

# THE CAT, THE MAID, AND THE WIFE

by Daisy al-Ameer

Her visit to her friend, promised a long time before, had to be continuously postponed. Her friend was free for visits while she was chained to her work. How could she convince her friend that the postponement was mainly due to piled-up work? How could a woman who kept looking for ways of killing time, be made to understand that the time of other people was full or over loaded?

However, the persistence of her friend finally conquered her. She decided to put off some of her work until the following day, even though she knew that the following day would bring more work.

The lady of the house, her friend, was alone in the sitting-room. "The children must be at school." That is what she thought before the mother declared that she had sent them to their aunt's house because she was tired of them. She had to get rid of them...

— "You had to get rid of your children?"

— "I am tired of everything," shouted the house lady.

— "Why can't you give them the right type of training which would prevent them from being a source of annoyance to you and to others? Why don't you apply the psychological information you learned at college, in this case?"

The friend responded with a bitter laugh, "Am I the only one responsible for them? There is the father; there is the grandmother. Every member of my family, and of their father's family, has the right to interfere..."

She went on with her complaint until she finally said in a nervous tone, "I hate my husband... I despise him!"

The visitor was shocked by the last remark. Imagine a wife hating her husband, yet accepting to live with him. Before she had time to comment, the wife continued, "My husband respects me because I am a minister's daughter. He hopes through this marriage to obtain the post of general director. I ...in fact, I do not respect my minister-father. I look down on all those who respect him... He is a thief."

The maid entered at this point, carrying the coffee tray. The house lady kept silent until the maid was out.

"Do you smoke?" asked the minister's daughter. "As for me, I find in smoking a solace, but I only do it in my husband's absence. He does not like women who smoke."

She lighted two cigarettes and went on with her chatter, "I once saw you light a cigarette and smoke freely in a public place. I envied you... Are not you afraid of what people would say?"

The visitor wanted to answer but the wife stopped her short by saying: "My husband practices all sorts of vices and so do all the men of the family, each according to his taste... I have been waiting for your visit some time and was told the first time that you were away on a business trip and, the second time, on a recreation trip. Which of the two did you enjoy more?"

"When I visited my country..."

The answer was interrupted by the house lady shouting:

"Your country! ... Do you really have a country? Do

you feel you have one? As for me, I do not recognize any... 'Blessed are you because you mention this word joyfully... I feel overwhelmed by darkness all around me. We all exploit each other. Our family is a group of enemies. I am tired of hatred. I would like to love, but..."

The maid entered and the lady kept silent until she had gone out with the empty cups. Then the talk was resumed:

"I am afraid... I am afraid the maid has understood that I would like to betray my husband, or that I have a lover... She does not know that by staying with him I am betraying myself, while he... he refrains from betraying me because he is afraid of my father, the minister... I wish I could reveal my opinion of my father in the newspaper, then I would see what my husband would do..."

The visitor was finally able to interrupt her:

"Do you mean to go on living like that?"

"What can I do? Commit suicide? I wish I could do it, then write a letter in which I told every thing on my mind, everything...! but who would publish my letter? My father is an object of fear... My husband would burn the letter and pretend that I wrote it and committed suicide because I was loose in conduct, a whore..."

"Suicide is not the only way of protesting against injustice... There are a thousand other ways,... for example..."

Suddenly, the husband entered and rushed to shake hands with the visitor, declaring that he was proud to see a militant, working, woman. In his opinion, she was an ideal woman because she had been able to assert herself successfully...

He was interrupted by the guest asking him:

"Do you really mean that you highly esteem working women? Would you like your wife to do the same sort of work as I?"

"My wife," he said, "my wife is in a different condition. She is protected and supported. A woman whose father is a minister and whose husband is a prospective general director, with a large family surrounding her, why should she work and toil?"... He said it with a loud laugh.

The visitor looked fixedly at the wife, searching her with her eyes, hoping that she might respond, express herself, say anything. She waited a long time, silently. She offered her a cigarette, but the wife excused herself by saying that she did not smoke.

The husband relaxed in his chair, then called the maid for a cup of coffee. The wife jumped from her seat, shouting automatically: "I shall prepare it. I know that you like coffee made by my own hand!"

Left alone with the husband, the guest went away, without thinking of saying good bye to the wife who was preparing coffee with her own hand for the husband whom she despised.

In the kitchen of her own house, she saw a number of bags stuffed with clothes, waiting in a corner. Her maid was there, wearing her best dress, sitting on a chair. She cast a questioning glance at the maid who said "Ma'am, I am

*The cat, the maid and the wife (cont.)*

leaving.”

“Leaving, why ? ”

“My dignity, Ma'am, is most important.”

She did not understand.

“But who has hurt your dignity ? ”

“Your husband. He asked for his telephone book. When I said I did not know where it was, he shouted at me, insisting that I should bring it to him. He called me a thief. Am I his wife, so that he has the right to insult me ? ”

“But where will you go now that it is nearly 10 o'clock. You are a stranger in this town.”

“The world is full of hotels. I shall contact my children. I have men who can protect me.”

She wanted to ask her why she did the work of a maid though she had reached old age and had sons who could

take care of her. But she did not. The events of the day were so confused in her mind that she did not know where to begin.

The packages and bags of clothes were taken away, and the maid closed the door behind her with a bang. The woman stood there, wondering whether she should admire the maid, or be angry at her; run after her, or respect her attitude.

When she went down the steps and reached the street, the maid had already disappeared. A thin dirty cat, evidently starving, passed by. She called her “Pussy, pussy.” but the cat darted into the other sidewalk, and jumped over the crumbling fence which surrounded the empty space.

The empty space surrounded by the crumbling fence did not echo the sound of a mewling cat. the starving, solitary, dirty cat did not utter any mewling sound.