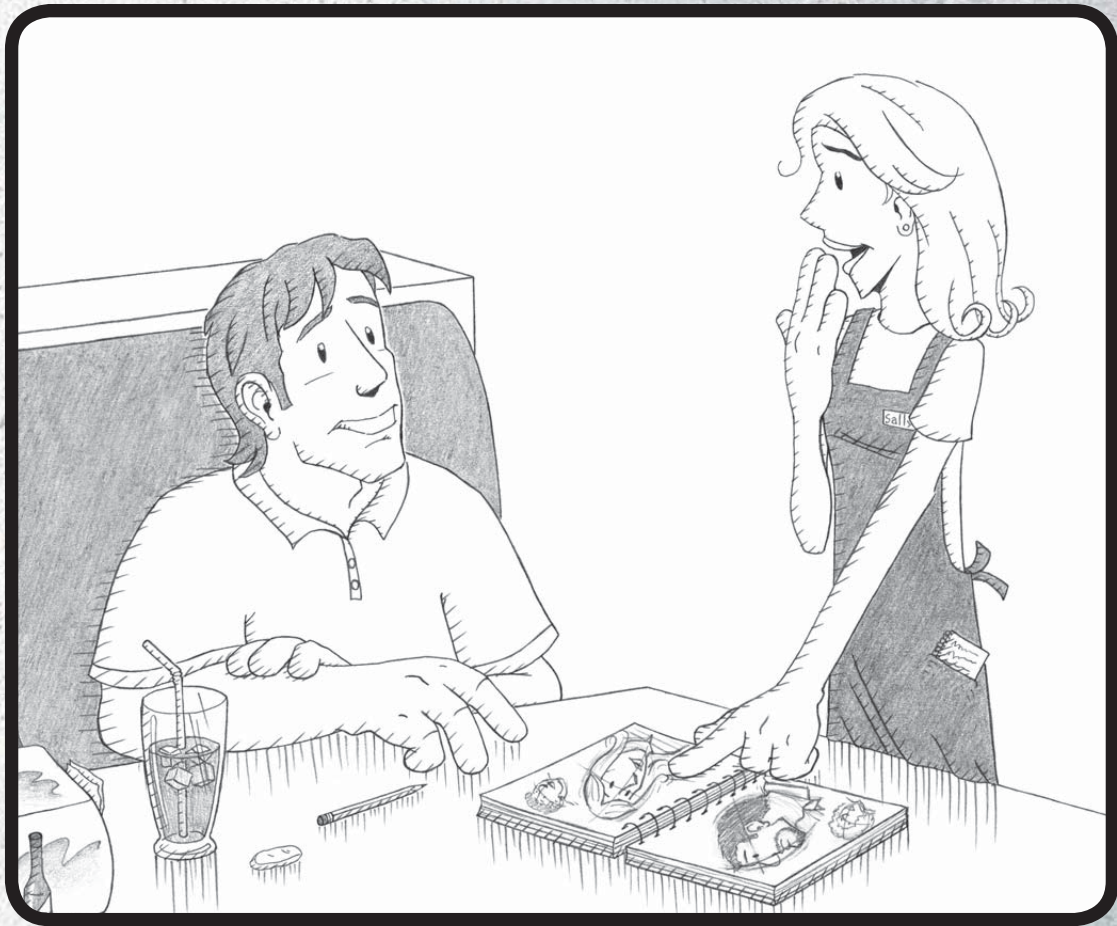


The Sketch in the Diner

A decorative title graphic with a blue border and a light blue background. The word "The" is in a white oval at the top left. "Sketch" is in large, stylized purple and orange letters. "in the Diner" is in smaller blue and orange letters. There are starburst icons and icons of a burger, a drink, and a hot dog.

A Short Story by Robert H. Flores

“Would you like something to drink, Sir?”

As I looked away from the window, I saw a pretty face looking down on me.

“Sure. I’ll take a pink lemonade, please.”

