

Character Sketch Through Dialogue

by Shawn Matheny

The two rode around the small empty town in silence. At the beginning of the evening they had been talking, and laughing, and enjoying one another, but then she had, as usual, said the wrong thing and he had become silent. She had decided long ago that his moody silences were worse than his quick outbursts. While he stared straight ahead and deliberately steered the battered red truck, she sat in her uneasy silence. At first, she had stared out the window past the levee towards the dark mountains. Then, she stared at her clasped hands resting on her lap, and finally she looked down at the space separating them. Suddenly, she could tolerate the stillness no longer. She had to say something—anything to disturb it.

"Mike, I'm sorry."

Simply continuing to clutch at the wheel and look straight ahead, he didn't respond to the softly whispered apology.

She reached across the space dividing them and gently touched his sleeve.

Mike. . . say something to me. . . please."

He pulled slightly away from her hand and then replied, "Hell Jamie, what do you want me to say? Just tell me, what in the hell do you want me to say this time?"

"I don't know," she said in a small, almost helpless, voice.

With a frustrated explosion he hit the steering wheel hard with the open palm of his hand, causing the truck to swerve into the thick darkness.

"That's right, you never know, do you? You don't know a god damn thing. You don't know your ass from your elbow and you sure as hell don't know what love is. I'm so sick and tired of it. Your lies. Your games. You use me. But let me tell you something right now, babe, it just don't get it with me—not anymore."

She looked up at him for a second with glistening eyes, then she quickly looked away out to the soft summer night.

In a cracked voice she implored, "Mike, why can't we just enjoy being together like normal people? Why do we have to fight every time I come home? I hate this. . . I hate to cry. . . I hate to hurt you. . . and I hate feeling guilty."

Swearing under his breath, he pulled the truck to a stop in the middle of the abandoned road. With only the sound of the crickets in the fields and the water in the canal to break the silence, he turned towards her with dark accusing eyes, but he didn't reach out to try to touch her.

"Shit, don't you understand? Can't you understand? I loved you so much—too much. I still love you and even though I sometimes hate myself for it, I know I'll always love you. And that's what hurts so bad. When you got out of school and I got my job with Mountain Drive, I wanted to marry you. But no, you wanted to go away to school. Then you wanted to date around. After that, you dumped me. Two weeks later you wanted me back. Do you remember how long that went on? Do you remember how long we were on-again-off-again? Well, I sure as hell do! And now? Who in the hell knows what you want. . . who in the hell."

She looked down at her hands and then she looked further down inside herself. She hesitated for a few seconds before she decided to speak.

"Mike, you're right in a way. I don't know what I want. But I do know what I don't want. I don't want this town and I don't want to be the wife of some Mountain Drive worker. I want something more than this. . . than here. I want to see more and do. . . do everything. I don't want to spend the rest of my life playing cards and getting drunk or high with your friends. I don't want to forever be watching TV at your parents' house or even. . . or even screwing around with you on some deadend road in the front seat of this shitty truck. I need. . . I don't know. . . something more. But you are wrong about one thing. I do know about love and that's why I can't let go of this. It's not so bad at school, but everytime I come home to see you. . . I've tried to say good-bye to you, but you won't let me and I guess I won't let myself. When I'm at school I close my eyes and you're there, but always when I open them you somehow slip away. When I'm here you never leave me. You're here too, and warm, and strong and. . . But I don't want this feeling for you and I don't want the memories. Don't **you** understand, Mike? Can't **you** understand? I need you and I love you, but I could never be really happy with you."

Staring straight ahead once more, he started up the truck and drove through town in silence. Finally, after stopping in front of her dark, large house, he turned to look at her.

"Dave and Jill asked us over for tomorrow night to watch "Arthur" on HBO. Do you want to go? If you don't want to decide right now, I'll come by the pool tomorrow after I get off work to find out. Okay?"

Without waiting for a reply, he reached across the seat and pulled her into his arms.

"Okay?" he whispered against her hair in a pleading voice.

A minute of silence and then a moment of decision faded away before she answered "okay" in quiet resignation.

Character Sketch: **Likable Character**

by Melinda Russell

His hair was wild, curling about in chaos down to his waist. Still, something about it fascinated me. I admired hair that was clean, lively and healthy looking. I knew he was outrageous, having hair like he did, but I could not help staring. His eyes romanced me in a silent brilliance. Their color was like that of a sparkling mountain lake. The color was clear, crisp and utterly blue. No one could doubt he had blue eyes, not blue-gray or blue-green.

I turned around, horrified by my own interest in him. Somehow he knew, and took pride in my affection. He moved to the table just in front of me and sat facing me. Three times he made a point of strolling by my table so I might have a full view of him. His build made me blush, so sleek, firm and perfect. He had the shape of an athlete with muscles molded with great care over his bones. Ah, such beauty Michelangelo never saw, or surely he would have sculpted a body like his. His body was a masterpiece of creation that any artist would pay a fortune to paint and sculpt.