The Wild Ones

Janet Stoner*
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Abstract

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...
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.

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The streetlight spread a fuzzy-edged circle of light on the sidewalk, and bugs danced hummingly around its glowing dome. There was no other light anywhere. The sides of the
house loomed whitely through the darkness. “Never saw a place so damn dead,” he thought.

The clips on his heavy boots clicked across the linoleum as he tried to tiptoe across the kitchen. “Damn.” He swore nervously under his breath, and bent over to tug them off, breathing rapidly as he did, and then walked lightly, in spite of his heavy frame, to the stairs. At the bottom he stopped again, and stared upward against the blackness, listening for some sound. None came. He took a deep breath and put on foot on the first step and shifted his weight carefully. Still no sound. “So far so good,” he thought grimly. He gathered confidence and began to climb more rapidly.

The tenth step creaked. Don stopped instantly, half on the step, pushing against the wall for balance. He waited anxiously, holding his breath, knowing what would come.

“Donnie?” A half-whining whisper. He let his breath out in a sigh.

“Yeah, Ma,” Now the old man would wake up.

Sagging springs creaked as a heavy body rolled over on them. “What’sa matter?” came in a grunt dulled with sleep. “Here we go,” Don thought. He tried to make it up the rest of the stairs and into his room, but the next step creaked, too.

“Who’s there?” the voice came again, wide awake now, but still dull. Then, suspiciously, “Don, is that you?”

“Yeah,” Don stopped. No use trying to get away now. Might as well get it over with. It came in a blast.

“What d’ya mean by comin’ home this hour of the morn­ing? Don’t ya know it’s damn near four o’clock? Where the hell d’ya think you’ve been?”

Don swallowed. “No place,” he muttered.

“No place? What d’ya mean no place? Ya sure can’t be no place till four in the mornin’.”

Don said nothing.

“Oh, Donnie, you weren’t with all those wild boys again?”

“That’s it, Ma,” he thought, “make it worse.”

His father took up the new trail suspiciously. “Were you with that Joe Henshaw?”

“There was a whole bunch of us guys, Pa. I don’t know who all was there.” It sounded pretty lame. Don shifted his weight to his other foot.
"What d'ya mean you don't know who was there? Ya know damn well who was there. Was that Henshaw there?"

Don moistened his lips. "I guess he might of been."

"Listen here, you, I told you I don't want you running around with that bunch. They're no good, and I ain't having no kid of mine run around with a bunch like that, or they'll be saying you're no good neither." He paused for breath. "And I ain't having nobody say a kid of mine's no good. How come you been out all night? What 'cha been doing?"

"Why don't you let him go to bed?" his mother pleaded nervously. "Settle this in the morning. Anyway, I've got a headache from all this worry."

"We'll settle this now," his father roared. "See, you've made your mother sick worrying about you. Now either you tell me what you've been up to, or by God, I'll . . ."

"We was just—riding around,' Don shrugged sullenly. "What's so bad about that?"

"You sure as hell could find something better to do besides ride all night." Don said nothing. "Couldn't you?"

"Riding's all right, I guess," Don said. "And there ain't anything else to do." How could his father know how dull it was just sitting around all night?

"There'd be something to do if you kids'd do something besides sit on your fannies all night. Why don't you find something to do?"

"What?" challengingly.

"What! How do I know what? I can't spend my time running around thinking up things to amuse you. Get out and find something to do. If you can't think of anything, you can just sit home after this. Hear?"

"Yeah."

"Now get to bed. Let your mother and me get some sleep, even if you don't seem to need any." An effort at heavy sarcasm.

Don just stood there for a minute, staring desperately at the blackness. Then he sighed and climbed the rest of the way up the stairs. Other steps creaked, but he paid no attention to them. It didn't matter now.