“Coming right up.”

I glanced at the street and wondered if Gus was stuck in traffic. Didn’t we both say Tuesday for lunch? Didn’t we say Ted’s Diner? The waitress came back with my lemonade.



“Here you go, Sir. I can take your order now if you’re ready.”

“Actually, um, I’m waiting for my friend to meet me here. . .”

“OK, No problem. I’ll check on you from time to time and see how you’re doing. If you need anything just holler.”

“Thank you.”

She turned to walk away, but before she turned, she shot a quick smile back at me.

During the next ten minutes, I noticed the waitress helping other customers, bringing food back and forth from the kitchen. She talked with a few customers in between orders. She seemed

genuinely friendly to people. Occasionally, she would look my way and I’d smile to let her know I was still OK. I thought about calling Gus on my cell phone, but I figured I would just let him call me. I hope nothing bad happened or that he forgot about our lunch meeting today.

Well, not one to waste time, I took my sketchbook out of my bag and decided to start sketching people in the diner. I always needed sketches of people and public places were always great to get “free faces.” The waitress noticed I was no longer just sitting here, but was now drawing. She started taking more of an interest in me. She would pass by me with plates of food and try to see what I was drawing, though she wouldn’t say anything. I could tell, though, that she was interested, because she didn’t try to hide the fact that she was looking at me. As the lunch crowd thinned out, she finally did walk over to my table and asked, “Are you an artist?”

“Yeah,” I paused. “I saw you looking at me.”

She turned red and looked down. Cute smile.

“I wish I could draw. I can’t even draw a stickman.”

“Well, you know, there’s good stickmen and then there’s bad ones. I’m sure you don’t draw bad ones.”

I finally got a glimpse of her name badge.

I slid my sketchbook across the table and offered her a look, “Here, you can take a look if you want. Sally.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. Of course.”

She began slowly flipping through my sketchbook, handling the pages as if they were ancient papyrii manuscripts. I laughed to myself and just watched her flip the pages.

Just then my cell phone rang. "Excuse me," I said. She nodded and continued flipping.

"This is William."

"Hey, Will. It's Gus. Unfortunately I'm not going to make it to lunch today. Can you believe it--I had a flat tire on the way over there and it's going to take at least 20 minutes for the tow truck to get here."

"Oh, that's terrible."

"I'm sorry, man, but, let's try and do lunch another time—maybe next week."

"Sure, next week sounds good. OK. Talk to you soon. Bye. . . sigh. . . well it looks like my friend isn't going to make it today."

"I'm sorry to hear that. Your friend. . . um, is she alright?"

"Oh, it's my friend Gus. Yeah, *he's* fine. He just had a flat tire is all."

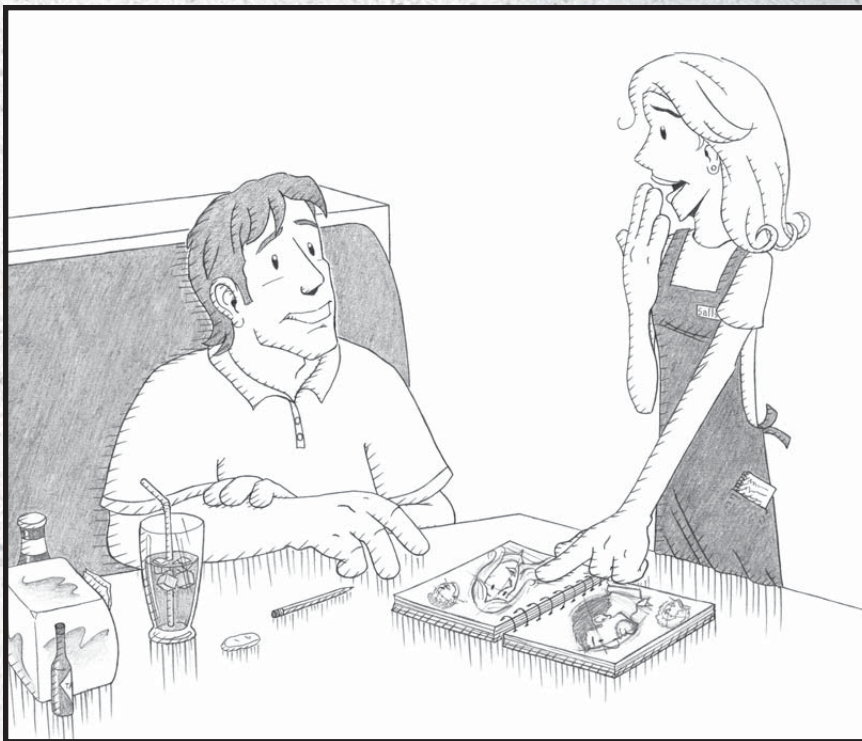
"Oh. For some reason I thought you were waiting for your girlfriend."

