

JUNE 18, 1904

NEW-ENGLAND HOMESTEAD

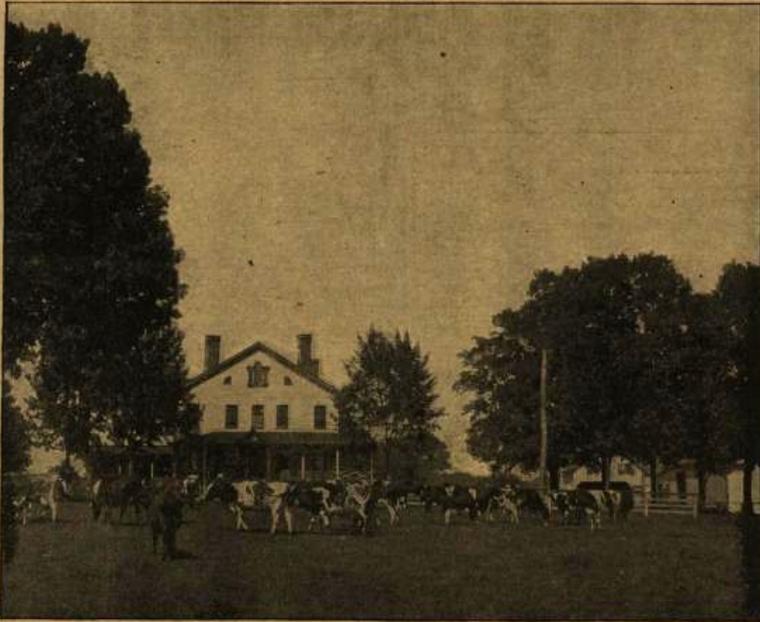
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Going to Pasture in Early Morning

The Rock Spring farm of Tolland county, Ct, is one of the many finely equipped estates found in New England. Edwin Reynolds, the proprietor, is consulting engineer for a manufacturing company of Milwaukee, Wis, and spends little time on the farm. He is fortunate in having C. S. Anderson for manager, who is introducing methods which will not only make the farm spectacular but also profitable. Though all farmers have not the advantage of having plenty of money back of them, there is little doubt they could have better conveniences were they to use their ingenuity and set about to have a change for the better. At least many can improve their methods. For full particulars see Page 673.

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Aunt Rose's Girl

A Story of Commencement Days

L. M. Montgomery

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Aunt Rose loosened her faded hat strings—They had served as hair ribbons for Ida two summers ago—and leaned wearily back in her creaky rocker. The walk to the store had been a long one and she was warm and tired.

“Deary me,” she said, patting the parcel in her capacious print lap tenderly, “I’m all het up.”

Belle Gamble gave a little scornful sniff as she looked at the parcel. She was Aunt Rose’s cousin by marriage and lived across the road from her. She had seen Aunt Rose coming over the bridge and had hurried in, agog with curiosity to find out what had taken her to the village on such a day. Belle had her own suspicions that Aunt Rose was up to some more foolishness about Ida, and, if it were so, Belle had made up her mind to speak out plainly to her. She was a tall, fair, slatternly woman with a general air of shrewishness about her. Secretly, Aunt Rose disliked her, and when Aunt Rose disliked anyone there was always good reason for it.

“No wonder,” said Belle sharply. “‘Tain’t a fit day for you to walk to the store. Whatever took you?”

“Oh, I went cross lots and took it easy,” said Aunt Rose. “It don’t hurt me a mite to get a leetle warm. It’s just ’cause I’m so big and fat. Don’t you ever get big and fat, Belle; to be sure, you don’t look much like it now. Besides,” she went on, “I had to go to the store to-day. I couldn’t put it off any longer—I had to get Ida’s dress for her commencement. I’d orter gone last week, but my rheumatiz took holt on me. Anyhow, I made it out to-day. Abner Colwell had some real handsome organdies in, and I picked the purtiest one, far’s I could see. My girl shall have the best.”

Belle smiled sourly as Aunt Rose untied the parcel, and she frowned darkly at the dainty contents thereof—a cream-tinted organdy with a pale pink blossom spray in it. Aunt Rose held it up proudly.

“Like it, Belle?”

“I guess it’ll be good enough for Ida—if she’ll think so,” was Belle’s sarcastic rejoinder.

