

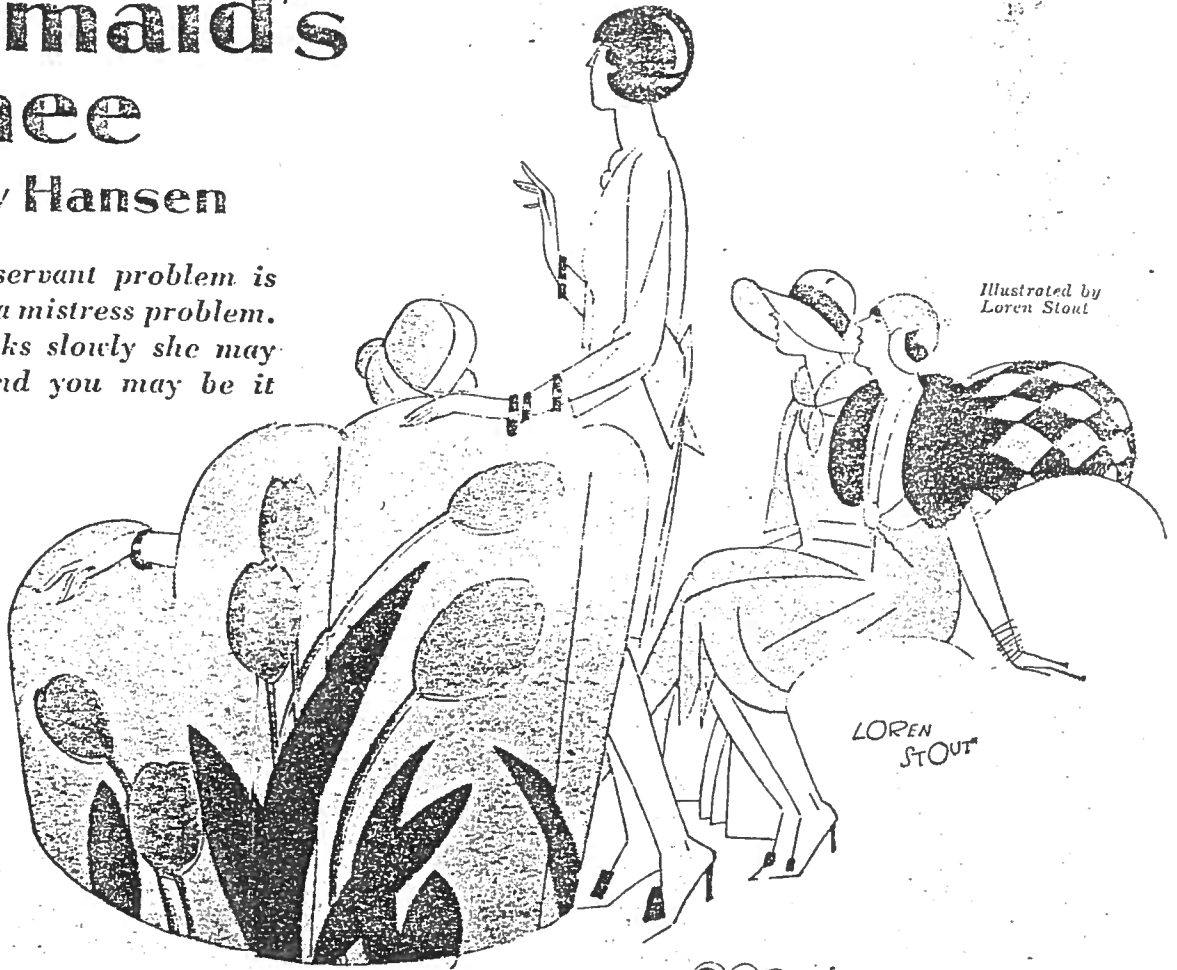
Housemaid's Knee

By Dagny Hansen

That everlasting servant problem is often, like as not, a mistress problem. If your maid works slowly she may have a reason, and you may be it



One woman has fixed a nice room where her maid can entertain friends. She often comes herself for a few minutes, bringing a plate of candy



Illustrated by Loren Stout

LOREN STOUT

THE other day I was paying a call on a girl I had known for some time, a girl who is married now and a little more prosperous than she used to be. The talk had been almost entirely about servants, when all of a sudden the maid appeared at the door and opened her mouth as though to say something. But she didn't get a chance.

"That's all right, Olga," said my friend. "When you get through with that carpet I'll show you what to do."

The maid nodded, but still stood there. "?" said my friend, with a dreadful look.

"Aye been t'rough vid d' garpet," said the maid, in a thick Scandinavian that I knew only too well. "Tonight aye living you, pliss, t'ank you."

"What!" said my friend, and there was an uncomfortable pause. Then: "All right."

"Isn't that nice?" she said, after the maid had withdrawn. "I tell you they're all alike. There's no keeping a single one of them. I've done everything for

that girl. I pay her seventy dollars a month, with room and meals, and that's ten dollars more than anybody else pays. I've given her clothes, anything she wants. And here at the end of a month she's leaving me. That's gratitude! . . ."