"No. . . I don't have a girlfriend." Our eyes locked.

She looked back down at the sketchbook. She stopped at one page. It was the face of a middle-aged woman.

"Funny, this one looks just like my mom."

"Really?" I turned my head to get a better look at it.



"Her hair has these little curls on the end. . ."

"Oh yeah. . ." I pointed to her hair, "Kind of like your hair, huh?"

"Heh heh. Yeah. . . kind of."

She just stared and smiled at me for what seemed like a long time. Finally she said, "Um. . . where did you draw this face?"

"Hmm. . . I think I drew that one at church. It was after one of the services and I was just sketching people on the patio area."

"Well, my mom definitely goes to church every Sunday. What church do you go to?"

"South Main Baptist."

"That's my mom's church!"

"Really? Huh. Then this drawing might really *be* her."

She just stared at it.

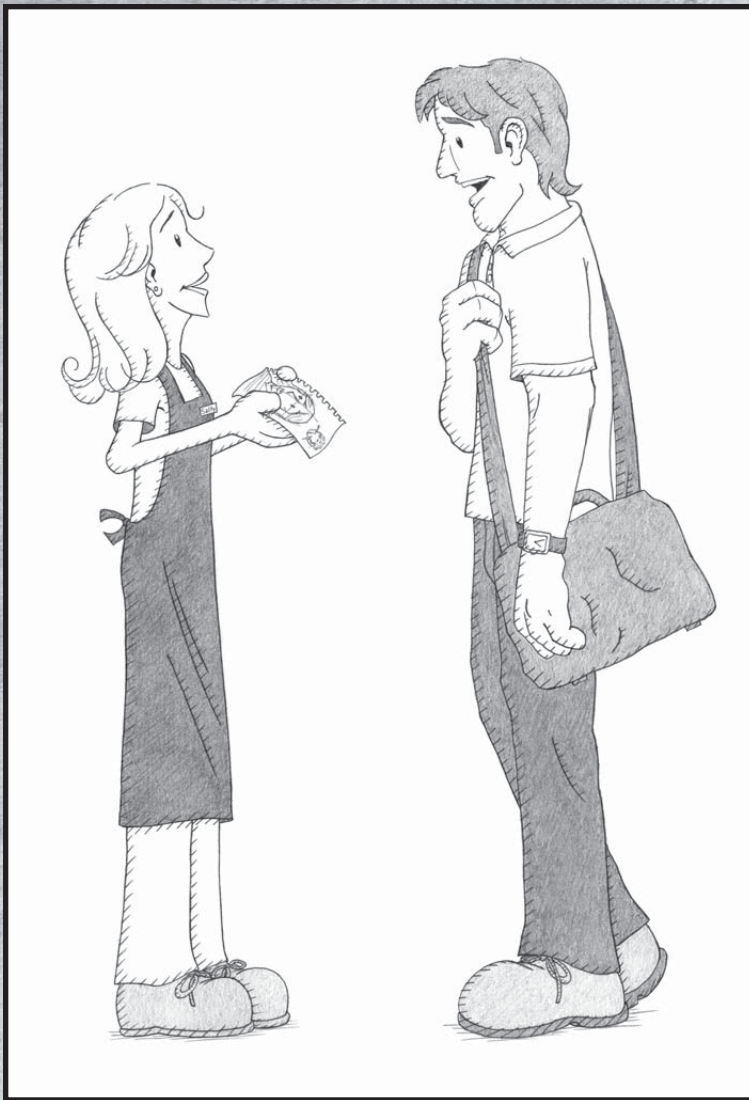
So, I continued, "It's a really good church: solid Bible teaching, small groups, lots of ministries. . ."