“I was always partial to pink,” said Aunt Rose, admiring the pattern and ignoring Belle’s slur, “and it suits Ida. Them dark eyes and curls of hers become pink now, I tell you. I got lots o’ lace and ribbing to trim it with, too—see. And Lucy Manning’s coming to-morrow morning to make it up. Won’t Ida be tickled when she gets it? I didn’t lay out to be able to manage it last time she was home, and she thought she’d have to wear her old white muslin f’r commencement. She felt real bad about it, but not a mite worse’n I did. I was more’n thankful when old Mis’ Wyand had that extra weaving for me. It just paid f’r the dress. I think I can see my dearie girl up on the

platform along o' all them other girls and looking the sweetest of them all."

"Are you going in to see her graduate?" asked Belle, mentally calculating the cost of the dress.

Aunt Rose gurgled with enjoyment. "Goodness, yes. I couldn't let my girl graduate without being there to see, could I, now?"

"D'ye think she'll want to see you?" said Belle, maliciously.

Aunt Rose opened her big brown eyes in mild surprise at Belle's acrid tone.

"Why, of course," she answered.

"Well, I don't then," said Belle, shortly. "What's more, I'm sure she won't, and anybody but you would have eyes to see it, Aunt Rose, but you was always so ridiculous fond and proud of Ida, you couldn't never see her faults, plain as they were to other folks. Ida'll be ashamed of you if you go to see her graduate. She won't want to own you among all her fine friends."

"I don't believe it," cried Aunt Rose in distress.

"Well, it's true. Why, when any of us goes to town and meets her on the street she'll hardly as much as nod to us. Last time she was walking with two stylish girls and she pretended she didn't see me at all. She's a pert, stuck-up thing."

"She isn't," said Aunt Rose, as indignantly as Aunt Rose could speak, "and she really didn't see you that time—she told me so. As f'r her being cool to you-uns, I don't wonder at that. You never was nice to her, none on you."

"You'll see. You've just spoiled Ida, Aunt Rose, ever since you took her out of the asylum—slaving and toiling to dress her better than need be, and educating her to look down on you. She's ashamed of you, that's what she is, and you'll find it out when you go to commencement."

"I don't believe Ida is ashamed of me," said Aunt Rose, with tears in her eyes.

"Oh, very well. When she was home last summer wasn't she always trying to fix you up stylish and get you to stop wearing that old brown hat? Tell me that, Aunt Rose."

"It was because she was fond of me and wanted me to look nice," sobbed Aunt Rose. "I'm such a homely old thing."

"Has she ever asked you to go and see her graduate?" demanded Belle.

"No-o, she hain't," admitted Aunt Rose falteringly. "But," she added, brightening up, "she knew there wan't no need. Why, it's always been understood. Long ago, 'fore she ever went to the academy at all, we used to talk it over. 'Won't you be proud of me when you come to Linden to see me graduate, Aunt Rose?' she would say."

"That was before she went to town and got in with fine folks," persisted Belle.

“Oh, I don’t say she won’t recognize you. But she’ll be ashamed of you, all the same. She’s a regular little minx.”

“You needn’t say anything more about Ida, Belle,” said Aunt Rose, firing up at last. “You never liked her, none of you. Good reason why—she was always too purty and smart and I reckon you-uns were all jealous of her. You couldn’t any of you be a valedictorian, I cal’clate. If Ida’s proud she’s got something to be proud of. I ain’t a mite afeared she’ll be ashamed of me—not a mite.”

Aunt Rose sat erect and hurled her challenge at Belle as defiantly as if she believed it whole-heartedly. But after Belle had flounced off, Aunt Rose’s spirit failed her. Belle’s shafts had struck home. It had never occurred to Aunt Rose that Ida could be ashamed of her, but now she wondered that she had not thought of it herself. Her kind old heart was full of the poison instilled by a jealous woman. She rocked back and forth in her chair miserably, and the tears fell unheeded over her cheeks.

“Ashamed of me? Perhaps she is, perhaps she is,” she said aloud in a trembling voice. “’Twouldn’t be any wonder, nuther. I’m a queer-looking old critter and I talk as queer as I look. But I never thought on it before. I wouldn’t disgrace Ida afore her fine friends for the world, but it don’t seem as if I could give up going to see my girl graduate—and her valedictorian, the purty dear.”

Aunt Rose Porter had taken a little girl from the orphan asylum 11 years ago. People wondered over it, saying that she had hard enough work to earn a living for one, let alone two. They wondered still more and heartily disapproved when they saw how the girl was brought up—“never let do any work, but just dressed like a doll and kept at school,” they said. “Aunt Rose Porter is a foolish woman.”

But Aunt Rose did not worry over what other people thought. She loved Ida with passionate tenderness, and it was her happiness to work hard that the child might have all she wanted. The two had been very happy in the little riverside house, with the tangle of honeysuckle and creeper over the porch and the thicket of sweetbriar beside it.

