

IMPRESSING THE JANITOR

By CLARA NORTON
(Copyright, 1925, by Daily Story Pub. Co.)

I was a rattling good stenographer. I am very stylish, with a swell pompadour, and there was not a girl in the office that could put up as fine a display of catchy toggery. My clothes were simply stunning. I am not ashamed of my walk, and my style is something everybody admires. I suppose because everybody appreciates a real lady when they see one. I was the real thing in the office, and whatever I said, went. His Nibs admired my work, although he called me down sometimes, just, of course, to show who he was. I have great individuality in all things and while he intimated many times that my spelling differs from the dictionary and that the places I found for commas and question marks and capital letters were decidedly injudicious, I know that he secretly admired my judgment.

I believe heartily in individuality. I choose my hats to bring out my profile, and I have my skirts cut to bring out the lines of my figure. I have a good figure, and it is much admired. When I go by most everybody turns and looks after me for blocks.

Sometimes, though, I am thoughtless. I suppose, because I have so many things on my mind. One day when I was called for dictation I left my gum on a chair instead of putting it in the wastebasket. And the high Mogul, like the stupid creature he is, sat on it. When he got up the gum stuck to his trousers, and the chair stuck to the gum. Not realizing what could be the matter, I laughed. Along with being stylish, I have a sense of humor. He is a puffy man and not at all considerate for a real lady's feelings. He swore at me. Being a lady, I said nothing in return, because I couldn't think of anything to say. If I had it to do over I would tell him a few. He called me to his office and sent for the cashier and told him to pay me my week's salary in advance. He was very polite. He was trying, you see, to fix it up for swearing at me. I took the money. Then he told me that he did not need my services and, furthermore, that I need not expect a recommendation from him. He knew he couldn't get anything but those dreadful, frowzy stenographers that persist so in living, and he wanted to place me in



I am very stylish.

such a position that I would be compelled to come back and work for him. When he said good-bye he fairly smiled in his efforts to make it up with me.

I bowed coldly to him and tucked the money away for the chiffon boa that I had been planning on.

I boarded with Mrs. Milling, who used to be a stenographer herself before she got married. But she lost

so much style that I guess she couldn't get a position, so she rents out a couple of rooms in her flat. I had one of them. She is a woman without tact. Most women have a little tact, but Mrs. Milling has none. She has a way of hurting her boarders' feelings. She asks them for her money. And, mind you, not once or twice or three times, but she keeps on asking until she gets it. Really she is without shame.

Although I wore my chiffon boa and made quite a splash, there were, somehow, so many of those sloppy creatures willing to work for half nothing that there was no place open for a lady. Weeks passed, and I could get nothing to do. Then Mrs. Milling got on her ear and got so insulting that I decided to leave her rather than lose my temper. But, mind you, she wouldn't let me go unless I left my trunk, and she wouldn't let me stay with my trunk unless I paid her. She threw significant hints at me. She had her brazen nerve along with her allright, allright. She said she thought a strong, healthy young lady that could eat the three square meals she saw me put away could certainly help her with the housework and work out what I owed her. I was up against a fierce proposition. She got out an old cotton wrapper for me and I was floored. I went into the kitchen. It was my tragedy. It was dreadful.

The only things I can cook are potatoes. I flatter myself on having a clever way of cooking them. I boil them not until they are done, but until people are ready for them. As people were ready for them sometimes after I put them on the stove or half an hour after they had fallen to pieces, my career in the kitchen was really interesting. Mrs. Milling fairly caved around and what she did to me was a plenty.

It was at this time I became interested in the janitor. The janitor was unmarried and young and as big as a trolley car. I met him in the laundry. He wore lovely ties, and when he was dressed up and on the street he was a swell piece of furniture. He had a dignified, persuasive way about him and he was just a dear.

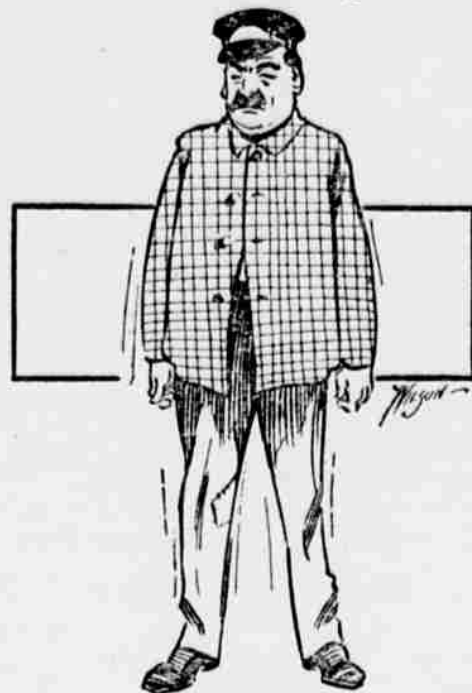
I knew from the way that he smashed lids on the garbage cans and shoveled old rag-men out of the basement and yelled at delivery boys and bossed the moving vans at the side entrance that he was a man very much above his job. He seemed not only to own the Merling flats here on earth, but he intended to take them with him when he died. He seemed to have a deeded right to the freight elevator and light-shaft. All the folks in the building fell all over themselves to prove that they not only respected him as friend and brother, but revered him as high Mogul. The railroad clerk in the top flat was afraid of him and would have named the baby after him if it hadn't been a girl. A lady in the second flat named her dog after him. So when we called "Bill," it was the dog alone that usually responded.

At this time I was going with Charley Tapper, the drug clerk. I never liked Charley. He had no money and he was an all-around fourflusher. But he put up such a swell front that we paired off nicely, and I rather enjoyed being seen with him. But the janitor had him skinned to death when it came to looks. I began to think that if the janitor and I could walk around the block together or out to the park in our Sunday togs we would certainly make a hit. No one need know that he was a janitor. You would never guess it unless you were told. You would have planked down your dollars that he was a trust millionaire. He looked just like one. The only difference was he didn't have the money.

