Machines

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Abstract

Sitting at a lunch counter. Waitress is busy busy. “Withya ina minit!” Encouraging...
SITTING at a lunch counter. Waitress is busy busy.

"Withya ina minit!"

Encouraging.
Ah, here she comes at last.
"Menu?"
"Please."
Flop. It is upside-down.
I open it to see if they have what I already knew that I wanted before I sat down. They do, as I was sure they would.
Waitress standing in front of me, staring out over my head: pad in hand, pencil poised.
"Yessir."
"I'd like a bowl of chili."
The pad vibrates at the impact of the high-speed pencil.
"Anything else?" in a well-practiced tone.
"No, thanks."
She moves away. All the while she did not look at me, only at the pad, and a glance or two at the counter. I watch her as she carries on her work: every movement performed
at least a thousand times before. And a real conversationalist:

"Yessir. . . What to drink? . . . Anything else?" pad vibrating.

"Yessir. . . Sorry, out of that today. . . No, sir. . . Yessir. . . Anything else sir?"

"Yes ma'am. . . Take cream? . . ." pad vibrating.

Utter lack of facial expression. She seldom has bothered to look at the customers (nor, indeed, they at her).

She returns.

Placed in front of me hurriedly: napkin, spoon (misses the napkin), and a bowl of chili.

Pad vibrates. Rip! Slap! The check lies on the counter soaking up the water which the waitress has spilled from my glass. It says "Thank You" in fancy red letters. I try to read the scrawl on the other side, then lay down a dollar. It soon disappears with the soggy check. Cash register, "Chaw-ding!"

Waitress returns, coins in hand.

"37, 38, 39, 40, 50, 75, a dollar, 'enk you." She was looking at the counter. If I were her brother, she would never have recognized me.

As I am eating, I happen to glance over at a machine standing in the corner. It sells various hot dishes, like chili, in little cans. A man steps up to it, turns the dial, inserts a coin, removes a can of food, picks up his change from a little trough, and walks away. The machine never even looked at him.