

Tildy's Moment

Bogle's Family Restaurant on Eighth Avenue is not a famous place, but if you need a large cheap meal, then Bogle's is the place for you. There are twelve tables in the room, six on each side. Bogle himself sits at the desk by the door and takes the money. There are also two waitresses and a Voice. The Voice comes from the kitchen.

At the time of my story, one of the waitresses was called Aileen. She was tall, beautiful and full of life. The name of the other waitress was Tildy. She was small, fat and was not beautiful.

Most of the people who came to eat at Bogle's were men, and they loved the beautiful Aileen. They were happy to wait a long time for their meals because they could look at her. Aileen knew how to hold a conversation with twelve people and work hard at the same time. And all the men wanted to take Aileen dancing or give her presents. One gave her a gold ring and one gave her a little dog.

And poor Tildy?

In the busy, noisy restaurant men's eyes did not follow Tildy. Nobody laughed and talked with her. Nobody asked her to go dancing, and nobody gave her presents. She was a good waitress, but when she stood by the tables, the men looked round her to see Aileen.

But Tildy was happy to work with no thanks, she was happy to see the men with Aileen, she was happy to know that the men loved Aileen. She was Aileen's friend. But deep inside, she, too, wanted a man to love her.

Tildy listened to all Aileen's stories. One day Aileen came in with a black eye. A man hit her because she did not want to kiss him. 'How wonderful to have a black eye for love!' Tildy thought.

One of the men who came to Bogle's was a young man called Mr Seeders. He was a small, thin man, and he worked in an office. He knew that Aileen was not interested in him, so he sat at one of Tildy's tables, said nothing, and ate his fish.

One day when Mr Seeders came in for his meal, he drank too much beer. He finished his fish, got up, put his arm round Tildy, kissed her loudly, and walked out of the restaurant.

For a few seconds Tildy just stood there. Then Aileen said to her, 'Why, Tildy! You bad girl! I must watch you. I don't want to lose my men to you!'

Suddenly Tildy's world changed. She understood now that men could like her and want her as much as Aileen. She, Tildy, could have a love-life, too. Her eyes were bright, and her face was pink. She wanted to tell everybody her secret. When the restaurant was quiet, she went and stood by Bogle's desk.

'Do you know what a man in the restaurant did to me today?' she said. 'He put his arm round me and he kissed me!'

'Really!' Bogle answered. This was good for business. 'Next week you'll get a dollar a week more.'

And when, in the evening, the restaurant was busy again, Tildy put down the food on the tables and said quietly, 'Do you know what a man in the restaurant did to me today? He put his arm round me and kissed me!'

Some of the men in the restaurant were surprised; some of them said, 'Well done!' Men began to smile and say nice things to her. Tildy was very happy. Love was now possible in her grey life.

For two days Mr Seeders did not come again, and in that time Tildy was a different woman. She wore bright clothes, did her hair differently, and she looked taller and thinner. Now she was a real woman because someone loved her. She felt excited, and a little afraid. What would Mr Seeders do the next time he came in?

At four o'clock in the afternoon of the third day, Mr Seeders came in. There were no people at the tables, and Aileen and Tildy were working at the back of the restaurant. Mr Seeders walked up to them.

Tildy looked at him, and she could not speak. Mr Seeders' face was very red, and he looked uncomfortable.

'Miss Tildy,' he said, 'I want to say that I'm sorry for what I did to you a few days ago. It was the drink, you see. I didn't know what I was doing. I'm very sorry.'

And Mr Seeders left.

But Tildy ran into the kitchen, and she began to cry. She could not stop crying. She was no longer beautiful. No man loved her. No man wanted her. The kiss meant nothing to Mr Seeders. Tildy did not like him very much, but the kiss was important to her – and now there was nothing.

But she still had her friend, and Aileen put her arm round Tildy. Aileen did not really understand, but she said, 'Don't be unhappy, Tildy. That little Seeders has got a face like a dead potato! He's nothing. A *real* man never says sorry!'