

## *Peace in Our Time*

**R**osemary Little lived out in the country. She grew apples and pears in a quiet little dooryard garden and made jams and jellies each year in autumn. In summer she ate eggplants and tomatoes, spiced with basil, and whenever September would roll in, she would dig and spade and wait for the hummingbirds to appear in her flower gardens. She lived a quiet life without praise or blame, managing her days more by the natural cycles of the seasons than by tedious human schedules. She swam all summer. She gathered mushrooms in autumn after the rains; she watched the leaves turn, and she felt lonely in November after they had fallen. When December came she would make tea in the afternoon and stay indoors, watching the grim weather. She had no television. “The programs make me sad,” she used to say.

Once, years back, she worked in the city in a bureau that dealt with environmental issues, but that too made her sad. “The news was always dark. There were polluters at every bend. There were developments destroying everyone’s backyard. There were actual criminals.” And then there was the world at large. “The greenhouse effect. Polluted air, polluted seas, polluted groundwater—everything polluted and dying. The world sick.”

She quit and moved away from the city.

For a while she supported herself by working in a garden center. After a single year in that place, removed from development and news, she began to notice that there was an actual order to the world. Birds came back each year in spring. In the woodlands on rainy nights in April, she would see salamanders. She would hear frogs calling.

She knew where all the woodland wildflowers grew—the lovely arbutus and the spring beauties, the bloodroot and the crinkleroot, and the lacy little Dutchman’s breeches. She loved them all; she learned all the seasons of flowering and knew that Mayapples meant the end. “After them the woods leafed out in lace. But I never minded. It was time to garden.”

She grew lettuce and asparagus, peas and beans, cosmos and marigolds, and

summerlong she watched for her specialties, her eggplants and her tomatoes. She swam at the local lake—the first to dip into the chill waters of June, the last to swim in September in the time of pears, when the water was chilled again and fresh. She warmed herself with apple pies and quiet dinner parties where people entertained themselves with small talk and never mentioned criminals. She practiced her cello at night and, in the mornings, speculated on things that did not matter. How many thousands of nuts buried by squirrels in the forest are actually retrieved by squirrels? How many of those unretrieved nuts actually sprout? How much of the northern hardwood forest was planted by squirrels?

“Maybe these things are important,” she said.

Rosemary Little lived out in the country and after three years learned once again to enjoy her life. She used to think the world was black. She used to think the bomb was inevitable. She used to think the glaciers were melting.

“Maybe it’s all true,” she said. “But here is what I think now. Life is a series of small moments of grace in the midst of an otherwise indifferent universe. Go tell that to your readers.”

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