

PARADISE CAFE

A ZINE STORY
RANDALL COLLEY
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PARADISE
CAFE

THE PARADISE CAFE
FOOD FOR THE SOUL

A Zine Story

By Randall Colley copyright 2024

The Paradise Cafe was a small Greek diner at the end of an alleyway in the middle of the city. It was opened by Frank's father Cosmos, when he moved from Greece to America from after World War II.

His son Frank took over the cafe when he returned from Vietnam.

Frank lost his right eye in combat and wore an eyepatch. His mother could no longer manage the cafe alone after his father passed away.

Tina handed out coins with Paradise Cafe on one side and Food For The Soul on the other side to people she met in the community and invited them to the Cafe.

Paul followed Tina to the cafe.

When they entered the doorway Tina introduced him, "Hello everyone, this is our new friend Paul."

The customers yelled without looking up from whatever they were doing, "Hello Paul."

Paul was trying to text his girlfriend. He looked up from his cell phone and said, "I almost got hit by a city bus this lady saved my life."

A roar of laughter came from a group high school kid celebrating at a back table.

Tina seated Paul at a table, he was still looking at his phone trying to text a message to his girlfriend.

Frank hit the order bell, "DING, DING", "Order up breakfast, the food for the soul is getting cold."

"Hello Paul, I'll be your waitress, my name is Grace."

Paul was still desperately trying to send a text to his girlfriend.

He looked up from his phone and asked, "Can I get breakfast, I am starving, eggs, bacon and a stack of blueberry pancakes?"

Grace sat down a plate with three eggs, bacon, and a stack of blueberry pancakes.

With a big smile he said, "How did you know, that is my favorite?"

"We just know things Paul."

Paul reached for his wallet and realized that he did not have it.

He told the waitress I must have lost my wallet, I think that policeman took my wallet.

All I have is this coin Tina gave me.

She said, "That's okay honey, lot's of people come here without money we are used to it."

Paul asked an elderly couple at the next table if their cell phone had service and could he maybe borrow their phone?

They laughed and asked, "What is a cell phone?"

A big Irish policeman came in the door. He said to Tina with his thick Irish accent, "Did a red haired lad come in here tonight?"

He burglarized a jewelry store on the corner I was chasing him and he took a shot at me and I lost my way in the dark alley until I saw your sign."

Tina said, "No Irish lads tonight officer, but please come in."

Tina said, "Hey everyone this is Officer O'Malley."

The customers shouted, "Hello Officer O'Malley."

Frank hit the order bell, "DING, DING", "Order up, Irish stew and a pint, the food for the soul is getting cold."

The officer sat down at the counter, "A bowl of Irish stew sounds good to me I am starving."

Grace sat a bowl of Irish stew and pint of beer in front of him, "Frank made it just for you."

He said to Grace, "Me shift ends at midnight and tomorrow is Christmas, I think I will have me another pint when I finish this one."

The officer asked, "Does anyone have the time I lost me watch in the scuffle."

Everyone in the café gave a different time.

Paul still trying to text on his phone laughed and said out loud to himself, "Everybody is a comedian tonight."

There were no clocks on the wall, Paul checked his watch it had stopped working at 5:27, he shook it and tried to wind it but no use. He thought to himself, I must have hit it on something when I fell.

Paul looked at the people sitting on the stools at the counter and for an instant his mind's eye blinked, like a flash of lightening in a storm and all of the people sitting on the stools looked naked and then fully clothed.



He thought maybe when he fell and broke his watch he might have hit his head and got a concussion and maybe that was causing his mind to flicker.

The lady at the counter asked Officer O'Malley if he was an actor and was he in a local play?

He asked, "Why do you think that?"

She said, "It's your uniform it looks like a police officer uniform from the 1940's.

You look like Mike Bridges the actor on my television police show it's called "The Detective", it's on every Thursday night at 7 o'clock.

I don't know anything about a television show, but I am a policeman at the 12th precinct next to The Empire State Building.

A happy little man came in and was greeted by Tina at the door.

"You're the lady that gave me this coin the night of our apartment fire. Tina said, "I remember that night, how's your wife?"

Oh, my wife was fine she left me and remarried.

I was just walking around the city and I have been carrying this coin in my pocket since you gave it to me and I decided to check out the food for the soul at the Paradise Café, I am starving.

“Hey everyone, this is Norman.”

The customers yelled, “HELLO NORMAN.”

Frank hit the dinner bell, DING DING, “Food for the soul is getting cold, order up pork chops and mashed potatoes.”

Norman said, “That’s what I want, my mother made the best pork chops and mashed potatoes when I was growing up.”

Tina came in later with a new couple. Hello everyone, this is Ted and Martha. “Hello.. . Ted and Martha.”

Martha said to everyone, “We were on the subway train that derailed in Queens, it was terrible. People died, people were screaming. We were so lucky.”

Paul said out loud to himself, while still trying to text on his phone, "Hello folks, the subway derailed in Queens when I was in high school 1998.

