

Certainly, Gracia assented graciously. 'Still, it would be better for me to let her know the reason of her dismissal. A sort of kindly advice, you know, to enable her to keep her next place, loftily. Mr. Hobbs' smile was buried in his newspaper. After breakfast Gracia retired to the verandah to read a new magazine, while Mr. Hobbs warily approached the kitchen.

'Ah, good morning, Martha. Morning, Mr. Hobbs. Martha, how would you like to have a little vacation?'

'What, sir?'

'A vacation. It would do you good. Besides, Miss Gracia believes she would like to housekeep for a week or so.'

'Miss Gracia? Housekeep? Lor' bless you, sir, she ain't ever done a stroke of work in her life.'

'She thinks she ought to begin. To tell the truth, Martha, she wants to dismiss you for some trivial reason, I forget what it is. I want you to pretend to go, but to be ready to come back—this is Monday—say, Friday morning.'

'Three days. She'll want me back in one. Though I'm not so sure I'll come back at all. You see, Miss Gracia's very overbeatin' at times, always telling me how to cook and make jelly and beds, me that's done 'em since I was knee high to a duck, and her that's been readin' in the noosepapers "How to house-keep." If she'd only tell me that she didn't know anything, I'd like to teach her. She—'

'That's enough, Martha. Just accept this bill and return in time for breakfast Friday morning—if Gracia can exist without you till then, her added diplomatically.'

'Oh, thank you, sir. Yes, sir, I'll be back Friday mornin' sharp. Thank you kindly, sir.'

At 5 o'clock Martha, having prepared the evening tea, was about to depart, when Gracia overtook her in the back hallway. Her farewell words were of a rather haughty character.

'A moment, Martha,' she began in an over-the-hills-and-far-away tone; 'I would like to say good-bye to you, and before you go to inform you why I am dismissing you. First, you are too slow; second, you become angry whenever I assert my position as mistress in the slightest degree. Sometimes your aprons aren't all that a maid's should be, and—ah—good-bye, Martha, good-bye,' she ended abruptly, as Martha's face prognosticated a storm. The storm blew over, however, for Martha bent over her valise, her shoulders shaking slightly but suspiciously.

'Good-bye, Miss Gracia.' In another moment the 'Jewel' was lost to sight.

It was something of a novelty for Gracia to rise at six. The early morning hours, she assured herself, were the little-known best time of the day, bracing, invigorating they were—but, still Gracia yawned. Breakfast, she went on, was simple—fruit, a cereal, rolls, coffee, and bacon perhaps. None of these things was beyond Gracia, for be it understood that she could cook in a certain small degree.

Seven o'clock saw Gracia in the kitchen. There truly her head saved her heels nothing, and at eight o'clock, when she was surveying with satisfaction her well-done breakfast, she was suddenly struck by the fact that she had not set the table. Leaving the bacon to frizzle in the oven, she hurriedly arranged the breakfast plates. Never before had she realised the number of small things necessary to a perfectly appointed table. Back and forth, forth and back she dashed. At nine o'clock they breakfasted. I believe that 'slow-poke' Martha had served the same meal at half-past seven the day before. No one mentioned the fact, of course. As soon as Mr. Hobbs was on his late way to town and Bob in the yard playing tennis, Gracia yawned, glanced at the dishes to be washed, yawned more than ever, then sleepily made her way to the davenport. For one little minute she explained to her conscience. One little minute was ticked away by geandfather's clock, then two little minutes and three. Gracia was lost to worldly time. Monotonously the clock intoned the hour, eleven and finally twelve.

'Gracia, wake up. I want some lunch.' It was brother Bob's gentle voice.

'What? Oh, Martha! I have lunch in a few minutes, comfortably. Do go away and let Gracia sleep.'

'Wake up, Martha isn't here and I'm hungry,' persisted Bob.

'Martha not here? Hasn't she cleared the breakfast table yet? Oh—the light of remembrance broke in upon her—oh, it isn't late, is it?'

