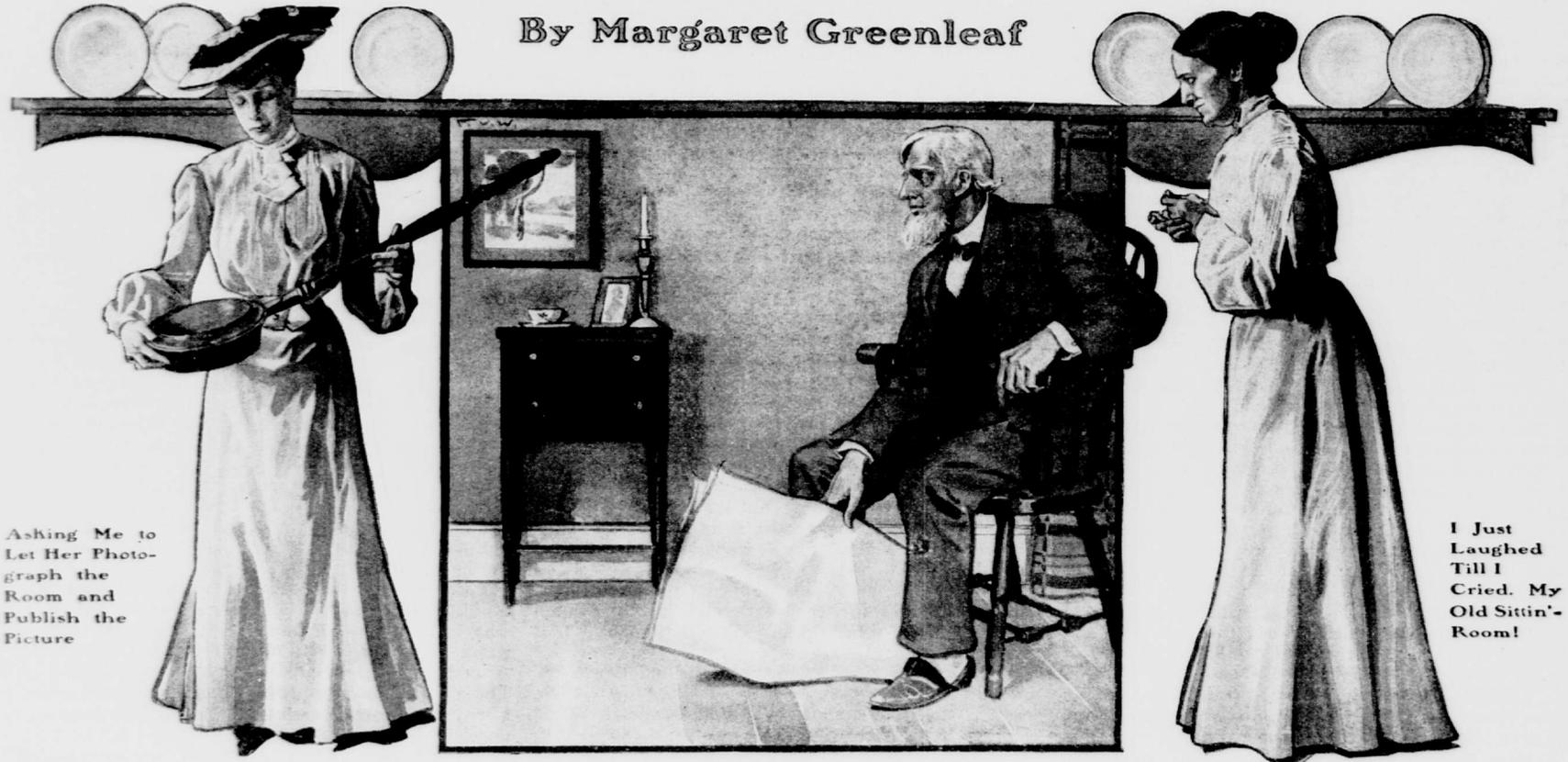


AUNT AMANDA'S SITTING-ROOM

By Margaret Greenleaf



Asking Me to
Let Her Photo-
graph the
Room and
Publish the
Picture

I Just
Laughed
Till I
Cried. My
Old Sittin'-
Room!

