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Dec. 1986
6,500 words

Mr. Wess and the Stainless Steel Cookware Party

"Know what yall ladies can do with one of these here things when you get 'un with it?" the salesman asked, ~~passing~~ passing a white baking dish ~~under~~ ^{beneath} their ~~eyes~~ ^{eyes}. He drew it back, ~~while he~~ ^{flipping} the lid of the garbage can ~~open~~ ^{like} a shocked mouth, with his wing ~~tipped toe~~ ^{tip}. "Th~~row~~ ^{row} it out!" he ~~answered~~ ^{said}. "Cause you can't get it clean." Then he let it drop two feet from his hand, plopping the ~~top down~~ ^{lid shut} and brushing his hands with flat finesse.

Miss Dilmer coughed into ~~her~~ ^{her} curled hand and refolded her arms beneath her collapsed bosom, turning as she heard shuffling in the doorway behind her.

Mr. Wess leaned ~~on the frame of the door~~ ^{in the} and wallowed his wad of tobacco from ~~left to right~~ ^{side to side} in his ruddy cheeks, ~~while~~ ^{as} his eyes riveted on the salesman. ~~He~~ ^{he} ~~glanced~~ ^{glanced} the change in ~~the products~~ ^{the products} his ~~overall~~ ^{overall} ~~pockets~~ ^{pockets} and scanned the semi-circle where Tynce's new wife craned her ~~neck~~ ^{neck} toward the sparkling dis-

"Wess"

play of stainless steel cookware on the white stove. Her
 lank, black hair, whacked even from ear to ear, emphasized
 the ^{SP}wanness of her face. She swallowed and sat back in the
~~straight chair stationed~~ ^{splat back chair stationed} against the ~~neutral~~ ^{neutral} wainscoting.

Miss Dassie, ~~on~~ ^{perpetually swears an} on her right, ~~swinging her elastic-^{board}~~ ^{board} ~~leg~~ ^{leg} to the rhythm of the porch swing's squeak, ~~that~~ ^{wafted} wafted
 on the dusk through the hall.

The fragrance of fried ham lingered from supper and
 blended with the honeysuckle outside the open window.

"Know what else?" the salesman picked up, flashing
 Miss Dilmer's black iron ~~frying pan~~ ^{skillet} with a flourish. "If you
 got a old man you want to get shed of, this here's the ticket.
 These thing's'll kill you dead! Look ~~there~~,^{there}" he demonstrated
 as he turned to the stove, ~~striking~~ ^{wasting} two matches before the gas
 whooshed beneath the burner - ~~at her~~ ^{knowing her own stove,} Miss Dilmer, had adjusted
 the knob and sat again, screwing her mouth to a ~~ragged~~ ^{rick-rack} circle.

Mr. Wess scrubbed his feet ^{on the floor} and lay into the otherside of
 the doorway, his perriwinkle eyes penetrating the back of the
 salesman, whose apron ~~was~~ ^{was} tied in a ~~knob~~ ^{dainty bow}.

"Awrighty... Now I fried up a plain lil ole piece of side-

3-Daugharty

"Wess"

meat, just like you ladies pro'bly done ever morning since you been married. Right? Right!" he said, turning towards them and sporting it semicircular with a dash. Then he dumped the contents into the gaping ^{garbage can} wastebasket and, with a deft swipe, ~~wiped~~ ^{scraped} the bottom with Miss Dilmer's bleached dish-rag, flapping it at them to exhibit the nasty stain.

A wave of "Oh, my's!" washed along the semicircle, over Mr. Wess's grunt.

"Pure ole irony rust," said the salesman. "That's what you're getting when you cook in one of these things. Know what you can do with it?"

They all looked at the garbage can before he flipped the lever and released it, as steam escaped around the clapped lid.

"Yessiree!" he said, brushing his hands again, leaning his ~~narrow~~ ^{toothy} backside into the yellow gingham curtain concealing the cupboard. "That's what you don't have to put up with no more; not since we come out with our new, 1965, scientific, stainless steel cookware."

