

The Cure for Adam

Adam did not like his job. This was a fact. Other people his age could at least find one thing they liked about their jobs, but he could not. Mind you, he didn't try either. Every weekday at 4:30 p.m. he would roll in from school to the restaurant, and put on his apron and dumb white cap. For the next four hours, he would be in front of a huge industrial sink, his feet already sore from track, with only one break.

The worst was the job itself though. He hadn't realized it before, but people have incredibly gross eating habits sometimes. Sure, he had the industrial strength sprayer to eliminate the worst of the crud off plates, but before he could actually use this brilliant tool there was always the vaguely archeological chore of carefully scraping garbage off plates to unearth utensils, dipping bowls and sometimes even tips hidden beneath. If he owned a restaurant, people would have to eat only using their hands, therefore eradicating this disgusting task.

"Hiiii Adam!" a loud sing-songy voice rang out. Ah, enter the second worst part of his job.

Chloe was a bouncy senior from his high school that was also on dish duty during his shift. She was loud, boisterous and overly happy about everything. Adam was not happy about much, so by the end of his shift after a significant dose of Chloe and her insufferable joy, he was always really irritated. Everything that came out of her mouth annoyed him. She constantly tried to make conversation, asked annoying questions, told him random facts, or bad jokes. It was impossible to drown her out. He was past the "grin and bear it" stage and into the "frown and ignore" stage with Chloe, but she seemed completely unaware of how much she got on his nerves. She was relentless.

"How's your day going so far, Adam?" Chloe asked, tying her apron on as she belled up to the sink.

Adam grunted, and shoved a barely nibbled piece of lasagna into the trash.

"Did school go all right?" she questioned, grabbing a stack of dishes and pushing them next to the sink.

"Meh," he shrugged.

"Well school was good for me today," she announced. "I found out that I'm not failing Science, which is awesome."

"Super," Adam muttered.

"Have you ever failed at any of your subjects, dude?" Chloe asked. "It's stressful. I try so hard and still struggle. It can be really frustrating." She leaned down and scrubbed at a particularly stubborn spot on the plate.

Adam didn't answer her. He'd never failed a subject in his life. Chloe probably just wasn't trying hard enough, or maybe she just wasn't meant to be in school. Either way, he certainly didn't care.

"I'm gonna keep at it though," Chloe continued, "because I need the Science to graduate, and get into College. Gosh, I'm so excited to get into College? Do you know what you want to do when you graduate?"

He cringed. There was that terrible question again. He was only in grade 11, and already, people had started asking him this, like, all the time. He was running out of ways to duck it, and he knew he'd have to figure it out, but man... Worse, that was the whole reason he had this crummy job to begin with. His parents insisted they were not paying for college, so he'd better start saving up enough money. They'd made it pretty clear that the minute he graduated, he was to be out of the house, off to college, and all sorted out, no questions asked.

"No," he said. "I don't know what I want to do."

"Whoa buddy," Chloe giggled, "that's the most I've heard you say since I got here. It's okay to not know what you want to do, you know."

But it wasn't and it made his stomach churn. In order to apply for scholarships or grants, he *had* to know where he wanted to go, meaning he needed to know *what* the heck he was even going to do there first. You couldn't just show up to College and figure it out later.

"Okay, so what do you like to do?" Chloe asked. "Like, what kinds of stuff are you good at, or enjoy doing?"

Instead of replying, Adam threw a pot into the sink out of frustration, sending a huge wave of suds all over the place.

"Dude," Chloe grumbled, "chill out. I was just trying to make conversation."

"We're not here to be friends," Adam said icily, "so just mind your own business. Wash dishes."

He didn't know what he "liked" to do, and Chloe probably thought he was a waste of space anyways, so he relished the silence that followed his outburst. Industriously he put his head down and worked. He thought about reading comics on his phone with Comixology, and looked forward to two new BulletProofCoffin comics to read later... His mental predictions were suddenly shattered by a sharp yelp of pain next to him.

Turning to face Chloe, he noticed that her face was ash-gray.

"What is it? What's wrong?" he asked urgently. He followed her frantic gaze immediately to her hand and noticed a huge gash in her palm.

"I think the ...the...plate was cracked...and broke in the sink, maybe?" Chloe said faintly. Without thinking, Adam reached behind him and grabbed a folding chair, snapping it open in a quick motion. Carefully, he caught Chloe by the shoulders and sat her down before reaching above them to grab a clean tea towel.

"Okay, we'll just clean that up," he said calmly, watching the blood from her hand drip onto the floor. Actually, he felt super calm. It was kind of weird. "Are you feeling okay? Do you feel faint or dizzy or anything?"

While he talked to her, he quickly inspected the cut and wrapped it in the tea towel, applying pressure firmly. It wasn't very deep, but there was one part that would probably need stitches.

"I dunno," Chloe mumbled, staring at him blankly. Her face was now completely chalky and white.

"Okay, well I think you're going into shock," Adam said gently, "but don't worry, I'll take care of you and get you to the hospital." Carefully he helped her up and they walked to the back door.

Later, after he sat with her as she got her stitches put in, Chloe seemed to slowly be returning to her normal self.

"Thanks Adam," Chloe said quietly. "You know, you were really great with the first aid and stuff." She laughed, "When you plunked me down in that chair, it was like you were a completely different person, all cool, collected, and in control of the situation. And you were really nice for once, too!" She paused before adding, "You are never usually nice to me, even though you don't even know me. It's kind of harsh."

Adam looked at his shoes. Clearly he had some things to think about now, not just of the comic-book variety.