I NEVER thought much about fixing up any of the house, except the best room, till last summer, when I commenced to take "The Ladies' Own" and read the page called "Helpful Hints." Well, from that on it seemed to me everything that I'd pick up to read would have something about "color schemes" and "harmonious furnishing," and so on, so I began to get kind of out, even with the parlor; altho' of course I tried to do the best I could for it, and kept it well shut up, and the ornaments and chairs straight, and the tidies pinned on.

I always prided myself on having the cleanest house in Berkley Corners; but somehow now that didn't seem enough, so I concluded I would just set to and find out what seemed to be the trouble with my "environments," as the papers called them.

One day I said to Joshua that I just naturally loved a pretty home.

"Well," he said, "haven't you got one?"

I didn't like to tell him I didn't think it was just right till I knew what to do to fix it. "It's been a happy one to us, Joshua," I says, and he let it go at that.

That was before I went to the city last fall; but the more I read in the magazine and Sunday papers about "the colors must be soft" and "the furniture all of one period" the more mixed up I felt. The old sittin'-room seemed hopeless. I felt I wouldn't know where to start in on that; but the parlor, I felt, needed only some few changes and 'twould be all right.

One night I got to thinking so hard I couldn't sleep, so I got up and lit the lamp and went to take another look at the best room. It wasn't as if I didn't know it off by heart, having bought piece by piece everything all these new ideas in my head it looked different and strange to me.

When I bought the chocolate-colored wall-paper with the red-and-buff pattern on it, I thought it right handsome, and that it would wear well and not show the dirt. It had a border with fine, big scrolls on it, and some six years ago I had a picture-rail put up and painted gray, like the rest of the woodwork in the room. That was after we got crayon portraits made of me and Joshua. I never had a notion of having a big picture till the man came round one day and just insisted I sh'd lend him the tintypes of us both. He came back after a little with big pictures in his wagon. They had deep walnut frames and gilded corners, and he said they'd cost us only nine dollars and ninety-eight cents each, "including the frame," he said. Joshua said he didn't think we "prettied" much in them, and that I was looking some scared; but I thought 'twould be nice to have them on the wall of the best room—so that was why we had a picture-rail.

But anyway, that night when I stole in like a thief (I was so afraid Joshua would hear me!) nothing looked right, not even the crayons. I pulled the chairs around a bit and set the center-table crooked. I had read that very night in "Helpful Hints" that one could "often completely metamorphose a room by simply rearranging the furniture"; but I was dis-

appointed. It only looked like I was getting ready for sweeping day, so I crept back to bed, with my mind about made up to go and see my niece Cynthia.

It's real strange how an idea like that takes hold of you, once you give in to it. Every book and paper I picked up seemed to be filled with advice on the subject that was worrying me; but none of it seemed to fit my case exactly. I did think some of packing the old mahogany set, that had been in the spare room so long, in the attic, and then I could set to work and make me "a dainty, draped dressing-table, and an hour-glass stand covered in the same airy fabric"; but I concluded that, as I had just about made up my mind, I'd go on an' see Cynthia. I'd wait and talk it over with her, and maybe buy the "airy fabric" there. I had some nicely starched lace (Nottingham lace) curtains in the parlor. There are three windows, and I had only two pairs of curtains, so I put one at each window, and laid the other away to make a bed-spread of some day, like I read about.

But lo and behold! One evening I opened my magazine, and there the first thing "Helpful Hints" said was "anything is better than Nottingham-lace curtains, in fact windows quite undraped would be much less hurtful to the beauty of a room."