He turned to the stove, which ~~dazzled~~ ^{clattered with dazzling} stainless steel pots, clamped with shimmering lids. One bobbed and he spun it, sealing it against the steam. The ~~scent~~ ^{vapor} of ~~cooked~~ ^{steaming} apples

4-Daugharty

"Wess"

shuddered like a hushed child.

"All your vitamins goes right up in the steam," he admonished.

On Tynce's wife's left Miss Alma nodded agreement, her ~~severely drawn brown hair pulling taut as her double chin ducked.~~ ^{Her ears gleamed like pink shells.} ~~Her ears gleamed like pink shells.~~ ^{Her ears gleamed like porcelain cuphandles.} ~~Her ears gleamed like pink shells.~~

"Now lessee," the salesman said. "Rice oughta be about done."

He peeked over the top of the stove, on confidential tip-toes, and removed ~~the lid,~~ ^{the rear} turning it up to the bare bulb that ~~lent an added boost to its sheen.~~ ^{turning it in the untampered glare of the bare bulb above, he exhibited its brilliance, expertly, without frowning back.}

"Yep," he said, proudly. "Now all you do is to take a reg'lar plate, a plain ole plate," he said, stalling as he dashed to the screened ^{pie} safe, lid in hand, grabbed a blue Currier & Ives plate, and rushed back to the pot daring to steam. He dumped the rice in a cake, balancing it on one ^{HAND} for them to admire ^{through a wreath of steam.}

Coarse "Ahs" emitted from the crescent of ladies.

"See anything on the bottom of the pot?" he asked at the ^{SP} pinnacle of the "ahs," extending the pot ^{with} in the other hand for them to inspect.

"Wess"

"Not a dab," said Miss Dassistie, looking at Miss Dillmer for confirmation.

She nodded absolutely, but retained her stern skepticism with her brown squirrel eyes.

"I bet you'd find yourself scouring it out before you knowed it," ^{erupted} Mr. Wess, pulling back and leaning through the door with ~~both~~ ^{pressed against} hands on each side. ~~of the~~

"Not a chance," said the salesman, taking a ready rag and wiping it twice in a circle. It gleamed like ~~polished~~ ^{crayony} silver.

The ladies turned to Mr. Wess and glared at him.

"Well, it just looks to me like if we been ~~making~~ ^{making} out with the old kind for this long, we can make out a while longer," Mr. Wess said, hesitantly.

"Glad you brung that up," said the salesman. "Gover'munt statistics shows that people that's bought this stuff lives twice as long as them that don't, sir."

"Well, I been ~~beating~~ ^{beating} Ma's cornbread out've a ~~horn~~ ^{horn} pan going on sixty years and ain't had nary ~~trouble~~ ^{ailment} ~~cept~~ ^{cept} a bunion on my big toe."

"Wess"

The salesman laughed, and the ladies ~~alternately~~^{alternately} chuckled ⁵⁷ as they roved disregarding stares his way and resumed their focus on the spectacle in the austere kitchen.

"Now lessee how the meatloaf's coming along," the salesman said, turning back to the stove and peeking beneath the clamped lid, following ^{a complacent} the counterclockwise spin. The steam rose to his swarthy face and shot through his slick, black hair. "I swannee, that do smell ready! Don't it, ladies?"

They leaned forward and inhaled.

indent "Yep," he said, busying himself with shuffling and shaking, apron strings fluttering on his tight posterior.

"We'll just leave this'un in the pot to keep it good and hot," he said, grasping the handle and passing along the semicircle, ^{is no one} bypassing Mr. Wess in the door.

See how pretty "See how ^{pretty} and smooth it is?" he said.

"Ain't brown," said Miss Dilmer; as it reached her, *she* grasped his wrist.

"Oh!" he said. "But you wouldn't want it to be. Ain't good for you."

"What about biscuits?" asked Mr. Wess.

"Oh!" he said. "I'm glad you brung that up. All you got

"Wess"

to do is to put'em right down in a little butter in this special nine-by-nine, stainless steel skillet and pop the lid on, Take it off in five or six minutes, and turn'em over, and let'em brown on the other side. And you got you the best danged biscuits you ever set ~~your teeth~~

"Fried biscuits!" Mr. Wess stated flatly.

The ladies glanced him ^{again} with their heavy disregard.