It's not like it just happened today. Get over it, time to move on."

Another roar of laughter from the high school kids at table in the back room.

Frank hit the order bell, "DING, DING", "Order up spaghetti and meatballs with garlic bread, food for the soul is getting cold."

Ted said, "Spaghetti and meatballs . . . Martha, we gotta stay and eat I'm starving."

Another roar of laughter from the high school kids at table in the back room.

Frank hit the order bell, "DING, DING", "Order up breakfast, the food for the soul is getting cold."

The waitress sat down another plate of eggs, bacon, and a stack of blueberry pancakes.

Paul looked up from his phone to thank her, "You look like Grace but you are not Grace."

I'm Nona we're sisters, Nona, Grace, and Destiny we have worked here since the cafe opened.

Paul asked if he could use a phone?

Nona said, "Sorry Luv, a big bolt of lightning hit the pole last week and they're working on it."

An elderly couple came into the cafe and Tina met them at the door.

The wife said, "Hello Tina, do you remember me, our car was hit by a city bus?"

You gave me a coin and invited me to come here and have a cup of coffee and a meal.

Charles has been in a nursing home since that accident, I have stayed right by his side day and night.

Then one morning he just woke up and said,
"Margie lets go get some French Toast."

I said, "Charlie I know just the place and
here we are."

Frank hit the order bell, "DING, DING",
"Order up, French Toast, the food for the
soul is getting cold."

Destiny seated the couple at the table next
to Paul and brought them French Toast and
maple syrup.

In the back room of the cafe, there was an
old blind man at a table, Homer Boatmen,
everyone called him Mr. Sticks.

That was his nickname from childhood.

He was born blind and has always used a
walking stick.

The old man sat at a table with his seeing
eye dog near the entrance to a doorway
that read "PARADISE."

On his table was a cup of coffee, a jar of coins and a basket of dog treats.

To enter the doorway customers had to drop a coin in the jar and give a treat to his dog.

A couple came in wearing overcoats complaining about how cold it was outside, "That northeastern is brutal."

Paul laughed still looking at his phone, "Yeah right, it's the middle of summer fool, why do you think I am wearing shorts and sandals."

Tina introduced the new couple, "This is Susie and Billy they are from Michigan."

"Hello Billy and Susie from Michigan."

Susie said, "We were so lucky our car got stuck in the snowbank it could have been worse."

I just need to use a phone to call my folks and let them know that we're okay."

Paul said, "Good luck with that, there's no service in here.

Wait, how did you hit a snowbank it's the middle of summer."

Susie, laughed, "That's funny, we were driving back from Time Square we watched the ball drop, this is our third wedding anniversary."

"We got married New Year's Day 2012."

Paul said, "To himself while still texting, you mean married on 2002 not 2012."

Frank hit the order bell, "DING, DING", "Order up T-bone steak baked potato and a Caesar salad, the food for the soul is getting cold."

Billy said, "That sounds perfect, let's order that I'm starving, I don't think we have eaten a bite all day and that's exactly what I want to eat."

"Me too", said Susie.

Tina said "Destiny will bring it right out to you."

The lady at the counter came to Tina with her coin in hand and said, "I think I'm ready to go now, will you show me the way out?"

Tina walked the lady back to Mr. Sticks and the lady dropped her coin in the jar on the table and gave the dog his treat.

Paul asked Nona does Tina work day and night?

She answered "Yes... Tina searches the city day and night everyday looking for her lost daughter.

And any other lost souls she can find and brings them here."

When the lady entered the doorway the cafe blinked, and for brief instant Paul saw Nona completely naked pouring his coffee.

Paul said to Nona, "I have been seeing naked people, do you see them?"

Nona said, "Oh my goodness is Hera naked again? Frank where is your mother."

Paul went back to talk with the kids from the high school band.

"So where are you kids from?", he asked.

We are now the state champion marching band from Moore High School.

Paul said "I went to Moore high school they have a big monument for another band that won the state championship a long time ago.

I bet they are going to be really proud of you guys when you get back.

The band leader said unfortunately we got separated from the other school busses on our way back. And our bus broke down on a railroad crossing.

Tina found us walking around in the dark and brought us here.

We are just waiting for them to come back and pick us up.

Paul went back to his table still desperately trying to text his girlfriend.

Tina came in with a young lady, "Hello everyone this is Karla she got into an accident on the interstate and she's waiting for the tow truck."

The customers yelled, "Hello Karla."

Paul heard her name and looked up from his phone.

He saw Karla, his girlfriend and ran up and hugged her.

She said with a totally surprised look, "Paul, oh my God is that really you."

"I am so shaken by this accident." They walked back to his table.

"Karla, I have been texting you like crazy, but there is no service in this place."

Karla was puzzled, "Texting me, how did you get my number?"

Paul also puzzled, "What do you mean, your number it's right here in my phone. I am so sorry about that argument it was all my fault."

Frank hit the order bell, "DING, DING",
"Order up, the food for the soul is getting cold."

Destiny, the waitress brought Karla a plate with French fries, a hamburger and a coke.

