THE RESTING OF MOTHER: BY GERTRUDE RUSSELL LEWIS

yielding to the importunities of her family, Mrs. Cary, some time after her husband’s death, divided the estate and went to live with her children, for they were all settled and could not come to her.

"The work in the house is too hard for you," they said. "Give it up and come and live with us and take it easy, and have a good rest. You ought to have relief from all care, and we don’t like to leave you here alone." It was against every inclination, for Mrs. Cary was a good manager and had an excellent tenant farmer in the wee old house, pushed back when she was married for a more modern structure. But she left the home of her wifehood, her motherhood and widowhood, of all the experiences of a full life, a life rooted with the fibrous domestication of forty years. She left the lane of hard maples planted by her father, to be ruthlessly felled, as she knew they would, by the new owner. She gave up the roan cow, granddaughter how many times removed from Uncle David’s legacy, and a lot of her mother’s old frumpery that no one ever uses now. She gave up her garden with a row of hollyhocks that little girls might play at dolls with the blossoms, overskirted with lady slippers and bonneted with variegated larkspur. She gave up, too, the habits of a lifetime; her own method of setting the milk pans, her salt-rising bread. And only next to giving up the glimpse of the little copse where long since had disappeared a tiny grave, green in no one’s memory but her own, next only to this was the renunciation of Coming over to Grandma’s, a privation she was ever more to suffer in common with the little people. She was not again to have her own cookie jar, and when one cannot dispense one’s own hospitality if only in the terms of lumps of brown sugar, surely one is in case akin to broken-hearted Dante, forever ascending another man’s staircase, his bitterest proof of exile.

Yet a life of ease has its attractions, too, for at sixty, though quite capable of the slender housekeeping required for one or two, one does tire a bit, and the cushioned chair and knitting needles have their allurements. She had seen at the County Fair that knitted spreads were coming in again; and a book, she had not read Pope’s “Essay on Man” since she parsed it at school. So she was overpersuaded.

She went first to John’s, where she was a welcome guest, for John’s wife was sewing carpet rags for an art rug and when she wanted to finish one more ball Mother got the supper and let her go on,—supper for six. John had an abscess and Mother made
poultries her way and kept them on hot for a week. After a time
Henrietta sent for her to help in the harvesting, and she went to
Maria’s for the housecleaning and to Henry’s wife until the new
baby got over the colic. Then back to John’s to cook for the fam-
ily reunion and to can fruit while they all went to the State Fair.
And so with the season’s hardest task she made the rounds of her
children’s houses, patient and plucky, but missing sorely the turn
of her own cellar stairs.

She had promptly loaned her third of the proceeds of the farm
to her oldest grandson and he had partly paid the interest on it,
twice. It seemed indelicate to ask for money while she was a guest
in the house and impossible, while living with one, to ask it of an-
other. A good-humored son-in-law handed her five dollars, but
more than once she overheard phrases to the effect that being an
old lady, Mother did not need very much. And she found that,
with all the rest, she had lost her identity. At her son’s she was
Old Mrs. Cary, at Henrietta’s she was the nameless “Mrs. Crosby’s
Mother.” People took pains to speak to her, but they seldom inter-
ested themselves in her response.

Adown the road James Alston was wrestling with the complica-
tion of a large corn crop and a delicate wife. It seemed impossible
to get help, but James was keen of perception. One morning as he
started out, he said, “Hally, I am going over to get Old Mrs. Cary
to come and do our work for us.”

“Maria Bissell’s mother?” Hally was shocked. “Impossible,”
she said, “she is very well off and wouldn’t come and her children
wouldn’t let her. Why, she’s too old, they made her give up the
home because it was too much work for her.”

“Well, she works like a slave now, I know. She certainly doesn’t
look as if she had any unearned increment coming her way, and
it’s peace and quiet here compared with those big noisy families.”

So he went over and got Mrs. Cary, Old Mrs. Cary, and brought
her home and they kept her. They gave her a room to herself
which had not been worth while at her various abodes, for she was
there for only a few weeks at a time and the children loved to sleep
with grandma. And they paid her a generous wage, the first mo-
teary independence she had known in several shabby seasons.

Her children, at first bewildered, took it on the whole good-
naturedly. “Isn’t it strange how queer old people are? You know
Mother could have had her home with us as long as she lived and
not a care in the world. But old folks have to be humored. I sup-
pose she likes the change, but I should think she would rather stay
with us and rest.”

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