A SHIFT IN THE DISHROOM .....

By MORRIS RONALDS

Four thirty! Ron leaped over the greasy spot that always seemed to be present outside the Food Services door of the Lady Cameron Ladies' Residence. He bounced down the stairs inside, and stowed his briefcase and coat in the locker room before going into the office to pick up some whites.

"Hi, Ron," Russell More greeted him. "How's it going? "

Russ was the Food Services manager, and like his other counterparts on the campus, he sported a mustache and a well-worn greeting.

"Same as always," Ron replied. He disliked having people greet him by asking "How are you? " or "How's it going? " because most of the time he could not in honesty answer such questions. For the past year or so, he had been trying to think of some smart-alec answer, but it still needed working on.

He felt very clean in his crisp whites as he went out to the serving line to pick up his meal. Unlike many of the girls who ate at the Cameron, Ron found the food to be quite agreeable. Perhaps he was prejudiced in favour of the company that paid him, or perhaps he wasn't as fussy or as hard-to-please as the girls. But in any case, he was happy to eat there.

Entering Line One, he narrowly side-stepped a collision with a sad-faced girl of surplus proportions. She managed a heart-breaking, "Hi, Ron," and ambled morosely off to the office to speak to Russ. A couple of other staff members were there before him, and he joined them as they rummaged through the pots. A couple of girls were supposed to be there to serve the staff, but the employees had no problem getting the food themselves.

"Here's the man! " Don welcomed him as he brought his tray into the staffroom to eat. "How's she goin'? "

"By foot," Ron quipped. "Doesn't have money for a taxi."

"Whazzat? " Tom was perplexed. "Who ain't got money for the taxi? "

Ron did not like having his witticisms so utterly unappreciated, so he answered, "Hasn't got any gas in the car and the bus won't be by for another hour."

"Who? Russ's wife? Pam? " Donny asked, bewilderedly raising his voice. "What the Jeezus are yuh talkin' about? "

"Quack! quack! " interjected Mac, the potwasher, obviously delighted with the intellectual intricacies of the conversation.

Just then, one of the girls appeared in the doorway. "Donny, will you get me something from the storeroom? "

"Not now, beautiful," he replied, pushing a heaping plate of meat away, "I'm eating. Russ told me that when I'm on my break I don't go tuh the storeroom or anything like that."

"Donny, I need to get the desserts ready before five, and you better go to the storeroom or I'll tell Ross you wouldn't," she returned.

"Alright, sweetie," he said getting up, "Whatcha want? "

But she had already left.

"I know what she wants," he said before following her, "She wants tuh get me alone in that there storeroom. These women are all alike."

A distant groan of pain rose from the girls sitting at the other table.

"You jus' waitchur turns! " he advised them over his shoulder.

"Quack! quack! quack! " Mac was enjoying himself immensely.

"Hey, yuh wanna know wha' happ'n'd tuhday? " This came from Richie, the silver sorter. "That fuckin' Harol' got shit from the boss. Yeah. Yuh know wha' happ'n'd? Harol' was fuckin' around in the dishroom an' gab, gab, gab. . ."

Richie was a sorry sort of person, who never had much from life, and who never would have. To listen to him was to hear how all the staff but him "got shit from the boss". As well, he had "told the boss off" several times in the run of a day. He had no friends at the Cameron, and Ron listened to him from compassion. Ron had once read in a nursing book that before the fetus is born, there is a race between the chin and the cranium for bone structure in the head. In Richie's case, it had been a race between the nose and the cranium, and poor Richie had wound up with a superb olfactory organ, but with little room for a brain.

"Quack! quack! " Mac said to a tall girl who just came into the staff room.

"Damn right! " Ron added, dead seriousness etched in the lines of his face. "Damn right, Mac! "

"Mm gur warf up dum murmur murmur pots, an work berfgutok prr tee muh duh same – awful hard! " Mac complained to Ron who nodded most solemnly in accord. "Russ tumperphilistok me murmur murmur and murmur ur ee put in dha wug murmur jesm, hurm, hur, hur, hur har! "

Mac had obviously found something ludicrous in his diatribe against the "berfugtok", so Ron laughed as if he understood completely. He didn't want to appear dull or retarded in Mac's presence.

"I got a swell joke for yuhs," Donny stated as he returned to his seat: "There's this rooster, a white cat, a worm and a bird. Now, the rooster goes across the river to get the worm, and the cat goes across the river to get the bird. Who's left on the other side of the river? "

Ron, with only four years of university behind him, found himself hard put to conceptualize this problem. As he was puzzling whether the cat and the rooster started from the same side or opposite sides, Donny sprung the answer upon his unwary listeners, like a B-52 dropping horseshit.

Ron didn't believe he could take another tour de force like this last one, so he picked up his tray and headed to the dishroom with it. On the way, he met the lead cook who was wandering around with an empty pot in his hand, and a look of benign wisdom in his face. The cook greeted Ron while sticking out his big foot which somehow managed to get between Ron's legs.

"Why don't you watch where you're going, you long-haired...? " the cook apologized to Ron who was performing various acrobatics to regain his balance.

Wierd Harold and the lunchtime dishroom crew had left a mess behind them. Ron often hoped that Harold would fall into the garburetor, but he never had any luck, for Harold was still around, crazy as ever. Old Tom was already in the dishroom, scrambling haphazardly from the sink to the dishwasher, carrying silver to be washed by the machine. He had had a hard life, and was bent with the weight of years. It pained Ron, a semi-athlete, and the provincial champion in badminton singles, to watch the slow, decrepit movements of Old Tom, so he took the remaining silver from the sink himself, and put it into the machine. Tom thanked him, apologizing that he "din't ge' time fuh do'em."

Ron wandered out to Line One to check the trays and plates – actually, he only wanted to get out of the dishroom for a minute. Sharell backed into him as he scooted along behind her, weakly muttering something to him as he rebounded down the line to the trays. Peering between the girls who were coming in for their dinner, he saw that there were enough trays to last for quite a while. Plates were ok too, so he headed back to the dishroom.

"Ron, umm, do we. . .ah, have enough silver on the. . .uh. . .lines? " Russ asked him in the dishroom. "If we uhhh, haven't, will ypu please umm. . .put some out? "

Ron answered in the negative, and compiled with the request. While he was gone, the other two members of the dishroom staff had come in, and were staring numbly at the piled up mess which greeted them with open arms.

"I don't think either of you has enough telekinetic power to move any of this by just staring at it," Ron observed. "Better start using your other talents."

Paul, a high school student with greasy dark brown hair, nodded and started running water into the sink to soak the silver that would be coming into the dishroom. Doug also began to move, arranging