

Mrs. Riley's Awakening

Written for The Western Home Monthly by C. M. Watson

NOW ain't she a shiftless woman though? Did you ever see her likes? She don't even wash her clothes, but puts 'em in some sort of round-a-bout thing and then she turns a handle once or twice and hangs 'em out 'thout hardly putting a 'and to 'em. Lorse-a-me I've seen her readin' at eleven o'clock on a Monday mornin' and Mrs. Riley settled down more comfortably in her arm chair which protested loudly under her ponderous weight.

She looked interrogatively at Mrs. Williams to see what that individual might have to say of the slothful way of their new neighbor who had bought the farm adjoining Mrs. Riley.

"I called on her on my way home from town yesterday," said Mrs. Williams in answer to the expected look of her neighbor. "She is a nice person to talk with and we ought not to run down our neighbors, but I can't help saying she does have the most ridiculous furniture in that house. She hasn't what you would call a carpet on the floor of the parlor, even. She's had that painted and put down a bit of rag that don't touch any side by three feet. She hasn't any paper flower ornaments around, and she hasn't got no fancy things at all. Only a few pictures which are such dull things you wouldn't look at 'em twice, and when I asked her about the fancy things she says, 'Oh, Mrs. Williams, I really don't have time to do fancy work, besides they take so much time dusting,' and there she sat readin' Sarah Riley, when I comes here with a clean white blouse that you or I'd think good enough to go to church in, she could sit there all alone in a clean white blouse a' reading a book, and she couldn't find time to decorate her parlor in a fitting manner. Gee! I wonder how her husband puts up with it."

This was only one of the many discussions that the Riley district had concerning their new neighbor. Any sign of

thriftlessness on the part of a young wife in that section of the country was enough to ostracize her from the "Ladies' Aid" or any neighborly confabs in which the main topics of these meetings consisted of scurrilous talk.

Myra Smith, however, was all unconscious of the criticism and dislike she was creating among her neighbors, went happily upon her way doing her work in the easiest manner possible and devoting all her spare time to her books and music to which she was greatly attached, during the long hours she was obliged to spend in the house alone.

Occasionally a neighbor would call, but though she tried her best to receive such a caller as becomes a hostess, there seemed to be a wall of partition which she could not break through.

She was thinking of this one day as she was taking in the clothes when she heard a step behind and turning faced the ponderous form of Mrs. Riley.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Riley," was the gentle greeting. "Just step inside the parlor and I'll be with you in two minutes." Mrs. Riley, not unwilling to find shelter from the hot sun, stepped not into the parlor, but into the sitting room. An open book lay upon the table which plainly condemned the young housekeeper to the crime of reading on a washing day. Carefully adjusting her glasses and unscrupulously picking up the book, Mrs. Riley proceeded laboriously to spell the title.

"Ahem! M-e-d-i-c-a-l, that's medical, H-i-n-t-s, hints, Medical Hints. For goodness' sakes and on a wash-day, too."

Her lips curled in contempt. Just at that moment Mrs. Smith entered the room and received her visitor cordially.

"Oh, I am so pleased that you have found something to pass the time! It's my doctor book, is it not? I was just referring to the first aid applications in case of emergency. You know I have always lived in the city within easy call of some doctor, but I should like to know what to do in case of an accident, because even with the telephone in the house precious time might be lost."

"For goodness' sakes! You ain't got one of them talking things, have you?"

I should call it a waste of money paying for them things, and wouldn't have one nohow."

The discovery of this "talking thing" that Mrs. Smith had had installed, and that she could talk to her mother in the town or even her friends in the city, was "food" which Mrs. Riley willingly shared with her cronies. Myra at last began to feel the coldness which her neighbors took no pains to conceal, and finally they ceased to call altogether.

To one with her sensitive nature this omission was keenly felt, for she had felt that perhaps she might share with them of her best, and also help to broaden their narrow lives. Instead, she found herself entirely shut out from all their interests. But "Every cloud has a silver lining" being her maxim, the brave little woman did her best, kept her own counsel, not even mentioning her trouble to her husband.

"It will come right in time," she would muse, for as Emerson said, "Persons and events may stand for a time between you and justice, but it is only postponement."

A full twelve months had passed since any of her neighbors had called on her, when, one bitter cold morning she saw the ponderous form of Mrs. Riley hurrying up the garden path as fast as proportions would allow.

At once Myra surmised that her neighbor was in trouble and was waiting at the door to receive her as she reached the house.

