

CAIN TOWN

by DOUGLAS HILL

CHARACTERS

DEBBIE

FRANK

SETTING

A one-horse town diner.

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(A diner in a one-horse town; a little after ten o'clock on a Thursday night in late summer. FRANK, a young man who's barely entered his twenties, sits alone at a table with an empty plate in front of him. DEBBIE ENTERS with a pitcher of iced tea. She is about the same age as him.)

DEBBIE

How're we doing over here? Need a refill? Made it with bottled water...?

FRANK

No, I think I'm about done.

DEBBIE

(taking the plate from the table)

How'd you like that country-fried steak? —I told ya it was good. Huh?

FRANK

(smiling warmly at her)

It was real good. Must be the second best thing in here tonight.

DEBBIE

(enjoying his flirt)

Oh, this late in the shift, I'm pretty sure it's the best thing in here.

FRANK

(he grins)

Well, in that case, I think the check is all that's left, and then I'll get out of your way; let you close up.

DEBBIE

(she starts to walk off without leaving the check at his table)

All right, cowboy; well you have a good night, okay?

FRANK

UHH... the check...?

DEBBIE

(after a sheepish look at him)

Here's where it gets awkward.

FRANK

You're kidding me. Same guy?

DEBBIE

Look, I told him. But he gave me a twenty dollar tip—on your *fifteen dollar* check.

FRANK

I don't want anyone else paying for my supper. You were standing right there—last night—did you think I was joking?

DEBBIE

(she chuckles at him)

I know, but, *you* weren't going to leave me a twenty dollar tip, were you?

FRANK

(He tersely gathers his jacket.)

This is the last time I'm coming in here. The last.

DEBBIE

Don't get mad. All he did was pay for your supper—

FRANK

(at the same time, putting on his jacket)

And it's a crying shame, because I really did like the country-fried steak.

DEBBIE

Sweetie, I don't get it—I really don't. I wish someone would buy *me* supper once in a while.

FRANK

Do you even know this guy?

(Beat.)

You don't, do you?

DEBBIE

He just started coming in here this week. About the same time as you started showing up.

FRANK

Okay, Pollyanna, listen up: *This* is what crazy people do. They stalk someone at a diner or a gas station and—

DEBBIE

Oh, come on.

FRANK

—and then someone ends up being...tortured...and killed. Even in a little hick town like this. You should read a newspaper once in a while.

DEBBIE

Hold on there, cowboy. It's *just* supper.

FRANK

No. The first time he did it, it was just supper. This makes three times in a row. He's watching me come in here, night after night.

DEBBIE

Maybe because he wants to thank you for working on the water tower.

FRANK

Really? Do you know how much your town is paying us to clean up those red worms in that water tower? I'm making a bundle of cash, sweetheart. I can afford to buy my own supper. But every time you let that sociopath pay for it, you let him invade my privacy – you let him feel like he and I are friends, or that I'm obligated to him on some level.

DEBBIE

He's not asking for anything in return. He just pays and walks away. He seems like a very sweet guy.

FRANK

I can't believe this. I bust my butt on a 12-hour day, and then come in here to get the third degree from some *waitress* about how nice the local stalkers are. Are you really this stupid?

DEBBIE

Okay. You're right: I shouldn't have done it.

FRANK

(plowing on ahead)

And you know, it'd be different if this town didn't roll up the sidewalks at nine every night. But you're the only place open, other than the Seven-Eleven. So I'm forced to come in here if I want some decent food. And you?

(falsetto)

"Oh, you've got a twenty-dollar bill for me, sugar? Why sure you can pay for his supper. For an extra ten, I can find out his hotel room number for you. I'm really that naïve!"

DEBBIE

I apologize – and *you* can leave now. We're closed.

FRANK

(still not listening to her)

And then I end up with my throat cut open at the Super Eight, and for what? Twenty dollars? Don't you see how *irresponsible* you're being? And what are you going to do with a measly twenty dollars that will—

DEBBIE

I'm going to buy a box of Pop-Tarts from the Seven-Eleven! Okay?

FRANK

Oh! Well, I'll be dead but at least you'll have some Pop-Tarts.

DEBBIE

(She shouts him down.)

They're not for me; they're for my son! And if that's what it takes for him to stop being mad at me, then...

(She immediately changes course.)

