

It All Began with A Turkey Sub

Frank stared at the vision who layered turkey and cucumbers on a six inch whole wheat loaf. Light from the fly-specked windows revealed auburn streaks through her dark-brown hair. Frank noticed a few gray hairs.

Yet the woman's face was smooth. Maybe she's prematurely gray. "Remember, lots of cucumbers," Frank reminded, wanting to say something, even if it were veggie talk. "Oh and mayo, that grainy mustard, tomato, and cheese."

She handed Frank the sandwich. He nearly dropped it. His arthritis fingers felt the cold weather. His small gas heater didn't keep his tent warm. But he was thankful to have a tent in a safe place.

All through lunch, Frank sneaked peeks at the gal making subs. She smiled a lot. If only. Naw! He not lots of nothing to offer. Lunch today was an unusual treat. He'd found a black bag full of refundable bottles near a trash can. He could afford lunch. No soda, only water, and a warm place to sit. He dug in pockets, tried to find a tip.

Then she was there, beside his booth. "Thought you could use this extra sandwich. New guy made it wrong. We'd toss it out."

How did she know? This vision of lovely guessed he was broke. Sure he'd tried hard to find work. Years back he'd nearly finished college when the downturn hit. Only choice was the service. Six long years and all he had to show for it was fragments in his leg. Now he attended night classes. With luck, he'd finish in a couple years. He walked to classes, couldn't afford the bus. He studied by lantern light.

The woman held out the foot long. His face and ears burned. Charity. "Don't mean to offend," she said softly. As if meals at the mission didn't humiliate enough.

"No worries," he murmured. "Thanks."

Still she lingered. "I'm Emmy, short for Emily. No offense meant. Honest, I know what you're going through. I've been there."

Frank tried to smile. She was so darn cute. When she grinned, he could see wrinkles at her eyes. But that smile. Wow.

“Thanks Emmy. I’m Frank. Yes, I can use this extra. How long have you worked here?”

“About eight months,” Emmy said. “Finally got a room with an older lady. I help her clean. She provides room and breakfast. Can’t complain.”

Easier for women,” Frank thought. *Can’t see anyone giving me a room.*

Heck, why be negative. When someone is nice and so cute.

“Listen Frank. Come by tomorrow for lunch. I’ll save any extras.” Emmy blurted out. “Owner doesn’t care. He’s a good guy, started from the bottom too. Actually he sometimes acts as if he likes me a bit too much, if you get my meaning.” Emmy giggled. “I’m going out on a limb here,” Emily went on. “Maybe we could visit the art museum when I get off around two. I’m studying art.”

She was bold too. Frank liked that. And why not? It was warm in the art museum. “I’m taking classes,” Frank offered. “It’s hard, since I live pretty simple. Well, I live in a tent is the truth.”

“I’d like to hear about your studies,” Emmy said, shyly. “I have trouble staying focused. I need a friend to talk to.”

Friend! Frank had none. Hard to invite anyone to visit when you live in a tent. “Sure. I’d like that. Tomorrow then.” Frank could hardly swallow. She wanted to be his friend.

He’d get a good shower tonight at the mission. Most of the time he avoided their showers in the evenings. So many guys with drug problems or worse. Listen to him. Trying to pass himself off as better than other homeless.

“See you tomorrow,” he told Emmy. “Thanks for the extra. But it’s your cheerful smile that made my day.” If he found enough bottles, he could spring for espressos at the café over on Hyde, after the art museum. Frank walked slow toward the door. When he looked back, Emmy was watching. His heart skipped a beat.

I’ll borrow a sharper razor and shampoo. Sun warmed his head. This was one special day. Wonder if St. Vincent would have nice jeans and sox. And a shirt – even pink. Don’t think Emmy will mind. With fresh clothes, he’d put in another job application in the morning. He’d keep trying. Especially now he felt hope again.