~~Wess~~

He turned and moped off down the hall toward the ~~porch~~ ^{squawk}

^{of the porch} swing. ~~Wess~~

The night breeze, in synchrony with the lazy porch swing, blew droplets of his tobacco juice to the concrete steps as he spat into the dusty hydrangeas.

"Your corn come up yet, Mr. Wess?" asked Hat ~~from behind~~ ^{who sat}

~~him.~~ ^{who sat beside the door clapping creaking to} ~~the wall in a chair against the porch wall~~

"Done and been apegging. Green as a gourd," said ^{Mr.} Wess, looking out.

"You don't say," said Hat. "Mine's up, but it's mighty yeller. Reckon I'm gonna go on and fertilize it come Monday morning."

"If yall boys'ud plant it fur apart, yall wouldn't need

"Wess"

to go all out on fertilizer.

"Yall ain't took nary turn in the kitchen, yet. Is you?" he asked, surveying the silhouettes of double heads in the porch swing.

Tynce's hair resembled feathers ruffled on the crown; ~~and~~ the background ^{drop} of violet sky held it rising and falling as his feet scraped ^{across} along the floor.

"Nope," he said. "Smells mighty good, though."

"They set the table, yet?" asked Hoke.

"Ain't afixin' to, the best've my estimation!" said Mr. Wess, leaning on the porch post and peering out as ~~if~~ ^{though}

he were looking for something suspicious in the corner crib ^{sinking in the} that had sunk lower in the dust ^{of duck} with time. ^{meadow}

"How come?" asked Hat, lost in the dark of the porch wall where he rocked back in a straight chair.

"I tell you how come. That'err big-shot cookpot peddler's showing off. Ain't no hand to cook, best I can tell," said Mr. Wess. "Come out here from Valdosta to get him some pocket money, I expect."

"Well, ^{wasn't} we s'posed to eat supper here?" asked Hoke, braking the swing with his foot.

Sawanda

"That's what my ole lady told me," said Tynce in a squeaky voice.

Mr. Wess laughed - more of a mocking chuckle that caught on the breeze and carried down the ~~long~~ ^{deep} lane and through the woods. "Boy, your ole lady's ready to clean out your pockets in there! He's got her ready to buy up the whole set."

"Naw," said Tynce. "She ain't the kind. Buys her shoes a size biggern her feet in case they grow some more. She's the savingest lil ole woman you ever seen."

"Yeh," said Hat. "I heard that before. Miss Dassie used to be the same-very way when we first got married. Now, come Saturday, she's ahankering to get to the gro'chrey store."

"They shore change," Mr. Wess said, musing into the gathering darkness.

"You wouldn't be ~~a~~knowing," said Hoke.

"You ain't got to own no autemOBILE to know what kind of gasé mileage one gets," said Mr. Wess.

The stillness encased the solemn breathing on the porch as the breeze brought the aroma of food through the hall.

Now and then a lid clanked, thwarted ^{only} by an owl's hooting.

The ~~mosquitoes~~ busy buzz of mosquitoes brought occasional slaps of frequent clapping on the night, like ~~as~~ random ^{P.B.} shots.

*firecracker paper
odd assaults
~~shots~~ (passed slaps) (tat)*

10-Daugharty

"Wess"

"I ain't ^{innerstid!} in'erstid!" Mr. Wess said, spitting again as the hall light flicked and the shadow of his immense belly spread over the clean swept yard.

He looked specutively back at the empty hall.

With a slow hand climbing up the swing chain, Hoke *cleared his* throat & spoke *(indent)* said: "Tamp's been dead bettern four years, and they ain't nobody'ud blame you and Miss Dilmer if yall was to figger on acourting."

"I wouldn't have her on a Christmas tree!" Mr. Wess stated.

"Now, look ahere," Hat said, clanking his chair to the floor. "You could do a whole lot worser. They ain't a cleaner lil ole woman in Duran County."

"I ain't said they was nothing 'ticular wrong with her," Mr. Wess drawled. "I just ain't got no use for nary woman. I got Ma to take care of me."

"~~MA~~ ain't ~~gonna~~ live forever," stated Hat. "Then what you gonna do?"

