

**Fiction**

cooks and a corps of waiters. He barely glanced up at the young man.

"I'm Duncan," he said. "Grab an apron and get over to the sink. Scrape the plates, rinse and stack 'em. Wash later."

The young man stood and watched the frenzy.

"Look, bud," Duncan said, "get busy or get out. You don't eat if you don't work." And then, muttering, "They're all alike, the drifters you get these days. I'm going to have to talk to that girl again."

The young man traded his jacket for an apron. He found a rubber food scraper and started to work. He scraped the plates clean, piled them up, and then began to rinse, starting another pile. He worked quickly, without a wasted motion. He smiled from time to time. Even though the dishes kept coming, he was about caught up when Duncan was back.

"Good," he said. "Now wash. I want that water scalding, plenty of soap. Rinse. Towels in that drawer. Get going."

"Right," the young man said. "You don't eat if you don't work.' Right."

"Balmy," said Duncan. "On a night like this, I end up with a loony."

The girl came back to the kitchen twice. The first time she nodded to the young man at the sink. The second time she smiled at him.

The young man worked smoothly. He earned an approving look from Duncan. When he finished, he looked up to find the kitchen deserted except for the girl. She was watching him with admiration.

"I'm Janet Mayberry," she said. "You sure can wash."

He wiped his hands and bowed deeply.

"The help is eating in the dining room. I'd say you've earned your steak."

"You need an automatic dishwasher," the young man said.

The girl looked startled. "Look, we can talk shop later. Or don't you really care to eat?"

"You also haven't got a garbage disposal," the young man said.

The girl shook her head. "There are a lot of things I haven't got. Go sit down and I'll bring your dinner."

**T**HE YOUNG MAN shrugged and went into the dining room. He sat next to Duncan. The girl brought him a green salad, a huge steak, asparagus, and a potato baked in aluminum foil. She slit the potato with a knife. "Sour-cream topping with chives, or do you want to argue about that, too?"

"No, ma'am," the young man said. He ate without a word. The girl brought him a slice of blueberry pie, topped with a slab of vanilla ice cream. She filled his coffee cup.

"Well, Duncan," she said, "what do you think of my dishwasher?"

"I don't like bums in my kitchen," Duncan said without malice.

"Thanks," the young man said. He stretched. "Great food."

"Janet," Duncan said, "I've told you before. I don't like it. One of these nights, you'll send back some bum who'll take a meat cleaver to us and make off with the cash register."

"Maybe I should have shaved," the young man said reflectively.

"Don't mind Duncan," the girl said. "Where you from?"

"East."

"Where you headed?"

"West."

"Hitchhiking?"

"Not exactly."

The girl looked at him and frowned. "You got a name?"

"Rutherford Hayes McWilliams," the young man said.

"Wow!" said Duncan and he began collecting dishes.

The girl sat down. "Never mind him," she said "You must be new at bumming around. Don't you know better than to come to the front door?"

"To tell the truth," the young man said, "I hadn't considered it."

"Short of cash?" the girl asked sympathetically.

The young man grinned. "That's the funny part," he said. "I never gave much thought to that either until you told me to go around the back. Then I realized I didn't have a penny."

The girl shook her head. "You're an odd one, all right. Lose your job?"

"No."

"Well," the girl said, looking at him directly, "so what is your problem?"

The young man took a pack of cigarets out of his jacket, offered the girl one, took one himself.

"Never really given much thought to that, either," he said, lighting up.

"Honestly," the girl said with spirit, "I just don't understand. You speak well. You've got good teeth. Shave, put on decent clothes, and you could look respectable. You could hold a job. You did very well with the dishes, I noticed."

The young man said, "That's nice. I mean, about the dishes, the teeth, and holding a job. Thanks."

"I'd like to help," the girl said earnestly. "I'll give you a job. I'll even ad-

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