

Tips

by

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FADE IN

INT. DINER - MORNING

Typical busy greasy spoon, a real ptomaine palace, packed, both counter and booths, and the NOISE borders on ear-numbing.

In the exact middle of the counter sits BRAD. Like his name, thin, hard, pointed, dressed in clothes just a day past handed-out from the Salvation Army: dress pants with a sheen, suit coat that may or may not have mated with the pants, a white shirt just barely hiding the fray on collar and cuff, and a tie as colorful as Brad is not.

In front of him sits a heavy scratched coffee mug, half-full. Just a coffee mug, unaccompanied by food.

To his right and left, however, food overflows as construction workers and secretaries and the whole army of labor chow down. Brad left, then right. If hungry eyes could speak, his would scream.

Brad's eyes drift back to his cup, and into his field of vision punches the sharp lip of a coffee pot refreshing his half-full mug. The steam curls upward, and his eyes follow it to catch the eyes of the WAITRESS, who gives him an automatic forced half-smile, then retreats down the line, refreshing everyone's mug. He watches the tight bow of her apron, chugs down half the coffee. His face doesn't even register how hot it is.

To his immediate right, a burly GUY wipes up egg residue with his toast. Last slurp of coffee, last chug of OJ, a signal to the waitress to bring the bill. She does, and Brad catches her eye again, this time throwing back his own smile. Forced half-smile again from her as the guy pulls bills from a wad of wallet fished out of his back pocket.

She disappears down the line to the register. The guy tucks two one-dollar bills under the plate, scarfs down the remaining crust of toast, half-spins on the stool, and exits.

Two one-dollar bills -- within easy finger distance. He checks -- he can't see the waitress. He looks back at the bills, and the hunger in his face steams.

He uncurls his hand from his mug and eases it rightward. A quick glance up, then steady, steady....

The coffee pot again, the cup brimmed up. She gives him another forced little smile, then moves down the line in the opposite direction: fill, half-smile, fill, half-smile. Craning over, he watches the bow on her apron.

Right hand out again, snakish, almost there... Then a sharp pain in his back as the leading edge of a briefcase, artilleried by a LAWYER, dings Brad's left kidney. Knocked into the counter, he barely catches a glimpse of the unapologetic backside of the shyster as he spews out words to a co-worker trailing behind.

Now or never, no finesse, and so Brad slides the bills out from under the weight of the porcelain. He's just about to pocket them when the coffee pot pins his hand to the counter. He jerks it away from the hot glass and looks up into the waitress' eyes.

She stares at him -- no smile. He tries to stare back at her, but he can't hold up his end of the match and goes back to focusing really tightly on the coffee in his mug. The bills sit just at the edge of his eyes.

Her fingers on the money -- he sees the hard-bitten nails, the cracked, overworked tips. The fingers guide one of the bills toward him, then make the other one disappear.

When he looks up again, all he can see, when he cranes over the counter, is the bow on her apron.

He fiddles with the bill, folds and unfolds it, then slides it under his coffee cup and gets off his stool.

But two steps away, he turns back and nips it into his suitcoat pocket.

Eyes straight ahead, he burrows through the crowd --

EXT - DINER - DAY

-- and out the door into the harsh impersonal sunlight.

FADE OUT