"I'll bach, if it comes to ~~hit~~," mumbled Mr. Wess /
decidedly.

"How's Miss Thelma getting on, nowadays?" asked Tynce,

"Wess"

his flaxen face jutted forward.

"Still bothered by that ole rheumatiz in her right arm," said Mr. Wess. "I set in an bought her a bunch of britches stretchers last week to h'lp out on her 'orning."

"Well, they ain't no house big enough for no two women," said Hoke.

"That's the Lord's truth," Tynce said, leaving the swing to peer through the screen door.

Mr. Wess *watched him long & profound (indent)* looked at him and said: "Got you worried up, huh?"
~~Boy~~ Boy, you best just go on and get your money roll out and get over with it. That lil ole wife of yourn's about bought everlast one of them new-fangled pots."

"Naw," Tynce said. "She ain't the ~~wasting~~ *wasteful* kind."

"Well, Miss Alma shore is," said Hoke, rising from the flailing porch swing to look through the door; his pocketed fists looked like tumors on his lean thighs.

"Hell, I'm starved plum to death," said Hat, rising also. "We eat supper ever night at six sharp. *Why,* I'm gener'ly done asleep by this time. What time you got, Mr. Wess?"

12-Daugharty

"Wess"

"Lemme see," said Mr. Wess, wedging between them in the hall light as he removed his pocket watch and peered at it, held it away, brought it near, and said, "Half past seven."

"Half past seven!" repeated Hat.

"Well, I don't know about the rest of yall, but I'm about ready to eat," said Hoke.

"Getting scared, boys?" teased Mr. Wess.

"Hongry," said Hat. "Pure-D hongry's what we are."

"Well, come on, boys. I'll ~~git~~ yall in. But don't expect nothing but some raked out pots."

11 (Mr. Wess entered ^{through the} the screen door, ^{decorated with} which sported a tuff of ~~white~~ cotton to discourage houseflies, and the others shuffled behind him up the airy hall.

"Now, ladies," said the salesman. "We're about done. ^{Weren't} ~~Wadn't~~ that easy as falling off a log backards? See, yall could done be ~~#~~setting around on the front porch by now. Cooks itself. You could put you on a pot roast middle of the day and let it go til' supper, and it'd cook itself. In fact, the more you lift the lid the worser it'll turn out."

"Wess"

"Mr. Jim," stammered Miss Dassie. "I got a question for you."

"Ask away," the salesman said.

"What if you was to not put no water in a pot of ^{fresh} acre peas, say, but that little dab you put in them ^{pot} english peas. Wouldn't they scorch to the bottom?"

"Nope," said Jim. "The steam takes care of it. Remember, you ain't ~~a~~boiling no more. Yall ~~a~~steaming. And what does that do for yall?"

"Keeps the vitamins in," they ^{chimed} ~~responded~~ in unison, ~~and giggled~~ like school girls.

"Now you got the notion," Jim laughed. "Lessee how it eats. What yall say?"

"Yeh," said Miss Alma, rising as she tugged her belt from beneath her large breasts to her waist. It slid back again.

"I'll try it out," said Miss Dilmer ~~bravely~~, rising energetically as she patted the neat coils of braids on top of her ~~head~~.

"I'm starved to death," said Miss Dassie. "Come on, Sugar," she said, turning to tug Tynce's bride from the chair.

14-Daugharty

"Wess"

"Got'em eating out've his hand," mumbled ^{Mr.}Wess. "They ain't give yall a thought," he added, looking back at the ~~eager~~ ^{ant as} line along the hall wall.

He stepped forward and hooked his thumbs on the galluses of his overalls.

"Ain't yall forgotten about somebody?" he asked. The ladies turned from the ~~oilclothed table~~ ^{table spread with oilcloth,} where they ~~were~~ ^{had been} cawing like crows stealing pecans.

"Yall come on," said Miss Dassie, with her mouth cooling a hot apple wedge. "They's aplenty."

"Yeh, get on in here and get yall a plate out've the safe over there," said Miss Alma, dipping with regularity from the shiney pots.

