

# Mr. Only

*by* Tim Young

I'm Mr. Only. That's not my real name but suffice to say it's plenty good for this tale. He calls me Mr. Only. "He" is an older guy I know at the supermarket where I like to shop. He sometimes will dish me out half a pound of cole slaw or potato salad. I don't have an enormous appetite. He is always friendly with me and we usually share a short conversation about the weather or whatever. I don't like to speak too much or take up too much of his time but I like it if he is the one who serves me.

It's funny, this whole Mr. Only thing. The only reason I know he calls me Mr. Only is because I overheard him talking about me to one of his co-workers. He does not know my real name but I figured since he does see me in the store very often he wanted to attach a name to my face. Which is more or less what I overheard in his remarks about me. I heard him say, "Do you know the name of this regular, the short, balding guy with the wire rim glasses."

The co-worker he was talking to, not one of my favorites, told him no, he did not know my name, but then said I was an OK kind of guy. A comment I did not expect from the one I'm not very fond of.

Then, the man I like said, "Well, I'm going to name him Mr. Only." But by the time those words left his mouth, the other man had moved on to serve another customer. I think it is somewhat weird that I do not know the name of the man I am fond of. All the workers in the store wear a name badge, first name, last name initial, but because of a silly block in my mind, I never have bothered to read the name of the man I am fond of.

One time, in the parking lot, as I was pushing my cart to my car, I saw him sitting in his car eating a sandwich. It was the first time I saw him in another context other than behind the deli counter. As I was picking up my gallon of milk and my Bounty paper towels,

stashing them in my trunk, I realized that seeing him out of the store was exciting. With each item I carefully placed in my trunk, I turned my head ever so discreetly over my shoulder to glance at him again as he sat in his vehicle. The last two times I glanced he was sipping from a cup which I assumed was coffee because I could tell he was not taking large gulps. He seemed to be enjoying whatever it was he was drinking. I closed my trunk.

I must divulge that the next day as I pushed my cart across the parking lot to the place I almost always park, I did it at approximately the same time I saw him in the car the day before, and sure enough he was in there with his coffee cup. This went on for quite some time. I did not always catch him eating his sandwich and drinking his coffee but often I did. I determined he must be watching me too since my routine so often coincides with his. I began to think I should saunter over to his auto and introduce myself as his old friend, Mr. Only. I thought about this idea for months on end because I could never convince myself he would have a positive reaction to knowing his private name for me. I don't know what I thought he might do or say but in my anticipation of his remarks I knew I had done a good job of frightening myself from doing what I was now becoming obsessed with.

Finally, as several more weeks crawled by, and as he was dipping the spoon into the four bean salad I had ordered, I stared deliberately and intently at his name badge. There it was, his name in block letters, Frank Y. It was at that precise moment he noticed the spot on his apron where his name tag was clipped and where my eyes had focused. I wanted to raise my voice and thank Frank for all his years of wonderful service and his kindness which had planted itself in my heart and blossomed into a real love. But I never raise my voice, except once, I remember when a young woman tried to steal my paper towels from my trunk, but Frank was helping me and I know would never attempt to steal from me. Instead I just said, thank you Frank. He looked so surprised because I had mentioned

his name, something I never had the nerve to do before. He smiled his professional smile and said, "always my pleasure." If only i had been more of a man and less of a regular customer I might have devised a way for Frank to say my name out loud. Then Mr. Only would have had a day unlike all the others.