"Oh, thank you, I am starving, that is my favorite meal, how did you know?"

Then she sat down a plate in front of Paul,
"Here you go Mr. Paul, bacon, eggs and blueberry pancakes."

Karla laughed, and she told the waitress, that on our first date Paul ordered "bacon, eggs and blueberry pancakes."

He said, if he had to order his last meal it would be blueberry pancakes, eggs and bacon.

Then Paul said, "And you said, your last meal would be French fries, a hamburger and a coke."

Destiny laughed and said, "The soul always knows what it needs."

Paul asked Karla, "So you're not mad at me anymore?"

"Mad about what?"

"About the argument, do you forgive me."

"Of course I forgave you."

"So, catch me up it feels like a very long time since yesterday."

"Well, Derick asked me out."

"Derick, the creepy guy in our chemistry class?"

"Yes."

"And you said no, right?"

"Yes, I said no at first, but he was persistent and I finally said yes."

Tina came in with a young couple, the wife said to Tina, "I am loving that is fall weather, finally we can wear sweaters again."

Frank hit the order bell, "DING, DING", "order up", "the food for the soul is getting cold."

Karla said, "What does that lady mean, fall weather and sweaters it's the middle of summer it's 90 degrees out there."

Paul said, "Tell me about it, but what do you mean. . . you said yes, when did this happen, you've been dating Derick behind my back?"

"What do you mean. . . behind your back?"

I didn't know what happened to you.

I never saw you at school anymore, I tried to call and text you for weeks.

I thought maybe you dropped out of college and moved back home."

"What are you talking about, why would I drop out of college? I am a senior, I will graduate in a few months. Did you hit your head in that accident?"

What have you done to your hair it's different it's longer?"

Karla asked, "So what have you been doing?"

"What have I been doing?"

I have been sitting right here trying to text you all day to tell you that I am sorry and can we go out for dinner tonight.

And now I find out you have dating Derick what else don't I know about?"

"Well, we dated until I graduated and then we got married and we have a son which reminds me, I need to text Derick and have him pick him up from soccer practice.

I don't know how long the tow truck will take."

"Can I use your phone, I have lost mine somewhere, I remember seeing a police women looking through my wallet she must have kept my purse and my phone."

"Sure, you can use my phone, but there is no service in here."

Karla took his phone, "Dear God Paul, this looks like the flip phone you had in college.

No wonder you can't get service, I thought you would have something newer like an iPhone, as much as you like techie stuff."

Tina walked by their table and Karla stopped her and thanked her for finding her in the middle of that rain storm and bringing her to the Cafe.

She said, "I don't know how long I was standing on that highway with all of those police cars and ambulances.

Thankfully you came along and brought me here and it was close enough we could walk.

And who knew my old boyfriend would be here?"

Margie at the next table said to Karla, "Isn't Tina just a saint, she was there when the city bus hit our car and Charles had to go into that dreadful nursing home."

Margie asked Tina if she knew what happened to that young college boy that was hit by the city bus that night of their accident?

He was texting on his phone and stepped in front of the bus, and that's what caused the bus driver to swerve and hit our car.

Paul asked Margie, "When did you have your accident?"

"It was on Charlie's 80th birthday July 23, we were coming home from the restaurant."

Karla said, "The last text message that I got from you Paul, was July 23."

Paul said, "Right, I texted you this morning July 23."

Karla said, No Paul, the last text message I got from you was July 23, 2005, 10 years ago this is 2015."

Paul was in a panic he walked around the Cafe asking customers, what's the date?

The lady sitting by herself at a table said, "It's 1975."

The policeman at the counter said, "Christmas eve 1946."

Mary next to the officer said, "No it's 1968."

One of the high school band members yelled out, "Class of 1970 State Champions."

Frank hit the order bell, "DING, DING", "Order up, breakfast, the food for the soul is getting cold."

The band students came to the table with their coins in hand and said to Tina, "We think it's time and we are all ready to go.

"We want to go home now."

Each one dropped their coin into the jar on Mr. Stick's table and gave the treat to the dog.

One by one they entered the doorway to Paradise and a bright light blinked and they disappeared.

Karla said, "Paul, I just saw everybody in this cafe naked like 5 times, I don't understand what is going on?"

Paul said, "Don't worry you'll get used to it."

Paul said, "I think I understand now, our soul finds its way to the Paradise Cafe.

And we stay here until we are ready to let go."



"When we pay the ferryman we can go home.

We leave this world just like we came into this world, naked and alone."

Karla said, "I am not going anywhere except to my home. I have a husband and a child, and I am going home as soon as the tow truck comes."

Paul gave her a kiss and said, "It's time for me to let go."

"I don't understand Paul, where are you going?"

"I don't know."

Paul walked back to Mr. Stick's table and dropped his cell phone and his coin into the jar gave the dog a treat and he entered the doorway to Paradise.

The Cafe blinked.

The End

ZINES
ARE THE DOOR
TO
IMAGINATION



OPEN
IT