

The thunderous clanging of dishes accompanied by the aroma of greasy food only amplified Mira's piercing headache. She massaged her temples hoping to rub away the pain. She woke this morning with the migraine and it didn't seem like it was going to subside any time soon.

The only logical explanation for her condition was the unseasonably warm December day. The temperature outside was nearly forty degrees and that was uncommon for December weather in Chicago. Still she needed to help her mother pay the monthly bills and since she graduated from high school working was necessary. The only ray of hope she had was that it was Sunday and the diner always closed early on Sundays. The lunch rush was nearly over, and Mira knew there was a light at the end of the tunnel. It was the only motivation she had to keep working through the agonizing pain. It was almost over!

Max, the cook, sounded the bell alerting Mira that her table's food was ready. Mira turned her attention back to her work. She squinted her eyes past the stainless-steel kitchen pass through counter and into the glaring light from the kitchen. The light may as well have been thousands of daggers stabbing her eyes. She couldn't wait for her shift to be over.

Mira collected her customer's order of two burgers and fries onto a plastic serving tray for delivery. She struggled to walk around the counter and into the dining room. Her pounding head was inducing bouts of vertigo. Mira felt like the world surrounding her was spinning out of control. The feeling of intense dizziness was disorienting and caused her to move slower than she normal would. She focused as best as she could to prevent herself from losing balance and dumping all the food off her tray and onto the floor.

Despite all her symptoms she managed to deliver the burgers to the man in the brown suit and his companion dressed in a black and white polka dot tea dress. Mira noticed their drinks were low, so she returned to the serving counter to retrieve refills. She wished the smell of the coffee in the pot could relinquish her from her haze, but the smell only nauseated her further.

Mira startled when the other waitress Betty exited the back-storeroom door in a frantic commotion. She made a hectic beeline for the radio behind the counter. Betty was prone to dramatic outbursts and Mira couldn't even venture to guess what had her worked up in a tizzy today.

Betty turned the dials of the radio struggling to find a strong signal. The whining and static noise only drilled into Mira's head. Just when she thought her head couldn't possibly feel any worse, Betty had to prove her wrong. Betty finally found the broadcast she was seeking, and a man's frantic voice came into focus, "...distant view a brief full battle of Pearl Harbor and the severe bombing of Pearl Harbor by enemy planes, undoubtedly Japanese. The city of Honolulu has also been attacked and considerable damage done. This battle has been going on for nearly three hours. One of the bombs dropped within fifty feet of KTU tower. It is no joke. It is a real war. The public of Honolulu has been advised to keep in their homes and away from the Army and Navy. There has been serious fighting going on in the air and in the sea. The heavy shooting seems to be..." Mira had zoned out as she listened to the terrible news, and the coffee she was pouring over flowed the mug. The gentleman in the brown suit jumped back in his chair alerting her to the spill. Mira quickly apologized and pulled a rag out of her apron to mop up the mess.

The broadcast continued, "...We cannot estimate just how much damage has been done, but it has been a very severe attack. The Navy and Army appear to have the air and sea under control." A woman's voice could be heard on air, "Ah, just a minute...This is the telephone company. This is the operator."

"Yes," the reporter responded.

"We have quite a big call, an emergency call." The operator sounded busy.

"We're talking to New York now," the reporter was desperately informing New York of this monumental attack.

After the initial announcement of the attack a bustle of conversation fell over the diner and several customers raised their hands requesting their check. For a moment Mira was too busy to worry about her throbbing head and attended to the customer's needs. The quicker she could deliver checks the

quicker she could go home. She bustled around delivering checks and cashing out tables. It was a frenzy and from look out the window it wasn't any better outside on the street.

Normally people kept to themselves on a Sunday afternoon. Most people took a break from their Christmas shopping to stay home with family after attending church, but today was different. Today America was at war. We had been attacked and people were taking to the streets.

Once the initial shock and rush began to die down Betty approached Mira, "Mira, Max told me I can go home early because of all this mess. I just really want to get home to the family."

"Sure," Mira shrugged, "Anything you need?"

Betty untied her apron and draped it over her arm, "I've just got one customer." She pointed to the back-corner table, "He's all done eating, but he just keeps sitting there drinking coffee. Eventually Max is going to have to ask him to leave." Mira could tell Betty was annoyed by his loitering and she was tired of waiting on him to leave, "You can have the tip. If he leaves one." She implied that she wasn't sure if he was going to leave a tip of any kind.

"We can split the money if he leaves any," Mira didn't want to take Betty's money. It was her table and she had earned it.

