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LIKE ONE OF THE FAMILY

Hi MARGE! I have had me one hectic day. . . . Well, I had to take out my crystal ball and give Mrs. C . . . a thorough reading. She's the woman that I took over from Naomi after Naomi got married. . . . Well, she's a pretty nice woman as they go and I have never had too much trouble with her, but from time to time she really gripes me with her ways.

When she has company, for example, she'll holler out to me from the living room to the kitchen: "Mildred dear! Be sure and eat *both* of those lamb chops for your lunch!" Now you know she wasn't doing a thing but tryin' to prove to the company how "good" and "kind" she was to the servant, because she had told me *already* to eat those chops.

Today she had a girl friend of hers over to lunch and I was real busy afterwards clearing the things away and she called me over and introduced me to the woman. . . . Oh no, Marge! I didn't object to that at all. I greeted the lady and then went back to my work. . . . And then it started! I could hear her talkin' just as loud . . . and she says to her friend, "We *just* love her! She's *like* one of the family and she *just* adores our little Carol! We don't know *what* we'd do without her! We don't think of her as a servant!" And on and on she went . . . and every time I came in to move a plate off the

table both of them would grin at me like chessy cats.

After I couldn't stand it any more, I went in and took the platter off the table and gave 'em both a look that would have frizzled a egg. . . . Well, you might have heard a pin drop and then they started talkin' about something else.

When the guest leaves, I go in the living room and says, "Mrs. C . . . , I want to have a talk with you."

"By all means," she says.

I drew up a chair and read her thusly: "Mrs. C . . . , you are a pretty nice person to work for, but I wish you would please stop talkin' about me like I was a *cocker spaniel* or a *poll parrot* or a *kitten*. . . . Now you just sit there and hear me out.

"In the first place, you do not *love* me; you may be fond of me, but that is all. . . . In the second place, I am *not* just like one of the family at all! The family eats in the dining room and I eat in the kitchen. Your mama borrows your lace tablecloth for her company and your son entertains his friends in your parlor, your daughter takes her afternoon nap on the living room couch and the puppy sleeps on your satin spread . . . and whenever your husband gets tired of something you are talkin' about he says, 'Oh, for Pete's sake, forget it. . . .' So you can see I am not *just* like one of the family.

"Now for another thing, I do not *just* adore your little Carol. I think she is a likable child, but she is also fresh and sassy. I know you call it 'uninhibited' and that is the way you want your child to be, but *luckily* my mother taught me some inhibitions or else I would smack little Carol once in a while when she's talkin' to you like you're a dog, but as it is I just laugh it off the way you do because she is *your* child and I am *not* like one of the family.

"Now when you say, 'We don't know *what* we'd do with-

out her' this is a polite lie . . . because I know that if I dropped dead or had a stroke, you would get somebody to replace me.

"You think it is a compliment when you say, 'We don't think of her as a servant. . . .' but after I have worked myself into a sweat cleaning the bathroom and the kitchen . . . making the beds . . . cooking the lunch . . . washing the dishes and ironing Carol's pinafores . . . I do not feel like no weekend house guest. I feel like a servant, and in the face of that I have been meaning to ask you for a slight raise which will make me feel much better toward everyone here and make me know my work is appreciated.

"Now I hope you will stop talkin' about me in my presence and that we will get along like a good employer and employee should."

Marge! She was almost speechless but she *apologized* and said she'd talk to her husband about the raise. . . . I knew things were progressing because this evening Carol came in the kitchen and she did not say, "I want some bread and jam!" but she did say, "*Please*, Mildred, will you fix me a slice of bread and jam."

I'm going upstairs, Marge. Just look . . . you done messed up that buttonhole!

can and some of all kind of folk. . . . This City is far from perfect, but it gets you to the place where you just want to try and *make it* perfect. Oh sure, I don't mind June comin' to visit, but I'm gonna try and make her see my home the way I see it!

. . . Hold on, Marge! No, I wouldn't go that far. . . . I ain't sayin' that everything here is better than any place else and neither will I take any cracks at the South! Because home is where the heart is and everybody knows their own home the best.

All I'm sayin' is I wish people would stop tellin' us "I could *never* live here."

