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## A Poet and a Housekeeper

I started working at the local country club as a housekeeper when our daughters were starting off to college. The country club is close by, an elite spot in the Rocky Mountains, with beautiful man-made lakes, a host of wildflowers, and an excellent - or so I've heard - golf course.

I thought it would be a good way to pull in some not-so-extra money and save myself from having to drive down the hill to Fort Collins, 45 miles away. Jobs are scarce in Red Feather Lakes. It's one of those picturesque towns with a modest economy, and the country club provides jobs for a good portion of the population.

Meeting Ruby, my supervisor, was a revelation. It was the first time I realized that some people feel that housekeeping is their calling. I'd always been a bit of a snob, and thought that preachers, teachers, poets, or artists were "called," but that somehow people in other professions just did them, without devotion.

Knowing Ruby has changed all that, and my ignorant snobbery has faded. Ruby is an ever-burning flame of devotion for housekeeping, a jewel among housekeepers. While the rest of the crew may clean well, as they've been trained to do, Ruby cleans brilliantly. Not one pillow escapes her gaze, not one spot on a mirror, nor one crooked corner of a bedspread. Ruby can spot a ball of lint at 50 paces. And what's most amazing is that working with Ruby has rubbed off on me.

I was always a poetic type who was more attuned to woodland wanderings than to pots and pans, a fact to which my mother would readily testify. I'm sure she would gladly have traded me in when she found dirty pots and pans hiding in her oven after I'd been asked to do the evening dishes.

Over the years, as a mother and housekeeper, I felt I'd been redeemed, but I hadn't met Ruby yet. Ruby has trained me so thoroughly that on a recent excursion to a Chinese restaurant with my family, I found myself cleaning spots off the mirror in the rest room with a paper towel. It took discipline to throw the towel in the trash and leave without finishing the mirror.

Ruby laughed in delight when I told her this, but I shudder at its implications. Can a poet be practical? When William Blake

saw God's face pressed against the window, did he then go over and clean the glass?

It's only fair to say that I've rubbed off on the crew, too, Ruby included. After knowing me, Ruby doesn't find it strange to dance to the rhythm and beat of a washing machine, and our 15-minute breaks are turning into occasions for reading poetry or looking through family photo albums. Our morning rides to the latrines to clean them before the golfers are out are often occasions for admiring a passing hawk, or a doe with her fawn.

I knew a change had come about when we arrived at the back latrines early one fall morning. When it comes to cobwebs, Ruby is a woman on a mission, but this morning, an artistic feat of cobwebbery spanned the eaves. Frost covered the intricate, delicate lace work. We stood for a long moment and stared at a series of cobwebs as fine and beautiful as a Spanish mantilla dropped from the hand of a lady. A breeze rippled the lake and floated the lace gently.

"Should I get the broom and clean them off?" I asked.

"Not this morning," Ruby answered, as we headed for the van. "They're beautiful with the frost on them. Let's wait until tomorrow."

People can change one another. We work changes in each other, and these changes work further changes in still others. Who we are, and how we are, affects our associates, our friends, our families. Like the ever-expanding ripples from a pebble dropped in a lake, the repercussions of a meeting between poet and housekeeper may be larger than we realize.