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The Dirty Dish to Clara

By AD SCHUSTER

CLARA came from the kitchen, carrying her tray high as a Grecian dancer carries a vase, and with quite as much of studied grace. In the tilt of her head and flush of her cheek there were anger and defiance. She would pretend she did not know of the plot against her, would fight it out, and then resign, giving a story she was needed at home. The girl knew she was beaten and that they were all against her, those in the kitchen and the other waitresses but she had not thought it would come to this.

"The dirty dish," she said to herself, "I am to think they went and handed me the dirty dish!" Unless one has been a husher, pearl-diver, or cook in a restaurant he cannot know of the disgrace which had fallen on Clara. This job she had needed so much and which she counted upon to provide her with enough money for new clothes and another try at winning a clerical position was being taken from her by the very men whom she had trusted. It was a diabolic scheme, she thought, and one difficult to trace. Giving a girl the dirty dish means to serve her wrong; make her wait, and put upon her from kitchen to table all the little inconveniences of which "practiced hands" are capable. The result, invariably, is an increasing number of complaints and dismissal.

They couldn't know that Clara was naturally self-contained or of the many things she had on her mind. As she thought it over, too late, she saw they must have reasoned she was putting on airs. Perhaps her efficiency and manner with the customers had won from the other tables some of the favored customers.

"Maybe," said Clara, "if I made an application I could be transferred to one of the other restaurants. The company has enough, goodness knows." "It seems to me," the customer looked over his spectacles and regarded her with disapproval. "It took you too long to get my order."

"Yes sir," the answer was prompt. "And the fault is with me and not the system sir. That is perfect." There was a trace of bitterness at the thought of how that system could be wrecked and for what purpose.

"Oh," said the man. "And now will you take this back and tell the cook it is not to my liking? Give me some lamb curry instead."

Clara flushed. Here would be another wait. A particular customer was one more trial in a day of many. Well, she would show them.

"Yes sir, and you will pardon another delay. They seem to be inevitable." She smiled, picked up the offending order and returned it to the counter facing the kitchen, where she spoke distinctly that the server could not pretend he had not heard.

"A lamb and curry to replace this, and I'll wait." What did it matter if anyone else wished her services? She would get this one order in front of the old gentleman and let it go. It must stand on guard lest one of the other girls take it away.

The server made the task exasperatingly slow. Clara drumming on the counter with her finger tips watched him.

"Your lamb and curry, sir, and again I apologize for the delay." "What's the matter?" the old man snapped, and the words, "Have they handed you the dirty dish?"

"You know? You don't mean to say you have been a waiter?" She stared at him while he nodded, accepting her questions as an answer.

"Yes, I have been a waiter and a vegetable cutter, a dish washer—pearl diver, you call 'em—and all the way through. Girl, can you add and subtract and give a recommendation for home?"

"Yes." She became suddenly hopeful. "I can show you a high-school diploma, and I have an uncle who will put up a bond. Can you help me out of here before they fire me?" You see, this is the third day of the dirty dish.

"Can't help you out of here," he shook his head vigorously. "Nope, don't think of it. Only bring your diploma and uncle's name tomorrow. See what I can do."

The next morning when Clara arrived she was greeted with wondering looks. Half way to the kitchen the floor girl overtook her.

"Miss Adams, you are wanted at the cashier's desk."

"Miss Adams?" That must mean mean the dismissal. Clara understood the silent greeting now. Maybe they were a little ashamed. Her head was high but the cashier greeted her with a smile.

"I am moved to one of the other places," she said, "and you are to take this desk. Today I will coach you in your work."

Behind her window Clara knew she had conquered. It was no more than right a cashier should be dignified, and no dirty dishes could be shored over the counter.

The cashier was chattering. "Don't tell me you didn't know it all the time. But until this happened not a one of us knew the old man by sight. You see, he likes to drop in in his restaurants to check up on the service, and

"Oh," said Clara.

What! No Exception?

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