



## NIGHTHAWKS

Alanna Wheaton

The door jingled as he entered. The bright fluorescent light juxtaposed the dark night sky. The walls were painted a musky yellow, and the triangular bar in the center of the diner was stained to look like mahogany. The diner was empty except for a man, a woman, and the server. Both the man and woman were sitting at the bar; the man sat at the corner furthest from the door, and the woman sat in the middle of the adjacent side. The server was trapped in the center of the triangle. All were gazing in no particular direction and focused on nothing; all were listening to the radio. He sat next to the woman.

The radio crackled, "Large-scale evacuation Japanese aliens and their American-born children from strategic Pacific Coast military and industrial areas began today as a caravan of 350 autos and trucks left Pasadena for the Army's new reception center east of the Sierra Nevadas. More than 600 aliens and American citizens of Japanese descent assembled before

dawn at Pasadena's Rose Bowl, scene of the annual New Years' Day football classic in pre-war years. In scenes reminiscent of the flight of Oklahoma and Texas dust bowl refugees to California a few years ago, the Japanese piled their household belongings on their autos and trucks, many of them ready for the junkyard. Each evacuee wore an identifying card on his lapel and carried a ditty bag stuffed with personal effects. Many of the American-born youths wore sweaters indicating recent participation in high school and college sports. Then Major C.V. Caldwell, provost general for the sector, gave the order to start. There were grinds of self-starters, a few orders from officers, and the long parade began to the camp at Manzanar, in the Owens Valley, 230 miles north of Los Angeles."

The server turned the dial until the radio clicked off. Everyone in the diner was silent, concentrated on the words that still echoed.

The man next to the woman started, "Some news, huh?—Oh, you—I've seen you here before."

She quickly turned her head to look at him. It took a moment for her

to recognize his face. "I've seen you too. You're here every night I am." She resettled herself in the chair and crossed her legs. "How often do you come?"

"Everyday. My wife left a few days ago to see her mother. I can't cook for myself, so I'm here getting fed. You're here often too."

"I drop by to get coffee after work sometimes."

They both paused.

She worked in an office. The light was dim, and the windows on the doors were opaque and aged. She shared the room with her boss. All the wooden furniture in the room matched except for her tiny desk. It could only fit a typewriter on it. She filed papers she had written or the boss had read in an avocado green filing cabinet. The boss always kept his head down, concentrated on his work. He would rarely look up as he gave her orders. And as words were precious to him, he was curt. He would only speak to give orders, so she had few responses. The office was quiet. After work she'd walk. The din of cars and horns was the soundtrack of the streets, but no people spoke. In the diner people spoke sometimes. She liked to listen.

"Can I refill your cup?"

"Sure. Thank you."

"Hey, fella. Two coffees and a blue plate special."

"Yes, sir."

"Hey fella, what's today?"

"The twenty-third of March."

He looked at his watch. "Why that makes it my wife's birthday today. Oh, God. Well, at least she isn't here. Do you have a special woman, fella? Have her date memorized?"

"Yeah, a girlfriend at home. December second."

The woman turned to the man and said, "I'm sorry you won't be celebrating your wife's birthday with her this year," she said.

"Naw, it's all right."

They were silent.

He was usually alone on his wife's birthday; he would end up in the dog house. He'd buy a card and flowers for his wife, but it was always wrong.

"These aren't my favorite flowers."

"What are your favorite flowers, honey?"

"You should know. This gift ..." She'd huff, then begin her sentence again, "You are so careless! Do you even know me?"

She'd storm to the laundry cabinet and throw a pillow and sheets at her husband, then lock herself in the bedroom. He'd sigh. Then he would lift the couch cushion, retrieve a list, add roses or orchids—whatever the flower he got this year—to the list and cross it off, indicating he'd once again got it wrong.

"So, where do you work?" he asked.

"In an office."

The man laughed. "So do I. I earn the money and the Mrs. spends it!"

Laughing, he addressed the man at the other end of the bar, "Am I right?"

The man remained silent.

He had a wife once. She saved money, reserving it for a baby. They had tried for children, but she had two miscarriages, so they saved their money for adoption. But she had found another man. She became pregnant with that man's child, and divorced her husband. She took the house. It was a white, two-story house with green window shutters and green accents on the door and windows. Trimmed, green shrubbery followed around the house in a square, and a quaint, white gate let guests in. It was in a safe neighborhood: a perfect place to raise children. She put a crib in it. He was left to find an apartment.

"Hey, buddy, so what do you think of moving the Japs?"

The man croaked, "FDR's taking every measure to keep us safe."

"Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, whatever it takes to keep this country safe. The Japs living in this country could've been plotting another attack. We don't need another date of infamy. Executive Order 9066 is affecting us right here; my neighbor was Japanese."

"Mine too," the server added as he placed the two mugs and blue plate special on the counter.

"Thanks, fella."

"You're welcome, sir."

There was silence again.

The server knew it was not necessary

to move the Japanese. They were American citizens; they were devoted to this country. His neighbor flew the American flag in her yard. They would not be plotting another attack. He used to see her everyday. But when he returns home tonight she won't be there. Her house would be empty. His house was empty; he didn't have a girlfriend. He only wished his neighbor was. But an inter-racial couple was frowned upon and stirred gossip. The consequences of a relationship kept him reserved, but once she came back he would be changed. He'd be undignified and profess his love. He didn't care what the gossip weavers said anymore. He feared his decision came too late; he feared she wasn't coming back, and he didn't say goodbye.

"Mind if I smoke?" asked the man next to the woman. No one responded, so he lit a cigarette. The woman looked out. The man at the other end of the bar stared into his empty glass. The server bent down, got a rag, and started cleaning the counter, taking off stray glasses.