You know, you've got so many problems. Oh. All the money coming at you from your high paying job, and strangers buying meals for you—

FRANK

Oh, and now you're going to make fun of me? Great.

DEBBIE

(whipping out her check-pad)

...chicken-fried steak, side salad, glass of iced tea. There!

(she rips off the check and slams it down on the table)

Fourteen dollars and eighty cents. You want to pay for your meal? Let's go ring you up so you can get the heck out of here.

(Pause.)

FRANK

The point is not paying twice for my meal—what is wrong with you? The point is I don't want some backwoods thug paying for my meal.

DEBBIE

I think the real point is you're scared to let someone do something nice for you.

FRANK

Oh my gosh.

DEBBIE

And here's a news flash: People who pay for your meal aren't exactly thugs! Around here it's called being generous. You should read a newspaper once in a while.

FRANK

So it's all the same to you: generosity, stalking...?

DEBBIE

Oh no: stalking doesn't come with a free chicken fried steak.

(Beat. FRANK smiles)

FRANK

Okay. You know what? I'll pay this forward. Tomorrow night I'll drive out to your house and make supper for you.

(He's suddenly deadly serious.)

What's your address?

DEBBIE

Oh, trust me: that ain't happening.

(She starts to walk away but he blocks her.)

FRANK

You're not going to let me be generous? Come on: "*it's just supper.*" Give me your address. I'll bet I could find out...

(He reads her nametag.)

Debbie. I'll just ask around town and see if someone won't be helpful...and tell me where *Debbie* lives.

(Pause. She feels this threat.)

DEBBIE

You need to leave. We're closed.

FRANK

I'm trying to be nice, here, Debbie. A little supper for you and me. Oh – and your little boy, too, right? You think he'll open the door for me if I bring a box of Pop-Tarts?

DEBBIE

You are two seconds away from Gerald coming out here and throwing you in your car.

FRANK

Yeah? Your heart racing, Debbie? You think I might be there tomorrow night when you get home from your shift?

DEBBIE

I am dead serious.

FRANK

Good. Now you know how I feel.

(He starts to walk away.)

DEBBIE

You will not do this to me.

FRANK

I was just making a point. It's a whole lot different when you're the one who's vulnerable, isn't it?

DEBBIE

I'm stronger than you.

FRANK

(a half-hearted apology)

I'm not going to do anything.

DEBBIE

You want to talk about thugs, cowboy? Let's talk about 'em. Because I've put up with men like you plenty in my life.

FRANK

Look, I was just trying to make a point.

DEBBIE

Yeah, you made a lot of points already, so let me make *my* point. That guy comes in here and pays for your supper, and you call him a thug. But you come in here and call me stupid, and then you threaten me?

FRANK

I wasn't going to do anything, I was just—

DEBBIE

I think we know who the real thug is. Don't we?

FRANK

I'm sorry I scared you. I'm not a thug.

DEBBIE

And I'm not a Pollyanna—just because I expect the best from people the first time I—You have no idea how hard I've fought to be able to do that. After all that's happened to me...? I worked around the clock for *years* to not feel like every man who approached me was a threat.

(FRANK looks quietly at her. She returns his silent stare.)

I don't know what happened to you to make you afraid of people who do something nice for you; but let me tell you, you aren't strong enough to scare me into becoming like you again.

(Pause.)

FRANK

I'm sorry. It was wrong of me to do that.

(Pause.)

DEBBIE

Apology accepted. But you should go now. We're closed.

(FRANK nods and walks toward the exit. He stops and turns to her.)

FRANK

My younger brother was...well...we were kids. The next door neighbor was babysitting us. We liked him. My whole family liked him. And he...took my brother downstairs. It's not an excuse for what I just did to you, but... I don't ever live too far away from that day.

DEBBIE

(She's not sure what to do with this information.)

That's a terrible thing, cowboy.

(Pause.)

FRANK

My name's Frank.

DEBBIE

(struggling with compassion and vulnerability)

You've got a lot of work to do in the morning. Good night, Frank.

(He looks at her for another moment.)

FRANK

I don't just. . . I haven't told anybody that. . . and. . . It's not easy over here. Okay?

DEBBIE

I know. But it's not easy anywhere. Trust me.

(She's right. It's awkward. He attempts a weak smile.)

FRANK

I'll see you tomorrow night.

DEBBIE

(she gently shakes her head “no”.)

Good night, Frank.

FRANK

Good night, Debbie.

END