When Ida shot up into slim, dimpled, pink-and-white girlhood, Aunt Rose sent her to the Linden academy for two years to fit her for a teacher. It cost the old woman more than anyone ever knew of planning and skimping and hard work to do it, but it was done and well done. Ida had lacked for nothing, although Aunt Rose had dressed in patched and faded clothes and lived on the poorest food for two years to manage it. And this one thing she had looked forward to as her reward—to see Ida graduate. It would repay her for everything.

And now Belle had spoiled it all. Everything seemed to have gone out of life for

Aunt Rose. Ida was ashamed of her; the girl she had loved and toiled and sacrificed for was lost to her forever. Yet she would not glance at a thought of blame for Ida.

“It ain’t any wonder,” she reflected, over and over again, as she helped Lucy Manning sew the lace on yards and yards of foamy ruffles for Ida’s dress. “But oh, dear, I wish I hadn’t found it out. I wish Belle had held her tongue. I dunno what to do. I feel as if ’twould kill me to give up going to see her graduate, but I don’t want to disgrace her or make her feel bad, the poor dearie.”

When the dress was finished, Aunt Rose sent it to town by a neighborly chance. She pinned a little envelope among its dainty folds; there was a two-dollar bill in it for Ida to get her commencement bouquet. Aunt Rose had intended to take her a bunch of the big pink roses from the bush at the gate, as they had once planned long ago, but those roses were funny, fat, old-fashioned things, and perhaps Ida wouldn’t like them.

Ida sent back a little verbal message of thanks by the neighbor. She was delighted with her dress, but too busy with exams to write, she said. The academy examinations were over, but those of the students who intended to teach were taking the normal school examinations for teachers’ certificates. Ida said nothing about Aunt Rose going in to see her graduate, and the older woman’s heart felt an added bitterness. She had been secretly hoping all along that Ida would specially mention her coming after all.

“But I must see her graduate,” Aunt Rose told herself that night in her forlorn solitude—forlorn now, since it was stripped of all the pleasant hopes and anticipations which had once peopled it for her. “I’ll put on my old black veil and sit way back and never go near her. Then she won’t have to speak to me before folks, and nobody’ll know. I just must see her.”

On commencement day Aunt Rose dressed herself for her 12-mile drive to town. She looked at herself in the glass with great dissatisfaction. Her black dress had been turned and pressed so often that it was very shabby, indeed. Her little straw bonnet looked flatter and dowdier than it had ever looked before, and the fingers of her only pair of kid gloves were worn quite white.

“I didn’t know I looked so shabby,” said Aunt Rose with a sigh. “I never took thought on’t before. I must look awful queer to Ida and no mistake. ’Tain’t only the clothes, nuther. I’m so big and ornary-looking, with my fat red cheeks. If I was only thin and genteel-looking, like old Mis’ Seaman down the river, it wouldn’t be so bad. I feel heart-broken and and I look ’sif I was laughing at everything and everybody. There ain’t a mite of pleasure in the day for me, not a mite. And I’ve looked forward to it for two years!”

Some very bitter tears welled up into Aunt Rose's brown eyes as she tied the rusty old black veil over her face.

She had hired Henry Martin's horse and buggy to drive to Linden. Once she had planned to go early in the morning, hunt up Ida at her boarding house and go with her to the academy, but she would not have done that for the world now. She would not disgrace her girl. She drove to town after her early dinner, and put her horse up at Henry Martin's brother, then she toddled forlornly down to the academy and crept into a seat at the far end of the assembly room.

The room was already quite full. Aunt Rose noticed what a stylish audience it was and how well the women were dressed. In front of her a big, handsome woman, with purple violets in her bonnet and a black lace scarf across her shoulders, was talking to a friend beside her. She had come to town to see her niece graduate, and Aunt Rose, listening, discovered that the niece was Jennie Stirling, Ida's most intimate friend. Oh, no wonder Ida would be ashamed of poor old Aunt Rose Porter, who wove and scrubbed for a living and never had a bonnet with violets in it in her life.

Aunt Rose put up her fat, brown hand and furtively wiped away some tears.

"Wisht I c'd stop crying," she thought in disgust. "Wisht I'd stayed home—no. I don't nuther. But oh, ain't it hard!"

Then the doors on either side of the platform opened and in marched the graduates, the boys on one side and the girls on the other, and took their seats. Aunt Rose looked with a swelling heart for Ida. Yes, there she was, in the front row of chairs, wearing the organdy dress. It became her bright young beauty deliciously. One glance was enough to convince Aunt Rose that her girl was as well dressed as any there, and a little thrill of triumph swept over her in spite of her heartbreak.

