

## [Open All Night]

Roaldus Richmond ???]

### OPEN ALL NIGHT

“On a job like this in a town this size,” he said, “I guess you get to know about everybody. Maybe you get to know too much about most of 'em. All different kinds of people come in to eat. You see some funny ones all right.”

He was a dapper little figure in his white apron, leaning on the counter of the diner, a white cap cocked on his sleek head. He had probably been good-looking once. Now his skin was pallid and there were dark pouches sagging under his eyes. Being night-man in an all-night lunchroom to not conducive to health. But his manner was cheerful and self-assured.

“All the younger stonecutters drop in about every night, and some of the older ones. So I hear plenty of talk about the granite business. The best stonecutter left in Barre quit the other day. Yeah, he had to quit. They called it kidney trouble or something, but it's t.b. all right. His name is Grandi, a hand carver, and they say he was good, plenty good. He cut statues and things like that. Guys like him are real artists, you know, geniuses. There aren't so many of them left. The boys all say Grandi was the best—and now he's all done.

“He used to come in here once in awhile, Grandi did. A quiet guy, not very big, but wiry and strong. I think he came from Carrara, where they cut marble. You could tell he had 2 something just by looking at him, see what I mean? He had that look about him, in his eyes and face, the way he acted and talked. He was always quiet and kind of dignified, kind of sad looking. But proud too, you understand. You could tell by looking at him he was no ordinary worker. He was a fine looking man too.

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"I've done about everything myself, tried about every kind of job. But I never tried cutting stone. I have fooled around the sandblast room though. A good pal of mine, a Scotch fellow, runs a sandblast machine. Once in awhile he lets me work on something easy, some simple job. It ain't so tough either. A kid could handle the machine. There's no vibration—it comes through a long hose to cut the vibration. About a hundred pounds air pressure it is. They use rubber to protect the stone they're cutting. If you're going to cut a flower, say, you work out the lines of the flower. Then you blow the surface around it back, see?—to bring the flower out. Yeah, they cut letters with the sandblast too. They can cut in straight and sharp if you want to pay for it. If you want a cheaper job they cut in on a slant, because it's easier. But of course they can't do with machines what Grandi and the others can do by hand. If a statue is machine cut it shows it. You can tell in a minute. You take a look at the Burns statue up there by the high school. You can damned well see that wasn't cut by any machine. That's a beautiful job.

"In here we got different batches of customers every night. What I mean there's a crowd after the first show of movies, another after the second show. Than there's a gang after midnight 3 when the bars close, and after them come the people who've really been out on a late party. Besides there's the people driving through late, and early mornings, tourists and truck drivers, all like that. Did you ever notice how people hate to go to bed? They'll hang around and hang around, drink coffee and smoke cigarettes and talk, hating to go home and go to sleep. I notice that a lot on this job. It's a funny thing too. I suppose some of them have reasons for not going home. Maybe they're scared of getting hell from their wives or mothers. But I think most of them just hate to go home to bed... It's kind of like dying, I guess, sleeping is. They just naturally hold back from it. They hang around the street or a place like this, doing nothing, just hanging around talking. Some guys have wives waiting, some have just an empty room and an empty bed. I don't know which is the worst, honest I don't. I'm still single.

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“I was born in Vermont, but I've kicked around the country quite a lot. I worked in Jersey City awhile, then I was in New York. I did short-order cooking, I worked in a grocery store and a shoe store, I tried selling, and I drove a taxi. I tended bar in Boston, but I got to drinking too much, so I quit. It's hard for me to stand drunks when I'm sober. I used to sneak a lot of drinks. When I saw it was getting me I quit. Sure, we get drunks in here too, and once in awhile there's a fight. This is quite a town for scrapping. These foreigners are quick-tempered, and plenty of Yankees are pretty wild and tough, you know. This town's got a kind of tough rep anyway—but it's a good town. At least it's alive, and that's more than most 4 Vermont towns are.

