

## Into Something Good

Charlie Farnsworth had never been known for having high aspirations, no driving desire or urgent need to be anything more than what he was: a sometimes shy, divorced thirty-seven year old cook at a little eatery called Alice's. Even though the hours were long, the owner of the restaurant, Alice Kramer, gave him every weekend off and Blaney Long would work the grille.

Since a greater part of his working life had been spent inside Alice's rather than outside, he thought of Alice and his co-workers as more than just friends, more like the family he never had. There were certain customs he had fallen willingly and easily into, taking short breaks whenever he wanted for a quick smoke or to read the newspaper, or to do nothing at all.

As long as all his orders were filled and there was a lull in new customers. Not that that many of their customers could be considered new, though. Except for the lunch and dinner surges of out-of-towners during the summer and winter seasons, most of the people Charlie Farnsworth cooked for were regulars; solid folks like him who lived, worked and played in and around the small town rising up at river's edge called Canton.

All the regulars he could call by name. Some—he felt justified—he would call names not fit to mention openly.

Just after six in the morning, the restaurant was still quiet. Over next to the pastries showcase, at a table for two, Melinda and Peter Murray sat yawning and discussing their plans for the day; drinking coffee, eyeing the pass-through, waiting for their pancakes and sausages to appear.

Melinda kept the county zoning office running smoothly for Darren Christian, the zoning department's director. Pete was a deputy sergeant with Canton County Sheriff's office.

For over five years the Murrays had been two ships passing in the night: she just going in to work just as he was getting off. There were rumors around the county building, though, that he was about to

get his detective badge, meaning he would become a day person and both would regain a measure of sanity in their lives.

Looking like she had been crying, Karen Davis sat side by side with her four year-old daughter, Amy, at a table near the front windows. She quietly whispered, and wiped pancake syrup off Amy's face with a handful of paper napkins.

Her husband, Clyde, laid-off from the stamping plant and drinking again, had run off two weeks earlier with their afternoon baby-sitter, Megan Falon, a senior at Canton High. Karen's mother, Melody Simpson, a night-shift nurse at the hospital, took over caring for Amy during the day, at least until her daughter got off work just after noon.

No longer able to work the four to midnight shift and having lost her afternoon baby-sitter, Karen had been reduced to working part-time mornings at Tommy's supermarket. Several congregation members at Canton Community Baptist church, attentive to Karen's dilemma, brought boxes filled with canned goods, dried beans and other non-perishables every Thursday afternoon and left them on the Davis's front porch.

Charlie Farnsworth had discovered late one night while solving the cross-word puzzle in that day's newspaper, that, after two years of working with Rachel Mathers through the serving window and in and around the kitchen during set-up from one day to the next, he had developed feelings for Alice's head waitress. A young woman of thirty-eight, and single mother of two children, Jake, age 7, and Chelsea, age 5, the raven-haired and trim Rachel had finally caught his attention, not so much for what she said or did, but mostly for the things she didn't say. Like Charlie, she was very committed in her daily routine, and he liked that about her, that stability.

Standing next to the booth and waiting patiently, Rachel drummed her pencil on her order pad as Hank Driscoll, production manager at the stamping plant, scanned the menu. It had become a six a.m. ritual with the thinly-built Hank: pour his coffee, ask about Jenn and the kids, then wait for him to order.

“Okay, Hank,” Rachel said. “What's it gonna be? The usual?”

“Give me a minute, sweetie,” Hank said, glancing up at her and winking. “I want something different today.”

Rachel gave him an annoyed look, then went ahead and wrote up the order. No matter what Hank said or how he said it, he always ordered the same breakfast. Come rain or shine it was eggs, bacon, hash browns and rye toast.

“Times two: sunnies, strips, rye—and browns,” Rachel called as she hung the order on the pass-through’s rotary then spun it around.

“You read my mind, Rachel,” Hank said.

“What mind, Hank?” she replied dryly.

Without another word Hank Driscoll smiled broadly, slipped the menu back into the holder against the wall, then began reading his paper and sipping his coffee; also his routine.

Eying Rachel and Hank through the pass-through and knowing their exchange from memory, Charlie Farnsworth chuckled as he opened two eggs on the grill, dropped the rye bread in the toaster, then placed a square of potato hash and two slices of bacon next to the eggs on the grille to cook. His admiration for the self-assured Rachel Mathers had just grown by several measures.

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Sitting under the Tiffany lamp at the dining table in his trailer in Benson Estates after work and sipping a double-shot of Jack Daniels, Charlie Farnsworth opened his rumpled copy of the Canton Tribune and turned to page two of the A section, where the calendar of events was listed. Every so often, he had noted in the past, the Canton opera house featured some kind of special event.

Charlie had always felt an uncertainty about attending any event in the restored and lavish old hall, especially by himself. Seeing a new event listed for that weekend, he thought immediately of Rachel, wondering if she might like to go along, then, just as immediately, doubting.

As he prepped the grille for the morning’s fare early the next morning, Charlie Farnsworth