ALL ABOUT MY JOB

MARGE, I sure am glad that you are my friend. . . . No, I do not want to borrow anything or ask any favors and I wish you'd stop bein' suspicious everytime somebody pays you a compliment. It's a sure sign of a distrustful nature.

I'm glad that you are my friend because everybody needs a friend but I guess I need one more than most people. . . . Well, in the first place I'm colored and in the second place I do housework for a livin' and so you can see that I don't need a third place because the first two ought to be enough reason for anybody to need a friend.

You are not only a good friend but you are also a convenient friend and fill the bill in every other way. . . . Well, we are both thirty-two years old; both live in the same building; we each have a three room apartment for which we pay too devilish much, but at the same time we got better sense than to try and live together. And there are other things, too. We both come from the South and we also do the same kinda work: *housework*.

Of course, you have been married, and I have not yet taken the vows, but I guess that's the only difference unless you want to count the fact that you are heavier than I am and wear a size eighteen while I wear a sixteen. . . . Marge, you know

that you are larger, that's a fact! Oh, well, let's not get upset about it! The important thing is that I'm your friend, and you're mine and I'm glad about it!

Why, I do believe I'd lose my mind if I had to come home after a day of hard work, rasslin' 'round in other folks' kitchens if I did not have a friend to talk to when I got here. . . . Girl, don't you move 'cause it would be terrible if I couldn't run down a flight of steps and come in here to chew the fat in the evenin'. But if you ever get tired of me, always remember that all you have to do is say, "Mildred, go home," and I'll be on my way! . . . I did not get mad the last time you told me that! Girl, you ought to be ashamed of yourself! . . . No, I'm not callin' you a liar but I'm sayin' you just can't remember the truth.

Anyhow, I'm glad that we're friends! I got a story to tell you about what happened today. . . . No, not where I work although it was *about* where I work.

The church bazaar was open tonight and I went down to help out on one of the booths and, oh, my nerves! you never saw so many la-de-da fancy folks in all your life! And such introducin' that was goin' on. You shoulda *heard* 'em. "Do meet Mrs. So-and-so who has just returned from *Europe*," and "Do meet Miss This-and-that who has just finished her new *book*" and "Do meet Miss This-that-and-the-other who is on the Board of Directors of everything that is worthwhile!"

Honey, it was a dog! . . . Oh, yes, it was a real snazzy affair, and the booths was all fixed up so pretty, and they had these fine photographs pinned up on the wall. The photographs showed people doin' all manner of work. Yes, the idea of the pictures was to show how we are improvin' ourselves by leaps and bounds through the kinda work that we're doin'.

Well, that was a great old deal with me except that if they was talkin' 'bout people doin' work, it seemed to me that I was the only one around there that had took a lick at a snake in years! . . . No, it wasn't a drag at all because I was really enjoyin' the thing just like you'd go for a carnival or a penny-arcade once in a while.

My booth was the "Knick-Knack" corner and my counter was full of chipped-china doo-dads and ash trays and penny banks and stuff like that, and I was really sellin' it, too. There was a little quiet lady helpin' me out and for the life of me I couldn't figure why she was so scared-like and timid lookin'.

I was enjoyin' myself no end, and there was so many big-wigs floatin' around the joint 'til I didn't know what to expect next! . . . Yes, girl, any second I thought some sultan or king or somebody like that was gonna fall in the door! Honey, I was how-do-you-doin' left and right! Well, all the excitement keeps up 'til one group of grand folks stopped at our booth and begun to chat with us and after the recitation 'bout what they all did, one lady turned to my timid friend and says, "What do *you* do?"

Marge, Miss Timid started sputterin' and stammerin' and finally she outs with, "Nothin' much." That was a new one on me 'cause I had never heard 'bout nobody who spent their time doin' "nothin' much." Then Miss Grand-lady turns to me and says, "And what do *you* do?" . . . Of course I told her! "I do housework," I said. "Oh," says she, "you are a housewife." "Oh, no," says I, "I do housework, and I do it every day because that is the way I make my livin' and if you look around at these pictures on the wall you will see that people do all kinds of work, I do housework."

Marge, they looked kinda funny for a minute but the next

thing you know we were all laughin' and talkin' 'bout everything in general and nothin' in particular. I mean all of us was chattin' except Miss Timid.

When the folks drifted away, Miss Timid turns to me and says, "I do housework too but I don't always feel like tellin'. People look down on you so."