Miss Dilmer marched to the screened safe and ~~dealed~~ ^{began dealing} plates ~~like a deck of cards, to them.~~ ^{as from a stack like cards from a deck,} She thrust the final one at ^{Mr.}Wess's ^{protruding} belly, grimacing at his smirking face.

Tynce's wife swiftly ladeled food to her plate, breaking in line ~~to complete the process.~~ ^{to scoop portions from each pot.} Then she turned to Tynce and offered it to him ~~like a silver platter laden with delicacies.~~ ^{as though in atonement,} He beamed.

"Wess"

"Better git your money out, boy. Or pin it down with a safepin," whispered Mr. Wess, trailing behind.

After all plates were filled and the bottom of the pots were exposed, Wess, who had scraped the bottoms, turned and looked slowly about the kitchen, waiting, shifting from foot to foot.

"Whereabouts we s'posed to eat at?" he asked.

They all stopped eating where they sat or stood along the wall.

"See if you can't clean up this table, Mister, so we can set down to supper, like white folks," he commanded, turning on the salesman.

"I was just ~~fixing~~ ^{the salismon} to," he responded, turning from the stove he scrubbed. "But you ain't"

"But you ain't et," said Miss Dilmer with a fork of meat loaf hovering near her mouth.

"Oh!" Jim said. "I ain't hungry. Yall go on." And he began stacking pots and pans in the dishpan.

"You, a lil ole bitty thing, needs to eat ever chance you git," said Miss Dassie.

"Yeh," said Miss Alma, with her mouth full. "You don't"

16-Daugharty

"Wess"

want to lose your strength. Now do you?"

^{"No 'um"}
~~"None,"~~ he said.

"Weren't nothing left," said Miss Dilmer, eyeing Mr. Wess, accusingly, whose heaped plate barely made it to the table top as he pulled up a chair.

The ladies at his back chatted about who took what to Big Meeting on first Sunday and general improvements to be made on Jim's recipes, as the men joined Mr. Wess, elbowing to the table and digging in.

Mr. Wess watched the efficient clean-up from beneath hooded eyes as he ate rapidly but critically, separating carrots from peas. After he finished, he took his starched, white handkerchief and wiped it across his mouth, then his hands, and leaned forward, to replace it in his ^{big} pocket.

"I bet you make a purty good living apeddling. Don't you?"

"You talking to me?" asked Jim, turning his professional smile on ^{Mr. (no para)} Wess. ↓

"Not all that good," he said, drying his hands and turning to face the front row audience of men. "We aim to ~~serve~~ ^{please} our customers first."

17-Daugharty

"Wess"

"You mean to tell us you're #giving them cookpots away?" *(no paa)*

Mr. Wess ~~he~~ laughed and the other three men joined him, *eying the perplexed*
salesman.

"I didn't think so," *Mr. Wess answered for him.* interrupted Wess. "Well, what
you ~~get~~ for'em, all told?"

"Well, you'd be surprized..."

"All told!" repeated *Mr.* Wess.

"Well, the same set at Sears and Roebuck - if you
could even ~~get~~ 'em - would cost you..." Jim said, holding
the counter backwards and looking up as if the total were
scribbled on the ceiling.

"We ain't *innerstid* ~~innerstid~~ in no Sears and Roebuck prices.
What's yourn?" said Mr. Wess.

Tynce nodded and paused from his eating.

"Well, you got the twelve piece set here," he said,
turning to the tidy stack of gleaming pots.

"I ain't accounting but six cook pots," said Mr. Wess.

"*But* Then I ain't never been all that handy at 'rithmetic,
neither. Yall count six, boys?"

They mumbled ~~six.~~ *six.*

"Well, I meant with the lids," explained Jim, lifting
one to the light.

18-Daugharty

"Wess"

"So you got to pay extre for the lids," said ^{Mr.}Wess, winking at Tynce, who paled in the incandescence of the light over the table.

"Not exactly," said Jim. "Lessee," he said, lifting the manual in front of his face.

^{Mr.}Wess nudged Hat.

"Of course, you got a double boiler th^Rrowed in by putting one pot on top of another'un," said Jim, still reading behind the manual.

"So that's just one pot," ^{Mr.}said Wess, grinning. "Leaves five to total up."

