

MISS CHUCK put down her canvas bag, a sack, and a huge paper parcel. This was for me a great occasion. She had arrived. I had at last attained to the dizzy heights of acquiring a Weekly Woman. Help for One Afternoon a Week. The W.W. was small and wiry, with little brown eyes and a face like a rooster. "That's what I like," she said, as though she had read my thoughts, "little fowls, and banties to make friends with. They don't let you down, and they lay good eggs, too. There's a lot of nourishment in a fowl's egg."

"Well," she continued, "What do you want me to do? I'm used to work." She sniffed her way into the kitchen. "Not like some," she said, as she peered around.

I cleared my throat. "I thought, perhaps, you might start with polishing the sitting-room floor," I said. "Just the bits round the carpet," I added foolishly. "And then the hall and the nursery before the children come from school."

"Hm. Fancy painting the floor that colour." She regarded my blue painted floor with lifted nose. "In my days, plain wood was good enough, but we had to be always up and polishing, up and polishing. None of your once a fortnight wipe-over."

A Short Story, written for "THE LISTENER" by S.S.



"... The W.W. was balancing a large pile of china in each hand"

"Well, really the paint keeps nice and shiny," I said. "And here's the nursery."

"Hm. Kids'll slip down if I polish here, but just as you like. I'm used to work I am, not like some. We had to work in the old days. No galumphing off to town getting jobs. No flicking

round with any of your new-fangled vacuum-cleaners. Just good hard elbow-grease."

"Then will you please scrub the kitchen and the bathroom?"

I retired in haste before she could tell me that she always kept her bathroom so that it never needed a scrub—

not like some—and took refuge in the garden. Violent sounds of upheaval emerged from the house from time to time, but I turned a deaf ear. Suddenly, her voice broke my peace.

"Them's nice cabbages—good land here, too. You could keep some fowls easy—dear little things. They like cabbages, and fertilise the ground lovely."

Before I could reply that the cabbages were really intended for family consumption and I hoped she didn't think that was a waste, Miss Chuck had opened her brown paper parcel. "I always brings a bit o' meat along for the cats," she remarked. "The butcher lets me have this lot for my cats and the fowls. There is always one or two cats running around a garden, and they likes a bit o' meat."

A mountain of meat scraps was revealed, and in a trice, at least three large cats bounded in to avail themselves of this unexpected opportunity. I shuddered miserably as I thought of the efforts we had been making to rid the garden of feline stragglers.

"Funny," she said, "they seem shy," as a cat edged up reluctantly, with an eye cocked on me. I thought of the large missile hurled at it yesterday, and of my husband's frequent excursions to restore peace to the shattered night air.

"What I don't like," said Miss Chuck, "is people that are unkind to dumb animals."

I agreed. The dumb ones should certainly be encouraged—especially to remain dumb.

"Now, I've got nine cats," she said, "and they're wonderfully friendly. They come to meet me when I get home, and look up at me as though they could understand every word I say."

"More than I can," I thought

She turned into the house. By this time, the back yard was well littered with mats and dusters and cloths, scrubbing brushes, and all the contents of the back porch. I went round to the front and climbed my way into the front door over what seemed to me to be most of the sitting-room furniture.

"Sitting-room looks nice now that it has been cleaned up a bit, doesn't it?" I glanced in. A hurricane appeared to have swept over the room. Every chair, mat, and table was set at an angle. The W.W. was balancing a large pile of china in each hand—vases, bowls, and two very precious Chinese plates. "I just thought I'd give them a bit of a scrub," she said. I rescued them as tactfully as possible. "Well, anyhow," she said, in a thwarted kind of tone, "I've cleaned up that old bit of brass. Shockin' state it was in, too."

I repressed a shudder as I saw the surface well cleaned off an antique of my husband's that was explicitly Not To Be Touched.

"Before you start the kitchen, you had better have a cup of tea," I said.

"I don't mind if I do," she said. "Tea's a grand thing for building you

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