“I was out in Detroit working in a Ford plant for awhile too. That's a hard-boiled burg all right. The Purple gang was operating out there then, and they bumped off plenty of guys. They killed seven or eight Checker cab drivers in one week. I don't know what they had on them, but they knocked 'em off right and left that one week. Lot of tough [muggs?] in Detroit, lot of whorehouses and tough joints. It was too goddamn hard working for Ford. That assembly line stuff is a sonofabitch, I'm telling you. That's nothing but slavery. I quit and went to work in a White Tower place, you know the nickel-hamburger White Towers. That's where I got onto this all-night business. It ain't so bad when you get used to it. I kind of like it. I guess I always liked night better than day anyway. When I was a kid I used to frig around all night and my folks were always giving me hell for it. It's damn tough on the old folks, sitting home worrying what kind of trouble their kids are getting into tonight.

“I came home when my mother died. That was five-six years ago. I grabbed a plane from Detroit, trying to get here in time—but I was too late. I've been here ever since, and I haven't missed many nights back of this counter.

“Of course you get a couple nights off a week, and if you ever want to get off for something special one of the other boys will work for you. There's only two of us on at night, and sometimes we're rushed like hell. You know how they all come at once, in bunches. Sometimes the nights are goddamn long too. But the pay is pretty good and we get our

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board. 5 We eat good here, I'm telling you. Still a guy gets sick of always eating in the same place, especially the same place you work at. But what the hell don't you get sick of in this world?

"I don't know about the War. It looks bad over there with Russia and Japan in it now. I know they'd be hard to beat when Italy went in. Hitler must've known Russia and Japan was coming in. England and France should've driven in there while Germany was after Poland. They waited too damn long. Poor Poland, what a god-awful licking they took. And France folded up quick. Maybe Hitler will quit after he ruins England—but I doubt it. If it keeps an six months we'll get dragged into it sure as hell. But England's holding out good.

"I don't know how the Italians here will take it if we go to war with Italy. "Most of 'em I've heard talking hoped Mussolini would stay out in the first place. They didn't want Italy in with Germany. Most of 'em like it pretty good in this country. There are a few Fascists but they don't talk too loud or open. It ain't safe.

"All you hear now is war talk. In every bar and restaurant in the country they're talking war. You can't believe anything you read in the papers today. The British claim one thing, the Nazis claim another. There's no statement of facts, it's just what they claim. I think both sides lie like hell. We don't know what's really going on over there. How can we?

"Last Sunday I was in a joint drinking with a gang—one of those fourth-class license joints, you know. A Spanish woman runs this one. Everybody got high and everybody got to arguing about the war. They argued for hours about if you 6 started flying from Burlington to bomb Barre, where would you release the bombs. Say you were flying three hundred miles an hour. Some said right over Barre, some said over Montpelier, some claimed way back between Waterbury and Middlesex or further. One guy said he'd drop them as soon as he left Burlington! Over forty miles away. Everybody got drunker and louder and madder. They sure bombed Barre from all angles and all distances. It was funny as hell to hear 'em. I laughed my head off listening.

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“Well, I was too young for the last one, but I'll get the call this time. Maybe not the first call but I'll get it sooner or later. I always wanted to go to Europe, but I'm not crazy to go over just to get blown apart. Some of the single guys are kidding about getting married right away to get out of it. Lots of guys have done it already. But what the hell, if I have to go I'll go, just like my uncles did last time. One of them died in a German prison camp. The other one has been drinking himself to death ever since. I've heard him at night when he's dreaming. It wasn't nice to hear either.

“Everything's war talk, war news, war. They don't even talk about granite now, or sports, Joe DiMaggio or football. It's all the war.

“And everybody's drinking harder than ever, seems to me. I've noticed it in here. They go get plastered, blind drunk. That's the war. And at Tunbridge Fair they were drunk by the thousand. Of course they always did that before. But everywhere they're hitting it harder than ever. The war reaches over here, way up into Vermont. 7 “Well, there's too many people and too few jobs. It this one gets bigger it'll take care of that. Anyway I don't know as I want to spend all my life behind this goddamn counter. I got no folks left to worry about me, no wife and kids to leave. And I don't think the girls I go round with would die of broken hearts or anything, the way I used to think they would...

“Yessir, you said it, boy. Who wants to live forever? Okay, coming right up. Two dogs with mustard and two coffees.”