Why Maids Leave Homes

But I knew why the maid was leaving, and I didn't blame her. What my friend didn't know was that four or five years ago, when I first came to this country from Norway and had a thick Scandinavian accent too, I had spent a year in the backyard, hanging out clothes myself. I had to, or starve. I, too, had given notice on Saturday afternoon, or at the end of the month, so many times that I cannot remember them all; I, too, had had ladies look at me in a terribly injured way, and wonder why I had so little gratitude. So it was not hard for me to see what the trouble was. Can you see from what I have just told you? This was the revealing remark:

"When you get through with the

carpet, Olga, I'll tell you what to do next."

How often have I heard that cheering news! If there were a household's alumnae association, I think that would be its college yell, with three sour raahs on the end of it. It accounts for a great deal of the trouble that women have with servants, I can assure you. If you do not think so, I shall show you how it works out. Let us suppose that you were in Olga's place, except that instead of being a maid you were a secretary. You start on a batch of letters. And you are no sooner under way than your employer puts his head out of his office and says: "That's all right, Miss So-and-So. When you get through with those letters I'll tell you what to do next."

And he does. Every time you think you are in a fair way to get your work done, he has a dozen other little things he piles on top of you, most of them quite senseless. What would you do? I'll tell you what you would do. In the first place, if it were letters you were working on, you would make them last as long as possible. And in the second place, you would begin to look around for a new employer who was not so afraid that he would not get his last nickel's worth out of you. Well, that is exactly how a maid feels about it, and that is part of the answer to why women, not only in the United States but all over the world, have such a hard time keeping servants. I remember one time when I made a job last as long as possible, and I think I was justified in doing it. I was working for a family that gave a big party on Thanksgiving Day. Twenty people came to dinner, and I was not only maid and waitress, but also cook. I had to roast two turkeys, prepare mountains of vegetables, and make a lot of special dishes I had never even heard of before. And when



it was all over I had to wash so many dishes that they were stacked in piles around the kitchen. But I got through it somehow. The dinner was at night, and when I had everything cleaned up it was three o'clock in the morning and I was so tired I could have slept on my feet. But do you think that made any

difference to the lady of the house? It did not. She made me get up at six o'clock the next morning, get breakfast for the whole family, and then when they had all gone out, start on work that could have waited a month, for all the hurry there was about it.

"When you get through with the breakfast dishes, Dagny," she told me sweetly, "come upstairs and I'll show you what to do."

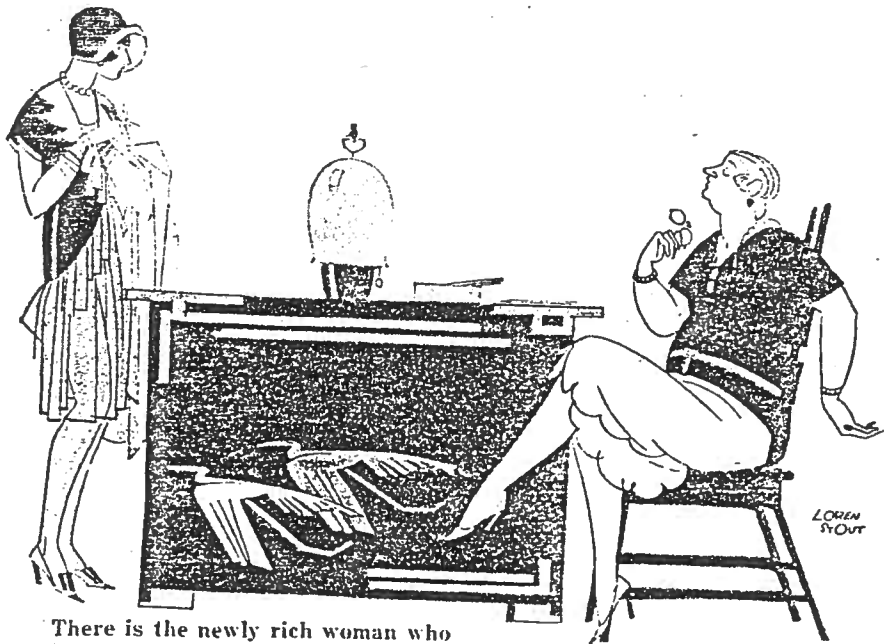
What I was to do was to clean out a closet full of books. It was a job that ought to have taken me perhaps an hour, but I made up my mind that I would take my sweet time about it. I sat down, made myself comfortable, and saw that it lasted until time to prepare dinner. It took me five hours, and the next day I left. That is usually the answer when you hear some woman talking about how slow her maid is.

The Proud Parade

"She is a fine servant," you'll often hear a woman say. "She's thorough, and a wonderful cleaner. But slow! My stars! It takes her two hours to do anything at all."

The maid is thorough, and there's a reason. If that woman would let her maid alone, tell her what she is to do and then not fret her with endless little chores that make her feel she is never finished, things would be speeded up about 300 per cent.

In other words, women seem to forget that maids are (Continued on page 54)



There is the newly rich woman who is forever talking about her servants

LOREN STOUT