

*Abduction at Griffith Observatory* is two novels in one -- both taking place in 1935 Los Angeles. Here, the main character's alter ego goes out for dinner after a long day, and has an encounter with the mysterious cleaning woman who works in his building.

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*I looked out through the windows at the dark night and the glowing of the city lights all around me. It was a little difficult, but I managed to see a few stars out in the night sky, their light fighting against the city glare. For a moment, I longed for those earlier, more simple times when I would just go out on the roof and lie there, staring at the stars in the sky. The night was darker, then, and I could see so many stars. I fought against my urge to go up to the top of my building and look at the skies again. Instead, I got up, put on some slacks and a shirt, some shoes and socks. I grabbed a blazer from the closet and headed out the door, unsure what the night would bring.*

*The first thing the night brought was something to eat. I left my apartment building and walked a few blocks up Broadway Street to the new Clifton's Cafeteria near Sixth Street. Until recently, it was a Boos Brothers Cafeteria. Used to be my favorite place to chow down. I had some concerns when they sold their lease to Clifford Clinton, the man who already ran a Clifton's up on Olive Street; but my first visit made me feel better. The food was the same simple good food; Clinton just changed the decorations a little bit. I was glad I still liked it so I didn't have to find some new place. Another change Clinton made was removing the fixed price of the meals. Instead, he instituted a "pay what you wish" policy loudly advertised by a flashing neon sign at the cafeteria entrance. It allowed a person to eat a meal and pay whatever he thought it was worth -- or whatever he could afford. During these hard times, I'm sure it was a godsend to a lot of poor or struggling families. Me, I had it good, so I always made sure to pay a little more than the usual going price. I wanted them to use the extra money to help a starving kid get a good hot lunch, or a man keep his energy as he ankleed it up and down the streets looking for any kind of job. These were tough times. I had it good. I knew it. I wanted to make sure I never forgot it.*

*I ended up not eating all the food I got. I guess my eyes were bigger than my stomach at that point. So I asked for a small box and put into it a piece of roast beef, some fried potatoes, an extra piece of bread and a single pat of butter. I walked back to my apartment building and up the stairs to the third floor. It wasn't so late, but I knocked on the door, gently, in case the occupant was asleep. I heard the slight sounds of footsteps and backed from the door a step. The door opened, slowly, and I saw the familiar face. It was the cleaning woman, looking every day of whatever age she was.*

*I held out the box.*

*"I was just down at dinner," I said, quietly.*

*She looked at me.*

*"I ended up getting more food than I could eat," I continued, adding a smile.*

*She continued looking at me.*

*"My refrigerator's been acting up a little lately, so I really can't keep all this food," I said. "I thought maybe you could use it. It would just go to waste, otherwise."*

*The old woman opened the door and stretched out a frail arm. She put her hand under the box, gently, and pulled it toward her.*

*"Thank you," she said, quietly, and closed the door behind her.*

*I turned, walked across the landing and headed down the stairs to the ground floor, wondering all the while what the cleaning woman must think about my refrigerator. It worked just fine, of course. I'd been telling her it was broken for a few years now. I'd been bringing her my leftovers all that time -- in fact, it started long before I bought the building. I didn't want her to think I felt sorry for her, or that she couldn't afford food -- even though I did and she probably couldn't. Just seems strange that a country as rich and successful as ours -- even in the midst of a crippling Depression -- could let people go to bed hungry at night. I don't see the sense in it; so, I try to do whatever I can, one person at a time.*

*I had thought to go back out, maybe catch a movie at the Orpheum just down the street; but suddenly a wave of exhaustion overtook me. I don't how it happened, but there it was.*

*I headed back up the stairs and back to my apartment. I dropped onto the bed, next to that evening's newspaper. I didn't even bother to take off my clothes, that's how tired I was. I should have taken time to read through the paper. It would have saved me a lot of grief and heartache if I had. But I didn't. No, I fell fast asleep and slept the sleep of angels.*