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knots. True, the boys admired the most thickly flowered gown immensely for a few minutes. Richard bringing me a posy to match for my hair, while Ian walked about me in silence which he broke suddenly with the trenchant remark—"Barbara. I think your dress would be prettier if it was weeded some!"

All of which is of course perfectly true. I have not been growing thinner all these six years. But this morning, in stooping over one of the cold frames to see how the plants within had weathered the storm, it came quite as a shock to me to feel that, like Martin Cortright, I am getting stout and in the way of myself when I bend, like an impediment in a door hinge.

However, as Miss Lavinia desired guidance in buying some real country clothes, I felt it my duty to give it. She is already making elaborate preparations for her visit to me. It seems strange, that simplicity is apparently one of the most laborious things in the world to those unaccustomed to it, yet so it is.

She is about to make her initial venture in shirtwaists, and she approaches them with as much caution as if she were experimenting with tights and trunks. The poor little seamstress who is officiating has, to my certain knowledge, tried one waist on five times, because, as Miss Lavinia does not "feel it," she thinks it cannot fit properly.

Never mind, she will get over all that, of course. The plan that she has formed of spending five or six months in the real country must appear somewhat in the light of a revolution to her, and the preparation of a special uniform and munitions for the campaign a necessary precaution. Her present plan is to come to me for May, then, if the life suits her, she will either take a small house that one of our farmer neighbors often rents for the summer months, or else, together with her maid, Lucy, board at one of the hill farms.

I have told her plainly (for what is friendship worth if one may not be frank) that if after trial we agree with each other, I hope she will stay with us all the season; but as for her maid, I myself will supply her place, if need be, and Kille do her mending, for I could not have Lucy come.

Perhaps it may be very narrow and provincial, but to harbor other people's servants seems to me like inviting contagion and subjecting one's kitchen to all the evils of boarding house atmosphere.

I used to think last summer, when I saw the arrival of various men and maids belonging to guests of the Bluff Colony, that I should feel much more at ease in the presence of royalty, and that I could probably entertain Queen Alexandra at dinner with less shock to her nerves and traditions than one of these ladies' maids or gentlemen's gentlemen.

Martha Corlie expresses her opinion freely upon this subject, and I must confess to being a willing listener, for she does not gossip, she portrays, and often with a masterly touch. The woes of her countrywoman, the Ponsonby's housekeeper, often stir her to the quick. The Ponsonby household is perhaps one of the most "difficult" on the Bluffs, because its members are of widely divergent ages. The three Ponsonby girls range from six to twenty-two, with a college freshman son second from the beginning, while Josephine, sister of the head of the family, though quite Miss Lavinia's age, is the gayest of the gay, and almost outdoes her good-naturedly giddy sister-in-law.

"It's just awful, Mrs. Evan," Martha said one day, when, judging by the contents of the station 'bus and baggage wagon, almost the entire Ponsonby household must have left at a swoop; "my eyes fairly bleeds for poor Mrs. Maggs" (the housekeeper), "that they do. 'Twas bad enough in the Old Country, where we knew our places, even though some was ambitious to get out of them; but here it's like blind man's buff, and enough to turn a body giddy. Mrs. Maggs hasn't a sittin' room of her own where she and the butler and the nurse can have their tea in peace or entertain guests, but she sets two tables in the servants' hall, and a pretty time she has of it.

"The kitchen maid and the laundress's assistant wait on the first table; but

one day when, the maid of one of Miss Ponsonby's friends comin' down over late, she was served with instead o' by them, she gave Mrs. Maggs the 'orriblest settin' down, as not knowin' her business in puttin' a lady's lady with servants' servants, the same which Mrs. Maggs does know perfectly (accidents bein' unpreventable), bein' child of Lord Peacock's steward and his head nurse, and swallowin' it all in with her mother's milk, so to speak, not borrowin' it second hand as some of the great folks on the Bluffs themselves do from their servants, not feelin' sure of the kerrect thing, yet desirin' so to do. Mrs. Maggs, poor body, she has more mess with that servants' hall first table than with all the big dinners the master gives.

"Mrs. Corkle," says she, bein' used to that name, besides Corkle bein' kin to her husband, "what I sets before my own household, as it were, they leaves or they eats, it's one to me; but company's got to be handled different, be it upstairs or down, for the name of the 'ouse, but when Mr. Jollie, the French valet that comes here frequent with the master's partner, wants dripped coffee and the fat scraped clean from his chop shank, else the flavor's spoiled for him, and Bruce the mistress' brother's man wants boiled coffee, and thick fat left on his breakfast ham, what stands between my poor 'ead and a h'asseylum? that's what I want to know. Three cooks I've had this very season, it really bein' the duty of the first kitchen maid to cook for the servants' hall; but if a cook is suited to a kitchen maid, as is most important, she'll stand by her. No, Martha Corkle, wages is 'igh, no doubt,—fortunes to what they were when we were gells,—but not 'igh for the worry; and bein' in service ain't what it were."

Then I knew that Martha, even as her bosom heaves over her friend's grievances, was also sighing with content at thought of Timothy Saunders and her own lot; and I recalled the Lady of the Bluffs' passing remark, and felt that I am only beginning to realize the deliciousness of "comfortable poverty."

Miss Lavinia and I spent some time browsing among the shops, finally bringing up at an old conservative dry goods concern in Broadway, the most satisfactory place to shop in New York, because there is never a crowd, and the salesmen, many of them grown gray in the service, take an Old World interest in their wares and in you.

While I was trying to convince Miss Lavinia as to the need of serviceable, she was equally determined to decoy me toward the frivolous; and I yielded, I may say fell, to the extent of buying a white crepey sort of pattern gown that had an open work white lilac pattern embroidered on it. It certainly was very lovely, and it is nice to have a really good gown in reserve, even if a plainer one that will stand hugging, sticky fingers, and dogs' damp noses is more truly enjoyable.

N. B.—I must get over apologizing to myself when I buy respectable clothes. It savors too much of Aunt Lot's old habit of saying, every time she bought a best gown, and I remonstrated with her for the color (it was always black in those days; since she's married the Reverend Jabez she's taken to greens). "When I consider that a black dress would be suitable to be buried in, it seems like a vain luxury."

We were admiring the dainty muslins, but only in the "abstract," when I looked up, conscious that some one was coming directly toward us, and saw Sylvia Latham crossing the shop from the door, her rapid, swinging gait bringing her to us before short-sighted Miss Lavinia had a chance to raise her lorgnette.

Sylvia was genuinely glad to see us, and she expressed it both by look and speech, without the slightest symptom of gush, yet with the confiding manner of one who craves companionship. I had, in fact, noticed the same thing during our call the afternoon before.

"Well, and what are we buying to-day?" asked Miss Lavinia, clearing her voice by a little caressing sound halfway between a purr and a cluck, and patting the hand that lingered affectionately on hers.

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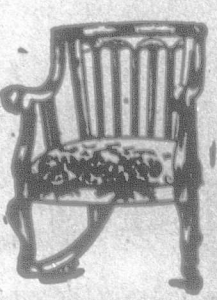
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