

# Humor

## CLEANING HOUSE

By Rocky Rubinoff



Every Tuesday afternoon at about five-thirty, my eyes fill with tears and my heart wells with joy and appreciation. Letitia has finished her work for the day. I struggle to hold myself back, embarrassed by the wave of emotion that comes over me. Surely my cleaning woman would think I'm more than a bit daffy if I were to suddenly grab her and plant a big wet one on her left cheek.

But once again her four hours in zealous pursuit of dust bunnies, mud encrusted flooring and insidious soap scum has brought a semblance of order and cleanliness to my hectic, frazzled and perpetually messy life. And I am grateful.

The feeling lasts for the rest of the evening as I encounter demonstrations of her handiwork everywhere I go. A sparkling bathroom mirror, temporarily free of hundreds of specks of toothpaste back splash. Last Wednesday's spaghetti sauce, stubbornly attached to the back burner for six straight days, now but a dim memory. The cushions on the family room couches, dusted and fluffed, ready for another week of use and abuse. And best of all, sliding into a tight, freshly made, hospital cornered, bed at night. There is nothing quite like the feeling of crisp, cool linens at the end of the day, the smell of fabric softener lingering gently in the air.

I hand over fifty-five dollars with much gladness and wonder truly, what is the price for peace. This seems like a small amount to pay for the tranquility, albeit temporary, that it brings.

But indeed for the next day or two, I am amazingly able to keep a minor handle on the mess. For a short time I

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am in control of the stuffed animals lining the family room floor, the legos that pop up out of nowhere and the endless piles of papers that tend to regenerate spontaneously as soon as my back is turned. Perhaps some of it has rubbed off.

This is a luxury, no doubt. Although for the cleaning impaired, like myself,

some may argue, a necessity. When my husband Earl and I got married, my mother-in-law made two supreme sacrifices. First, she graciously handed over her favorite son. Yet, even more amazing, she also agreed to share someone almost as precious to her, and now to me: Letitia. I suppose she took pity and wanted to give our marriage a fighting chance.

I've tried the whole cleaning thing, really I have, but somehow it never quite worked. I was never one to lend a hand growing up. Even now I can still recall my overwhelming sense of shock on the initial designated cleaning day, in my first real apartment. My college roommates and I were feeling quite adult, having even declared a designated cleaning day to begin with. I had an impending sense of dread as my so-called friends stuck a pink headed toilet brush in the bowl and told me to have a go at it. I claimed that my mother never used a contraption like that, and she was a very clean woman. They both looked at each other, looked back pityingly at me, and left me standing there, brush in hand.

Most of my attempts end in a bungled, embarrassing manner. Any self-respecting window definitely looks better before I go near it with a bottle of Windex and a soft cotton cloth. Show me a mop and pail and I'll show you a floor with dirt and grime swirled round and round.

I literally threw out my iron when we moved into our new home three years ago, because I decided that wearing wrinkled clothing was preferable to wearing wrinkled clothing I had spent time and energy attempting to press.

I often wonder about my affection for my cleaning lady. I suppose part of it stems from this: there are few times when I'm on the receiving end of being taken care of. As a wife and mother of three young children, most days I'm facing the flip side. But for those few hours on Tuesday afternoons, even though I pay for it, someone is, in a sense, taking care of me.

Of course I don't always like to stay around to witness it. Somehow chatting on the phone seems almost sacreligious while Letitia toils away just around the corner. I can still see my mother on the rare days when our sweet, but completely unreliable, cleaning lady did arrive. Mom and Maddie side by side, moving couches, washing down walls, waxing the

wood floors. Now that was cleaning. And that was work.

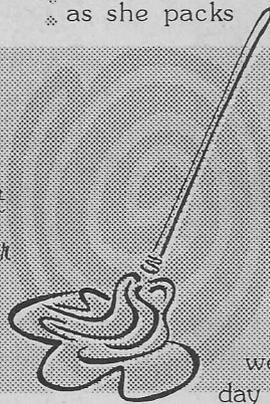
At the tender age of twelve, I silently vowed that would never be me. Even then, I couldn't see the sense in spending money to sweat myself silly. When she first started working for us, this wasn't an issue. In fact, it was years before I ever even met Letitia. I placed the money on the counter on Tuesday morn-

myself scarce.

A friend of mine is similarly cleaning challenged. One day her mother, disturbed yet tactful, after a visit on an especially slovenly afternoon, looked hopelessly around her home and said, "Your cleaning woman must be very fulfilled when she's finished here."

I can definitely sense Letitia's feeling of accomplishment at the end of the day, as she packs

her full-sized apron back into her purse, slips on her street shoes and heads out the door. Only one quick glance around and she undoubtedly has the feeling of a job well done. I have to marvel at the way she goes about her work, whistling away, day after day, week after



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ing, left for work and arrived home to a sparkling clean brick and stucco ranch that evening. It was a bit of an adjustment for me when I had my first child and was actually in the house with Letitia. So, though I truly have a place in my heart for this woman, on Tuesday afternoons, I make it my business to make

week, home after home. In some ways, it's reminiscent of a lost art form. A transformation definitely occurs. She is a professional.

Oh, and by the way, if you want Letitia's number, hang on a second. I'll grab it for you. Right after I give you my exact weight and complete credit history.