"How purty and sweet my dearie girl looks," she thought. "She is the purtiest girl of them all, bless her. What's she looking over the folks so anxious for? 'Pears she's hunting for someone. Can't be me. My goodness, if she ain't coming down here!"

That was just what Ida was doing. After her entrance she had looked longingly over the gay audience; then her eyes had fallen on the homely figure away back by the door. In spite of the screening veil, she knew Aunt Rose at once, and her pretty face brightened with delight. She gave a little impulsive spring from her chair, tripped down the platform steps and hurried down the aisle. The next moment Aunt Rose felt a pair of lace-ruffled arms about her; there was a warm kiss on her cheek over the black veil, and Ida was whispering to her, "Aunt Rose, you old darling, where have you been? I was looking for you all the morning and I didn't know what to make of it when you didn't come. I was so worried for fear you were sick or

something. What have you got on that horrid veil for? Do take it off—I'm starving for a good look at your beloved face. Oh, I've been so busy—there now—oh, you lovely aunty, it's good to see you again! But you mustn't stay back here. You won't be able to see or hear half. Come—there's a good seat up front. Let me take you to it. Oh, you must hurry, dear, for I must get back to my place."

Aunt Rose was really too bewildered to protest. Before she knew it Ida had whisked her up to the front seat, pinned a big rose on her dress and was back on the platform, smiling at her.

The opening numbers on the program Aunt Rose just didn't hear at all. She was too happy for anything beyond simple, blissful existence. Ida wasn't ashamed of her, after all—not a bit of it. Why, she had sought her out before all those fine folks!

"My own dearie girl!" murmured Aunt Rose. "Oh, if that Belle could just have seen her!"

When Ida came out to read her valedictory, Aunt Rose fairly glowed with radiant pride, especially when her girl gave a chummy little nod at her before beginning to read. It was pretty much like any other valedictory, but Aunt Rose thought it the most wonderful piece of literature ever penned.

That commencement was the golden hour of Aunt Rose's life. When Ida stepped forward to receive the governor's gold medal for general class proficiency, Aunt Rose fairly sobbed with joy. A lady beside her, rich in silvery gray silk and a tulle bonnet, looked at her with a smile.

"It makes us old folks feel young again to see our little girls doing so well, doesn't it?" she whispered in a friendly tone. "I've one up there myself. But yours has carried off the highest honors. She is so sweet and pretty, too. You may well be proud of her."

"I am," whispered Aunt Rose back. "Bless her, she is just the girl to be proud of, ma'am."

When all was over, Ida came flying down to Aunt Rose again, her eyes dancing and her cheeks crimson with delight and excitement.

"Oh, Aunt Rose," she cried, "I've a thousand things to tell you. This dress—oh, it was so sweet of you to send it. I know it cost you too much, but I'll make it up to you when I go teaching. And you didn't bring me any roses! I was so disappointed. I wanted to carry those dear old pink roses of ours. I didn't spend your two dollars for flowers—no, indeed! Jennie gave me some of hers. But come, come—oh, Mrs Stirling, how do you do? This is Miss Porter, my Aunt Rose; you've heard me speak of her. Jennie is looking for you, Mrs Stirling. We six girls who've been such chums are giving a little luncheon to our mothers and aunts. It's in Jennie's room across the

street, and hurry up, for I'm awfully hungry. Come, Aunt Rose, darling."

They had a gay, delightful little lunch in Jennie Stirling's pretty room. Aunt Rose was the only shabby person present, but nobody minded that a bit and neither did she. Mrs Stirling praised Ida to her, and the lady in the tulle bonnet, who turned out to be the mayor's wife, ate from the same plate as did Aunt Rose, for by some mischance the girls did not have plates enough to go round.

But after all, the best time for Aunt Rose was when she and Ida drove home together through the sweet, dewy, summer dusk, and the girl, with her head on the motherly shoulder, poured out the story of all her triumphs and plans and hopes. When they turned in at the little gate among the roses, Ida gave Aunt Rose's arm a squeeze.

"Oh, it's good to be home again with you, aunty. There's nobody like you. I was just sick with disappointment this morning when you didn't come. By the way, what prevented you?"

"Oh, I couldn't get away any earlier, dearie," said Aunt Rose; she was very much afraid that this was a fib, but she would have died before she told Ida the real reason.

"My dearie girl! She mustn't ever know I doubted her," Aunt Rose said to herself as she took Henry Martin's horse and buggy home. "My dearie girl!"

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *Aunt Rose's Girl: A Story of Commencement Days* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]