Well, I can tell you that I moved on in after that remark and straightened her out! . . . Now, wait a minute, Marge! I know people do make nasty cracks about houseworkers. Sure, they will say things like "pot-slingers" or "the Thursday-night-off" crowd, but nobody gets away with that stuff around me, and I will sound off in a second about how I feel about my work.

Marge, people who do this kinda work got a lot of different ideas about their jobs, I mean some folks are ashamed of it and some are proud of it, but I don't feel either way. You see, on accounta many reasons I find that I got to do it and while I don't think that housework is the grandest job I ever hope to get, it makes me *mad* for any fools to come lookin' down their nose at me!

If I had a child, I would want that child to do something that paid better and had some opportunity to it, but on the other hand it would distress me no end to see that child get some arrogant attitude toward me because I do domestic work. Domestic workers have done a awful lot of good things in this country besides clean up peoples' houses. We've taken care of our brothers and fathers and husbands when the factory gates and office desks and pretty near everything else was closed to them; we've helped many a neighbor, doin' everything from helpin' to clothe their children to buryin' the dead.

. . . Yes, mam, and I'll help you to tell it! We built that

church that the bazaar was held in! And it's a rare thing for anybody to find a colored family in this land that can't trace a domestic worker somewhere in their history. . . . How 'bout that, girl! . . . Yes, there's many a doctor, many a lawyer, many a teacher, many a minister that got where they are 'cause somebody worked in the kitchen to put 'em there, and there's also a lot of 'em that worked in kitchens themselves in order to climb up a little higher!

Of course, a lot of people think it's *smart* not to talk about *slavery* anymore, but after freedom came, it was domestics that kept us from perishin' by the wayside. . . . Who you tellin'? I know it was our dollars and pennies that built many a school! . . .

Yes, I know I said I wasn't particular proud about bein' a domestic worker, but I guess I am. What I really meant to say was that I had plans to be somethin' else, but time and trouble stopped me from doin' it. So I told this little Miss Meek, "Dear, throw back your shoulders and pop your fingers at the *world* because the way I see it there's nobody with common sense that can look down on the domestic worker!"

WE NEED A UNION TOO

MARGE, WHO LIKES housework? . . . I guess there's a few people who do, but when a family starts makin' money what is the first thing that happens? . . . You are right! They will get themselves a maid to do the housework. I've never heard of no rich folk who just want to go on doin' it our of pure love and affection! Oh, they might mix up a cake once in a while or straighten a doily, but for the most part they're gettin' a kick out of doin' that simply 'cause they don't have to do it. Honey, I mean to tell you that we got a job that almost nobody wants!

That is why we need a union! Why shouldn't we have set hours and set pay just like busdrivers and other folks, why shouldn't we have vacation pay and things like that? . . . Well, I guess it would be awful hard to get houseworkers together on account of them all workin' off separate-like in different homes, but it would sure be a big help and also keep you out of a lot of nasty arguments!

For example, I'd walk in to work and the woman would say to me, "Mildred, you will wax the floors with paste wax, please." Then I say, "No, that is very heavy work and is against the union regulations." She will say, "If you don't do it, I will have to get me somebody else!" Then I say, "The somebody

else will be union, too, so they will not be able to do it, either." "Oh," she will say, "if it's too heavy for you and too heavy for the somebody else then it must be also too heavy for me! How will I get my floors done?" "Easy," I say, "the union will send a *man* over to do things like paste wax, window washin', scrubbin' walls, takin' down venetian blinds and all such."

She will pat her foot then and say, "Well! *That* will cost me extra!" . . . "Exactly," I will say, "'cause it is extra wear and tear on a man's energy, and wear and tear on energy costs money!"

. . . Oh, Marge, you would have to put a problem in the thing! All right, suppose she says, "Never mind, I don't want you or anybody else from that union, I will search around and find me somebody who does not belong to it!" Well, then the union calls out all the folks who work in that *buildin'*, and we'll march up and down in front of that apartment house carryin' signs which will read, "Miss So-and-so of Apartment 5B is unfair to organized houseworkers!" . . . The other folks in the *buildin'* will not like it, and they will also be annoyed 'cause their maids are out there walkin' instead of upstairs doin' the work. Can't you see all the neighbors bangin' on Apartment 5B!