Betty hugged her, "Thanks hun, I'm sorry to have to ditch you on your birthday."

"Not a big deal. I don't really have much planned. I just want to get rid of this headache." Mira just wanted to go home and crawl into bed.

"Well it's a crummy day for an eighteenth birthday. I hope you start to feel better." Betty was a kind a soul and she was like a second mother to Mira.

"Any word from the university?" Betty was rooting for her to be accepted to Northwestern University, but the universities weren't admitting many women. Mira shook her head no. It pained her to think about her dwindling chances. "Keep your chin up. They've got to accept us as scholars eventually, but young women like you can't give up. You have to keep trying."

Betty pulled on her brown wool pea coat on and pulled her brunette ponytail out from the collar. She said her goodbyes to Max and a couple of regular customers. She was sure to thank Max for letting her leave early. Mira and Max went on cleaning up the diner, so they could get home as well.

At three o'clock on the dot, Max locked the front door and he stopped by Betty's table to inform her lingering customer to finish up the diner was closed now. Mira finished re-stocking the clean coffee mugs and then delivered the check to their last patron.

The man was quietly sipping his coffee when Mira approached. She dropped the check on the edge of the table, "Just let me know when you're ready to check out."

"I'll be leaving in a few moments." He looked up from his cup toward her and the sight of his face made her feel instantly uneasy. It wasn't just his facial stubble or dark hair that made her feel apprehensive. It was his eyes. She didn't want to stare, but his eyes were colored a brilliant golden yellow. They were not natural eyes.

Mira tugged at her thick blond braid hanging over her right shoulder. It was a nervous tick she had when she felt nervous. "Well just let me know when you're ready," she turned to walk away from the awkward encounter.

"Cheers to a happy eighteenth birthday," Mira turned to see the man dressed in a black suit lift his coffee mug up in a celebratory fashion. She was even more apprehensive about this man. Only her co-workers knew it was her birthday. How did this stranger know anything about her? Betty's conversation had happened too far away for him to have overheard.

She tried to ignore the comment and continued to move away and back to work cleaning. The man stood and pulled his dark trench coat on and approached the cash register. He handed her the check and Mira reluctantly tried to provide a warm hospitable smile on the outside. On the inside, she was frightened of this man. She couldn't completely put her finger on why. There were many oddities to this man that just made him seem off kilter. She got a sense from him that he was dangerous.

Mira gave him the change and he slid it back to her as a tip. "A little aspirin might help with that headache." He took a toothpick from the counter placed it between his lips and pointed at her, "Unless it's something more serious." He winked one of his disturbing yellow eyes at her and then Max let him out the front door.

Once he was gone Mira let out a sigh and an over exaggerated shiver. Max commented on her behavior, "What was that all about?"

"That guy gave me the creeps." She crossed her arms in front of her rubbing her upper arms as if she was trying to warm herself.

"Betty said the same thing. She said he smelled funny too." Max returned to the kitchen to finish up cleaning.

Mira inquired through the kitchen pass through, "I didn't notice a smell. What did she say?"

"Said he smelled like rotten eggs. Funny thing to say." Max shook his head in confusion, "You just never know what that gal's gonna say."

Also baffled by Betty's comment, Mira put on her gray wool pea coat and Max let her leave out the front door. The streets were teeming with people discussing the recent attack on Pearl Harbor. A young man was walking down the sidewalk carrying an American flag waving in the wind behind him. Passing cars honked at him as they passed. Mira's normally quiet Sunday was loud on this December day. It was distracting to watch everyone bustle about, but that didn't change the fact the Mira got the feeling she was being watched.

She started walking toward home, but periodically looked over her shoulder. That's when she noticed the eerie man from the diner across the street. He was headed in the same direction. Or was he following her. She wasn't entirely sure, but her gut feeling wasn't a pleasant one.

Mira turned down a side street which was an alternate route home. She wanted to see how the man reacted to her changing direction. Mira looked in a shop window to see if he was still following. She could

see him cross the main street and remain on the opposite side of the street she was now traversing. She knew it. He was following her. She wasn't sure why and she didn't want to stick around long enough to find out.

To be on the safe side, Mira looked for someplace she could hide until the man passed. She decided to duck into a movie theater which was along her route home. She approached the ticket window and purchased admission to whatever picture they were showing. Mira really had no concern for what she was watching. She only wanted to wait out this man who seemed to be following her.

Mira settled down in one of the theater seats and waited. Once the movie started she realized it was "The Maltese Falcon," starring Humphrey Bogart. She hadn't seen this one yet. She relaxed for the time being and watched her flick. There was no reason she couldn't enjoy her purchase.