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The Housekeeper and the Poet

I started working at the local country club as a housekeeper when our daughters, Juniper and Amanda, were starting off to college. The country club is close to where we live and is an elite spot in the Rocky Mountains, with beautiful manmade 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 driving down the hill to Fort Collins, 45 miles away. Jobs are scarce in Red Feather Lakes. It's one of those picturesque, low economy towns, and the country club provides jobs for a good portion of the population.

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

Knowing Ruby has changed all that, and this brand of 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 fifty paces. And what's most amazing is that working with Ruby has rubbed off on me.

I was always a poetic type, more attuned to woodland wanderings than to pots and pans, a fact my mother would readily testify to. 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 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 to 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 fifteen-minute breaks are turning into occasions for reading poetry or looking through family 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 miracle of cobwebbery spanned the eaves. Frost covered intricate, delicate lacework. 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 little breeze shivered the lake waters 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."

We work changes on each other, and these changes work

changes in the universe. Who we are, and how we are, affects our associates, our friends and families. Everything we do is significant, and like ever-expanding ripples on a pond caused by a pebble thrown into the water, the repercussions of the meeting of a poet and a housekeeper may be larger than we realize.