"Oh, Mrs. Smith, it's that brute of a horse that kicked my man and he's bleeding awful from his head where he struck when he fell. You've been reading doctor books, maybe you know what to do till the doctor comes. He can't be here for two hours yet. Our hired man is hitching up a team to go for him, but it will take him a good two hours' drive to town and the same for the doctor back again, and the poor man's a' bleedin' to death. Oh, Mrs. Smith, could ye have pity? If you read what to do, could ye come down?"

"Yes, yes, my dear Mrs. Riley," said Myra. "But first let me telephone for the doctor. There is no need of the hired man going to town. Why, he is

only a boy, and will freeze in this weather. What doctor would you like, Mrs. Riley?"

"Oh, it's Doctor Brown we'll get. He's the good man that—"

But before Mrs. Riley could finish her eulogy of Dr. Brown, Myra found the number and was calling him up. Mrs. Riley listened open mouthed in astonishment.

"Dr. Brown," said Myra. "Not in? Can you tell me where he is, please? We must have him at once—Yes—Thank you so much."

Then Myra turned to seize the directory again, saying, "He's over at Jim Andrews, Mrs. Riley. That's not quite two miles, and if Mr. Andrews has a telephone we can get him in less than thirty minutes. Yes, he has." Myra then turned to the telephone again. "Is this Mr. Jim Andrews? Thanks! Is Dr. Brown there yet?—Yes—Will you kindly ask him to step to the 'phone a minute?" "Hello! Is that Dr. Brown?—Mr. Riley—Tom Riley—has had an accident and we want you as quickly as possible—" "Yes, he'll be here in less than half an hour, Mrs. Riley," said Myra as she replaced the receiver.

"He said he was just leaving Mr. Andrews, so we caught him nicely. Now let us hurry to Mr. Riley and see what we can do."

It took Mrs. Smith but a few minutes to place Mr. Riley's head in a more comfortable position. But to check the flow of blood was a more difficult task. But by using compresses she saw it gradually become less and less, so that by the time the doctor arrived, it had almost ceased to flow.

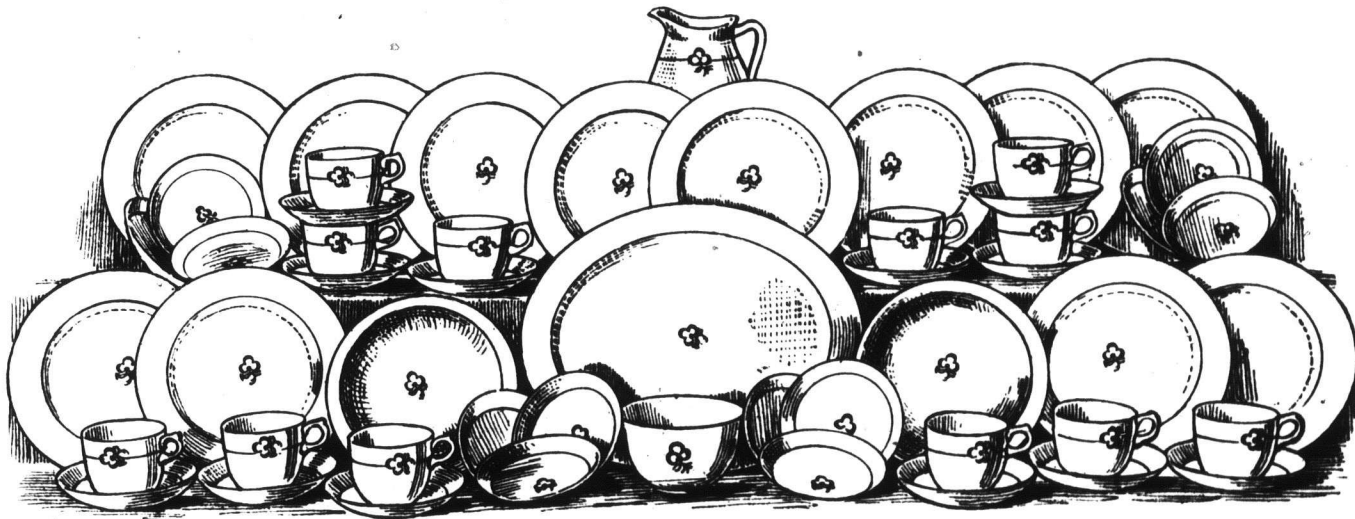
"A nasty cut," he said, "and if you had not done just as you have and got me here in a hurry there would not have been much use my coming at all. That young lady just about saved Mr. Riley's life." After the wound had been dressed and Mr. Riley sleeping quietly, Mrs. Smith turned to go.

But Mrs. Riley clung to her with tears in her eyes and said with trembling lips: "My dear Mrs. Smith, I've mistreated and slandered you shamefully, and the very things I have talked against you of

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