

Mrs. Pedersen

MRS. PEDERSEN opened the kitchen door and pulled her worn bathrobe closer around her. It was still early. The room was hazy gray in the early morning light. The work counters loomed shadow-like. The pots and pans hanging from overhead were non-descript jagged lumps. There wasn't a sound from the sleeping sorority girls upstairs.

"Damn poor way to make a livin' " she thought. "Maybe I won't stay. Wish I hadn't promised Miz Stanton. She shivered slightly and set out a tray of rolls on the kitchen counter. She rattled and banged a tray of glasses as she set them out too. She noticed the gauge on the coffee maker read half full. "So what," she thought, "them girls don't need to drink so much coffee. Miz Stanton always sez 'save'. Like last night . . . I'll jest warm up what's here."

From the refrigerator in the other end of the long kitchen she lugged a two-and-a-half gallon milk can and hoisted it to the counter, grunting. She was short and fat, and part of the way she dragged the can along the worn linoleum, leaving a rut. She brushed a string of mouse-gray hair back under her night cap with a grimy hand.

"Damn girls," she muttered. "If they're gonna drink milk, they kin pour it from that. I ain't gonna put it in no pitchers fer no queens."

She waddled back to the refrigerator and got out fat and eggs and measured them hap-hazardly for cookies.

"Damn girls an' all their parties. Jest a bunch of frilly fru-fraw."

A sleepy girl in a rumpled robe wandered into the kitchen and drew a cup of coffee from the coffee maker. "Morning, Mrs. Pedersen."

Mrs. Pedersen dumped a four-cup-measure of sugar in with the fat.

The sleepy girl started mechanically around the counter to warm her roll in the oven.

"Ovens ain't warm yet."

So she took her cold roll and coffee and wobbled sleepily out the door.

Mrs. Pedersen stopped mixing cookies to light the oven. Then she broke several eggs over the bowl. "Damn queens. Ain't satisfied with jest rolls — got to have 'em hot. Huh!" She fished out part of an egg shell and tossed it under the sink. "Huh!"

Two more girls drifted in the door. They wore bulky sweatshirts over their pajamas. Their hair was still curled in bobby pins.

"I'll be glad when Rush is over," said one.

"Ditto. What time's the party today?"

"Nine. Want coffee?"

"Yeah. Mrs. Pedersen, can we have Wheat Chex?"

Mrs. Pedersen slammed the bowl under the beater and turned the switch. The whirr of the big mixer drowned out the girl's question. The girl went over to the cupboard and got out a box of cereal. She poured a bowl full. The two girls put breakfast on a tray and left, winking at another who was just coming in. "Careful." The other winked back knowingly.

"Good morning, Mrs. Pedersen." The girl put a cup under the coffee spout. She raised her voice above the beater whirr. "How are the cookies? They look so good!"

"They'll be OK."

"Oh, I'm sure they will. And won't they taste nice and hot at the party?"

"Wull, they might not be done. Cookies fer fifty ain't no snap."

"Fifty? I thought you were making them for a hundred! There are thirty-nine actives alone. Plus guests."

"I'm making fer fifty and fifty it'll be." Her face darkened as she spit out the words. "Damn parties. Ain't I got enough to do but to make cookies too. Y'ud think I was doin' the rushin'."

The girl made a mental note to tell the actives not to take cookies at the party.

"Nice morning," she began again.

"Been out yet?"

"Well . . . no."

“How’d ya know then? An’ don’t eat in the kitchen.”

The girl choked on the mouthful of hot coffee. “I’m sorry.”

“Kitchens weren’t made to eat in. I ain’t gonna work and hafta watch people eat. Git on down stairs an’ eat.”

Mrs. Pedersen dumped in all the milk and let it splash wildly against the beater blades. It made dark splotches on the floor where it spilled. She dumped in the flour. The whirring slowed slightly and built up speed again.

“Damn beater makes so damn much noise,” She began greasing cooky sheets with the heel of her hand.

“Good morning, Mrs. Pedersen. How’s everything going this morning?” Mrs. Stanton, the housemother, stood in the doorway, looking even smaller and thinner than usual in the lacy robe she wore. Mrs. Pedersen grumbled softly and smeared another sheet.

“How are the cookies coming? Will they be done for the party?” She had to shout over the hum of the beater.

“Huh?”

“I said, how are the cookies coming?”

“I dunno.”

“I wish you’d made them yesterday like I asked you to, Mrs. Pedersen. Then they wouldn’t be pushing you now.”

Mrs. Stanton poured herself a cup of coffee.

“Miz Stanton, nothin’ pushes me. When things get too

The beater stopped suddenly. The kitchen was very still.

“Miz Stanton, nothin’ pushes me. When things get too much fer me, I quit. I know my limits.”

No answer.

“I’ve almost reached my limits here, Miz Stanton. I ain’t agin cookin’ meals fer yer sor-or-it-ty girls, but I ain’t fer all these frilly parties.”

“They’re part of your job. I explained that thoroughly to you when you applied. You were sure you could handle it then.”

“Wull, they ain’t no more. I’m gettin’ out, I am.” She swooped up a tray of cookies and popped it into the oven.

“You promised last night, on your word, you’d finish the week. The girls need you badly now. They can’t get through Rush without you.”

“Last night was last night. She yanked off her apron and

threw it into the sink. She strode toward the door. "I'm quittin'."

"What about the cookies?"

"Git one of yer queens to finish 'em. Ain't they home ecers?"

Mrs. Stanon drew herself up, filling the doorway. "Mrs. Pedersen," she began, "we discussed this completely last night. If you leave now, you will not be paid and you will have no letter of recommendation from this job. You said you'd stay the week. I think you'd better stay." She took her coffee upstairs. The coffee shook over the rim of the cup, leaving a trail of tiny spots.

Mrs. Pedersen stared after her. Her lower jaw hung limply against her thick neck. Slowly she turned and got herself a cup of coffee. She gulped it like a dose of medicine. Then she unwadded her apron and began to drop more cookies. "Damn queens and their parties," she muttered.

— *Mary Jean Stoddard, H. Ec. Sr.*



The Wild Ones

DON stood on the edge of the sidewalk, feet wide apart, shoulders hunched inside his jacket, as he watched the car gather speed and roar away. The red tail light vanished at the next corner, and gradually the sound faded, leaving only silence with an undertone of traffic somewhere in the distance. He turned defiantly toward the house.

The streetlight spread a fuzzy-edged circle of light on the sidewalk, and bugs danced hummily around its glowing dome. There was no other light anywhere. The sides of the