic responsibility to study a problem that almost 51 percent of Americans have to put up with.

These are some of the notes I had taken (in a professional Moleskine notebook, of course): "two guys in restroom; 19 women in line." That was when it was good; on average there were 25-30 waiting. "28 steps" is the length of the line, from where I can sensibly start,

to the end; again, about average. I even took note of when the line had two tails, or when it switched to the other side.

When I exhausted all the possibilities for empirical data, I talked to those in line. I was told wait times could easily be 15-20 minutes; a "Seinfeld" episode, if you will. Some women had turned away from the line earlier and were on a second attempt. I surveyed for anecdotal evidence.

One woman said the worst line was at a sports game, mostly because of the atmosphere of drinking and full bladders. An older woman said the Metropolitan Opera provided her with the worst line. I asked several women about the most unusual thing they had witnessed while in line.

"I did a cartwheel," one woman said.

One woman recalled her anger at some woman who had cut ahead in some other line some time ago. But what interested me most was that almost everyone asked believed the line had no rules, "Survival of the Fittest," said one, and "Law of the Jungle" (my own words), and yet, fights don't break out. The two tails of the line coexisted. There was cooperation, despite the fact that

you're waiting, despite the fact that after 10 minutes it probably feels like you got shot in the gut. It's part of life, and everyone has to deal with it, so your case isn't all that special.

There's a difference between waiting for a hot pastrami lunch and waiting for something essential and basic, and it makes me think about our current economic situation. I'd imagine quite a few people felt they were special, felt they could cut the line and take away time from complete strangers, felt that, just because there was no one looking, that they could do what they want. It's not that women innately would not have caused this mess because they are "naturally nurturing." But it does strike me that the mess comes from men who, ostensibly, never have to wait for the bathroom. They probably have their own private bathrooms.

And already I can think of a fitting punishment. I'll personally hand them the paper towels if they make a mess.

*Matt Keefers gives props to all the guys who wait with their girlfriends in the line. Babe, you know I love you, but I can shoot off a dozen e-mails with my 20 minutes.*