"That ain't how we sell'em, Mister," said Jim, lowering the manual; then seeing the face, hid again behind it.

The front row remained rankling and waiting as the background rose and fell in the bug-circling kitchen.

"What yall reckon they worth, boys?" asked ^{Mr.}Wess.

"All told?" asked Hat.

"Yeh?" said ^{Mr.}Wess.

"A good set like that oughta run ^{you}about, say, twenty-five to thⁱirty dollars, at the most. Wouldn't yall say?" asked Hoke.

19-Daugharty

"Wess"

The manual dropped from the pale, glistening face and rose again, like a shield.

"I'd say in that neighborhood," said Tynce, brightening.

"You come up on it yet, Mister ^{Cookpot} Salesman?" asked ^{Mr.} Wess.

"Fellows," said Jim, lowering the manual. "Y'all ain't ~~talk~~ talking about ^{NO} dimestore aluminum, here. This is genuuine stainless steel. Last you a hundred years."

"Y'all planning on living that long, boys?" asked ^{Mr.} Wess.

They laughed - all except Tynce who looked back at his bride.

"Listen here," said Jim, untying his apron. "You got a life-time ^{gar}antee on this stuff...uh...cookware set. If ^a handle breaks off, you get another'un free for the rest of your natural born days. Then them grandyounguns of yourn gets'em for free."

"I didn't think ~~it~~ it'd tear up," chided Wess.

"Well," he said, tossing the apron to the linoleumed counter. "I meant if it was to."

"But it could?" asked ^{Mr.} Wess.

"I doubt it," he said, adamantly, banging a pot on the counter.

20-Daugharty

"Wess"

A hush swarmed on the room, but the ladies resumed their conversations as the men began talking again.

"Free handles, huh?" said Hoke.

"Yeh," said Jim, advancing toward them with a mirroring pot bottom. "Show me sommers you can beat that!"

"What about if somebody was to break in and steal one?" asked ^{Jim}Wess.

"Well, that ain't hardly likely. Now is it?" asked Jim.

"Naw," said Hat. "They ain't nobody around Calvin, Georgie that sorry."

"I forgot to mention something, I think," said Jim. "Did I tell yall, yall ~~got~~ a free, bonus stainless steel vegetable grinder in the bargain?"

"No," said Hat.

"Well, you do," said Jim, dragging a cardboard box with bold, black print from beneath the table and, one by one, placing each gleaming, cupshaped section in a circle. He stationed and snapped the rotary grinder to the table top. "Extre blades for carrots and onions and celery and cucumbers and apples. You name it, and it'll grind it."

"Wess"

Make the best dang coldslaw you ever set your teeth into.

"Auntas Dilmer, you got a little cabbage I could get hold of?" he called over their heads.

"Look in the bottom of the frigidaire, Son," she answered and went on talking to Alma.

He turned to the refrigerator and came back with a head of cabbage, skillfully cleaving it into quarters.

At once, he placed a bowl beneath the spout, and turned the

handle on ~~the cabbage~~ ^{the cabbage} stuffed into the wedge shaped grinder, ^{stuffed with}

^{cabbage} causing green shreds ^{spilled into} to fill the bowl. ~~Then~~ he dumped it ^{smartly} on the table and slid the bowl away.

"Now, all you got to do is snap off the old cabbage grinder and snap on the tater slicer and you got a mess of tater chips for supper, quick as a wink."

And quick as a wink, one of Miss Dilmer's new red potatoes shot through in uniform slices to the table top.

"And onions," he said. "Watch this. Yall could do it your ownselfs, fellows."

The onion mushed through and heaped on top of the potato slices.

"Wess"

"Yall ever tried to cut up a carrot?" he asked.

"Huh uh," Hoke said.

"I ain't," said Hat,

"Well, look ahere," he said, already back from Miss Dilmer's refrigerator. And the orange shreds mounded the heap, like shreds clay on a hilltop.

"I swannee to goodness!" said Tynce.

"Listen here," said Jim. "Did I tell yall about the hostess gift?"

"Huh uh," Tynce said.

"Well," he drawled. "I hate to tell yall, but this'un just goes to the ones that throws a party for me. Miss Dilmer, over yonder'll get one. But I'll let yall see it."