'Twelve, and I'm hungry,' Bob reiterated.

'Twelve? I—why, I'll have luncheon immediately. What would you like?' she pacificated.

'Pears and pie and lob—'

'Stop! I—I'm sure I never thought about it. I haven't ordered the groceries.' The last words were lost to the wondering Bob, as Gracia had gained the phone by the time they were uttered. As a whirlwind she rushed back to the dining-room, and in the vortex she carried the breakfast dishes to the kitchen. One o'clock did not bring the groceries, so she humbly asked the famished boy to lunch on bread and milk. When her order did arrive Gracia resolved on reformation, providentially prepared the vegetables for dinner; for she was not to have a spare moment that afternoon. It occurred to her during the washing and peeling and shelling of the various vegetables that Martha had always, before breakfast too, dusted the downstairs rooms. Accordingly she hastily finished her preparations, found a duster, and faced the parlors. The formal process over, Gracia ensconced herself in a chair, a last evening's paper in her hand. She turned as usual to her 'Hints on Housekeeping,' so despised by Martha. The first sentence to meet her horrified eyes ran thus:

'When making beds— Beds, beds, I didn't make any beds.' With her usual late energy Gracia sped up the stairs as the old clock accusingly struck six.

When Gracia was hurrying over the last bed, she heard her neglected brother rush towards the front door.

'Father!' she exclaimed, and deliberately advanced to lock the bedroom door. There was a rap, as she anticipated.

'Gracia, I'm home, dear.'

'Yes.'

'Well?'

'Good evening.'

'Good evening. Gracia, I devoutly hope you aren't papering or calaminin in there?'

'No, sir, I am not.'

'You aren't crying?' anxiously.

'No.'

'Well, what are you doing?'

'Making the bed.'

A strained silence, then to the listening Gracia was borne in the sound of a half-suppressed chuckle. For a moment Gracia frowned, but the persistent chuckle was soon supplemented by her wholly unexpressed laughter. Suddenly she stopped and sighed. 'Oh, Martha, Martha!' then added aloud.

'We'll have a late supper, father.'

'All the more fashionable, my dear,' cheerfully responded the schemer.

At the cost of some of Gracia's sleeping hours the work resolved itself into somewhat better lines. The beds were made in the morning, and the breakfast dishes were washed immediately after that meal, though she deliberately abandoned the parlors to their dust. In the evening she was triumphantly sitting down to a seven o'clock dinner when she observed Bob beaming benignly at her. In justification she looked at her father.

'Why, what's the matter with me, anyway? You both are staring—'

Her father gravely led her to the pier glass in the hall. A queer reflection truly, for her hair, dishevelled, fell coyly towards her left ear, her shoe ribbons—but what only was their interest was her once immaculate apron. It had become a whole library of novels. Stove polish, berries, and other articles had left their story there. Worst of all, there was a big 'barn-door' tear. Surely Martha—but one must suppress one's deepest longings, one must smile for appearance sake, while inwardly one says 'Poor Martha.'

Thursday afternoon Gracia rushed in where the proverbial angels would have feared to tread. She decided to make a cake. Not that she could not make good cake, but she had not acquired velocity enough to carry her through all the housework and bake the cake, too. So, cheerfully she avoided the dusting again.

In her pink gingham, starched and fresh, and her clean white apron, standing over the big yellow bowl, Gracia was a pleasant Phyllis. However, she was soon surrounded by the uncalled-for messiness which an amateur always causes in a kitchen. Amid the greased pans, the dabs of butter, and the sprinkling of flour appeared the hospitable Bob, bringing a companion of his, just as Gracia discovered some yellow traces of egg splashed on her fresh pink gingham. It was rather an inauspicious moment. Troubles never come singly, Gracia grimly observed to herself as the two boys entered.

(To be concluded.)

Imp originally meant a child.

Acre originally meant a field of any size.

Meat originally meant any kind of food.

Label originally meant a small book or pamphlet.