The servants in the buildings were daffy about him. A big Swede girl made sky-blue sofa pillows for him. A pudgy German girl waited on him with needle and thread, sewed on his buttons and hung around him like a little poodle. A small, pasty-faced

Irish girl loaded him with snapshots and tintypes of herself. Besides, he had the affectionate interest of casual washwomen and scrubwomen that infested the building. Everyone seemed to crowbar after him with brazen gall. Among other things, he was a cold janitor. He had a strong sense of propriety and talked a great deal about the weather. He never let one of them know where she was at He had them all guessing.

Now I am clever. I have been interested in clothes as far back as I can remember, and I have good ideas.



The janitor.

Of course, not all the time, but most generally, I am awfully clever. I think the only way to win a man's affections is to make him wait on you a lot and be sort of girlishly thoughtless about asking him to do so. I did not make sofa pillows for him nor sew on his buttons nor bestow my picture upon him. But I had a regular method of keeping him interested in me. I would whistle for him through the speaking tube and ask him to come up. When he had climbed three flights of stairs to our kitchen door I would ask him for the correct time. Then I would set my watch at whatever time he said it was. And when I would tell him that was all I wanted he would smile in the queerest way and anyone could see that he respected me more and more. By the time he reached the basement I would whistle down to find out if the iceman had come yet. Then in a few minutes I would whistle down again to find out if he please wouldn't send up some more steam. And after a while I would call him up again and ask him if he would come up and turn on one of the radiators. When he was around I would prattle to him. I am a good talker, and when I want to I can be very entertaining. I told him about my profession, how much of a lady I am and how I have my mother's ideas and my father's walk. And he would smile and be so interested.

I have a pleasant sense of humor, and the janitor got so he would joke with me. The pasty-faced Irish girl turned green. My refined ways are the despair of most everybody and I made those kitchen mechanics fairly hum.

I was in the laundry one day when the Irish girl came in and disputed impertinently over my right to the clothesline at that particular hour on that particular day. She stated that she would take a fall out of me. I am not a coward, and I stood my ground bravely. In other words, she didn't faze me a bit, and I dared her to come on. She doubled up her fists and made for me. She landed an upper-cut on my jaw like a man. Most girls make for your hair with one hand and for your eyes with the other, so that I was not prepared for her unladylike attack. But I managed to get away without leaving more of myself with her than my neck ribbon and a few strands of my hair.

The janitor had heard my screams, and knowing my voice, of course, he came to the rescue. But the Swede girl and a scrubwoman butted in. When I started to faint in the jani-

tor's arms my dress caught on the scrubwoman's bucket and the Swede made a grab for me. But nevertheless I keeled over against the man's blue-jeaned bosom and tied my breath up in knots and let them have a few gasps at a time.

As I said, I am very clever. It took a long time for me to be restored. In the meantime, they carried me to the freight elevator in the back part of the basement and they laid me in it with a gunnysack under my head. I began to sob. Then they pulled the ropes and the elevator went up into such a cold draught of air that I began to sob in earnest. My earnest sobs do not sound nearly so pretty as my imitation sobs. I learned how to sob at the theater. I learned a great deal about clothes and everything at the theater. When I hand out my imitation sobs I seem somehow to be delivering the real goods.

They pulled the rope again, and the elevator went up and up. It shot past Mrs. Milling's flat. It shot past all other flats and I was brought face to face with the skylight. I was alone with the gunnysack, and it was cold and dismal and lonesome. I cried and sobbed as if my heart would break. Back doors opened inquiringly and closed heartlessly. Finally they let it down a few feet. Just as I was growing hopeful they raised it again and left it midway between two flats. Then they gave it a vicious jerk and brought it down a few feet more. It was dreadful. They let it down and then jerked it up and let it down in a ziz-zag fashion. They were as deaf as posts to my cries.

Just about the time the last breath was leaving my body they returned me to the basement. I rose and stepped from the elevator to wreak vengeance upon my tormentors. The principal object that I was after was, of course, the Irish girl. I intended to wipe the floor up with her.

I found them all in the laundry with the janitor standing guard. They were all giggling. Mrs. Milling was there too. To all appearances she also had been laughing. A lady can never trust another of her own sex. She then told me that my account with her was square and that I could take my trunk whenever I liked. I left them then and there. It is best for a true lady to take no notice of such trash. I dressed up and started out with my chiffon boa to get anything I could find. I have a courageous spirit.

A gentleman at once saw my worth, and I am now head lady in a restaurant. I have a date to-night with Charley Tapper. He is such a manly fellow and has such a quantity of sense. We are going to swell out in our glad rags and go to a show.

Mme. Loubet's Simple Nature.

The late Mme. Loubet was 90 years old. One of M. Loubet's first thoughts on being named president of France was to send her a photograph enlarged to lifesize, in a handsome gilt frame, to be hung up in her parlor—this on learning that the old lady preferred to remain as she had lived on her farm rather than to come and share the splendors of the Elysee. Replying once to a friend who congratulated her on her son's elevation, Mme. Loubet raised her eyes, and, pointing to a portrait, remarked: "No doubt you knew my husband. In my old age I have the happiness of thinking that my son resembles him."

The Passing of Italics.

The great days of italics were in the '30s of last century, when the London Figaro began its criticisms of politics, the drama and society. Then every other word was italicized, and the effect to-day is as though every other word were a shriek. Until the '80s women retained the habit of underlining all but the prepositions and conjunctions in their letters, and there are still many women journalists who cannot get along without the stimulus of italics. But in reality a writer needs italics about as often as he needs a Turkish bath.