"I haven't been to church in years", she said, still looking down at the sketchbook.

"Oh, really?"

"Yeah. . . I guess I just kind of got burned out on it. I grew up in church, Sunday School, youth group, summer camp—the whole thing."

"I see. During college I went through a whole phase like that. Between work and school, I just didn't have much time for Bible studies or church. But eventually, God convicted me to reprioritize my life. He got



me back on track, and I've been happier ever since."

She nodded.

Just then one of the other customers was calling her to order.

"I've gotta go, um are you OK right now?"

"Yeah, go take care of him. I'm not going anywhere."

She smiled and went away.

I went back to sketching people. There was a man by himself, sipping coffee and reading the newspaper. At the counter was a pair of teenage girls eating salads. In the corner was an elderly couple drinking milkshakes together.

I thought, "Man, I would love to have that someday." I started sketching them. The way that she looked at his face and admired every detail of his moustache and his nose and his wrinkles was just fascinating to me. And the way that he talked to her with such respect; he admired her in every way. They would both laugh occasionally and cuddle up next to each other. It was very romantic without it being pretentious. She felt at home in his eyes and he felt confident next to her.

Sally came back about 8 minutes later and looked down at my drawing.

"Wow, did you just draw that couple over there?"

"Yeah."

"That is so amazing. It looks so real! You've captured the moment perfectly-- like her hair and the way they're sitting. It's so romantic-- I mean, I don't mean to be critiquing your work. . ."

"No, no, that's fine. I'm glad you like it."

"I see couples like that all the time in here. They go on their once-a-week date nights and they are all smiles. Personally, I think older couples like that could teach this generation what it takes to make a lifelong relationship work."

"I agree. It's altogether rare these days. It takes commitment to God and to each other to make a marriage like that work."

"You know, my mom has said something like that to me on more than one occasion."

We both studied each others' faces.

"Well," she said, catching her breath, "I guess I should take your order now if you're ready."

I glanced at my watch, "Uh, actually, I should probably get going. I've got to get back to work. So, can I just pay for my lemonade up at the front?"

"It's on the house."

“You sure?”

“Yeah. Today is, um, Free Lemonade Day, or something.”

“Heh. Well, thank you. I appreciate that.”

I started gathering all my stuff together, and stepped out of the booth.

She looked right into my eyes and said, “Thank you for letting me look at your sketchbook, and, um. . . for the talk. It was really nice.”

“Oh, um. . . my pleasure.”

I started to turn to leave, but I turned back around and did something I usually never do.

“Here”, I said.

She looked up at me.

I took out my sketchbook and carefully tore out the drawing of her “mother” and handed it to her.

“Really?” she asked surprisingly.

“Well, yeah, I need to give you a tip, don’t I?”

“Well, uh... thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

I turned to walk away and then I heard her say, “You know, maybe I’ll go to church this Sunday with my mom. I don’t live too far from her.”

“That wouldn’t be a bad decision. I think you’d like it, Sally.”

“I’m sure I would, too, William.”

We both smiled.

The next Sunday was another beautiful day. The sun was shining brightly as I stepped out of Second Service. Walking around outside, I decided to sit down and sketch some people. Just then, across the patio, I saw Sally and her mother walking out of the sanctuary. Sally saw me sitting down and waved at me. And I waved back.

The end.