He dragged another box from beneath the table, as they leaned over to see.

From the box, he removed one, two, three, four, five, six stainless steel knives, the last whacking through the mound of vegetables and parting them in a valley.

"We can't buy them offn you?" Hat asked, reaching to touch the blade of the cleaver.

to really try to read Wess & his ~~strong~~ immutable intrinsic attractor to the display

"Wess"

"Nope," he said. "Fraid not, fellows. Them's just for the ones that th^rows me a party."

~~He~~ Carefully, ^{he} slid them back between ~~sleeves~~ of styrofoam and placed them in the box, slipping it beneath the table.

Hat looked crestfallen; ~~so Jim consoled him.~~

"But," ^{Jim} he said, holding a finger in front of his face. "With the twelve stainless steel cookware set, you ~~get~~ another bonus prize. That's the good part! Guess what it is?"

They leaned famished faces toward him.

"Yall ever seen how coffee stains mess^s up a 'luminum coffee pot? Yall ever tasted it when it come out bitter as QUI'nine?"

They nodded.

"Well, look at this," he said, magically producing a sleek stainless steel percolator. It grew irridescent in the light above the center of the table.

Tynce, Hat, and Hoke touched it gingerly, and exclaimed.

"Now wouldn't you fellows say ~~one~~ ^a hundred and ninety-nine dollars and ninety-five cents ain't all that much to

24-Daugharty

"Wess"

to be a asking for a set like this, plus two bonus gifts: a handy-dandy vegetable grinder and a coffee perkerlater that ain't never gonna brew up no bitter coffee."

"Don't sound like too much to me," said Hat, ~~laughing agreeably~~ *with a self-deprecatory chuckle.*

"I ain't got nothing on me but a check," Hoke said wistfully.

"We could shore use it, just setting up housekeeping with what Mommer divided with us. Got mending on nearly bout **ever** cookpot in the kitchen," said Tynce. "Reckon yall could let me have it on time til my roastinears gets made?"

"Shore," said Jim, slapping him on the shoulder.

*W*Wess, who had remained reared back on the heels of the chair, chuckled softly.

They looked at him.

"You oughta go on and get your Ma a set while he's here," said Hoke.

"Naw," said *W*Wess. "Yall go on, boys. I'm afeared I might disfurnish yall. Besides, you can't never tell, I mought up and decide to th^Row a party or something."

"Wess"

"Yeh," said Hat. "If we done that we could ~~get~~ us a set of them knives, too."

"Me and Alma's been ~~planning~~ planning on having a fishfry, anyhow," said Hoke.

"We'll come," said Tynce.

"Let me ~~get~~ that down," said Jim, writing rapidly on a blank pad. "Next week I got a opening, I think."

"I'll take it," said Hat.

"Now let me ~~get~~ yalles orders down before I ~~get~~ mixed up again," said Jim, switching pads and scribbling numbers.

"You ain't got none I can take home with me tonight?" asked Hat, as disappointed as a child at Christmas.

"Nope," said Jim, writing. "But they'll come in the mail long about three or four weeks. Give'em time to ~~get~~ from the factory out yonder in Chicargo. You know how fur that is from Georgie," he said, looking up *with a wink.*

"Yeh," said Tynce. "We'll just have to wait."

"Let me just ~~get~~ yalles taxes and shipping charges figgered up. Give me a minute," said Jim.

Tynce reached forward and fondled the percolater, ~~and~~ *draw* his hand back as *W.* Wess wiped the smudges away with his

26-Daugharty

"Wees"

handkerchief.

"Yeh, you boys is natural smart!" ^{Mr. Wees} He said. "Ain't
everday yall ~~get~~ the chance to get shed of two hunderd ~~AND~~ ^{FIFTY}
dollars you grubbed out in the fields. Next time the Watkin
man comes by, I'm ~~send~~ sending him to yalles house to unload
his roach ~~poison~~ on. ^{Gonna} Tell him to th~~row~~ in some 'niller
flavoring for a bonus. ✓

I'll tell him if he don't see ^{ANY} sign of yall to
go on. ✓