Well, I had thought if anything in the house was right those curtains were, so I was, to say the truth, clean discouraged. I'd see Joshua looking at me out of the tail of his eye, when he'd come in and catch me with a yardstick and a note-book; but he didn't say anything, and neither did I—but Joshua is a powerful observing man. The night before I left for the city I came into the sittin'-room, and it struck me I hadn't planned as much about that room as I ought; but there would be so much to do to it I just guessed I'd finish the parlor and spare room first. The walls in that room had never been papered—just washed with a plain yellow wash. An' the fireplace was a big open one, filled then with green-hemlock boughs.

Joshua sat by the table smoking, and as the light from the tall, green, glass lamp fell on his white head and pink face he looked so comfortable I kind of hated—just for the minute—to think of altering it all, for I knew he liked it so; but men, I thought, don't know anything at all about "beautifying one's surroundings."

The clock ticked loudly on the high mantel shelf, and the brass candlesticks and pieces of old china that were by it had been put there by Joshua's father's father. The black maple high-boy and the secretary in the corner with the glass knobs had been his too. There was a big haircloth divan on one side of the room, where Joshua loved to stretch out when he was tired. I was put about when I thought how he'd hate to give that up; but I concluded not to cross the stile till I came to it, for I had determined to fix the other rooms first—tho' as I looked at the green-print curtains with little yellow stars on them, and saw how all the brightness had gone from them, I thought I'd stretch a point and get some new curtains anyway.

On the floor, which was dark with age (for it was well scrubbed, I can tell you) were home-made rugs

and a big bear skin in front of the fireplace. I'd try and get a new lamp too, I thought, so I put it down on my list.

That list of mine when I started next day was half a yard long, and included the measurements of about everything in the house, and I had a nice little roll of bills pinned in the front of my gown—it was my turkey money I'd been saving for several years.

The very day I arrived at Cynthia's house I told her of my plans. We sat and talked in what she called her morning-room. It had pink-striped curtains at the windows, and the wicker chairs were painted with a slick white paint and had cushions in them of white stuff with pink roses on it. The rugs on the floor had all the colors of Joseph's coat in them; but they were all run together—you couldn't tell where one began and the other ended.

When I stopped to take breath Cynthia spoke in her pretty, soft voice: "Aunt Amanda, dear," she said, "must you change the dear old house? It seems so perfect as it is—it and you and Uncle Joshua!"

"Well, I hadn't thought any of trying to change Joshua," I said, a little huffy; "but I do feel, after all I read, and some I've seen," looking about me, "that I can bring more of real intrinsic beauty into my everyday life by a careful study of effects." I was quoting, and I didn't know if I said it just right; but though Cynthia looked surprised she seemed to sense my meaning.

"Do you know," she said, "the living room and great roomy kitchen and that dear bed-room I had when I was there last are the whole house to me? I never realized the parlor. It was always so dark."

"Yes," I said, "I do generally keep it closed, so the sun won't fade the color in the wall-paper and carpet. I have spent quite a bit on that room first and last, and I do feel that with some little done to it it will be 'entirely satisfying.'" I was quoting again. "Helpful Hints" said last week that often-time some added bit of strong color or the removal of an unsightly piece of furniture—"

"Helpful Hints?" Cynthia interrupted me. "In 'The Ladies' Own,' do you mean? Do you read those?"

"Indeed I do!" I said, "and get much good advice from them."

"I know the girl who writes them," Cynthia said—just as she'd say she knew Tom, Dick or Harry. "She is a delightful creature, artistic to her finger-tips. I am so interested to know you read them and like what she says."

"Did you say it was a girl?" I asked, trying to speak coolly. "A girl to give all that excellent advice?" and then I had to say it: "Oh, Cynthia, could I see her, do you think? There is something I'd so love to ask her!" I felt all in a tremble.

"Of course, you dear thing!" Cynthia said. "This very afternoon I'll ask her to tea."

Well, you wouldn't believe how sweet and modest that little girl seemed to me! "Oh, dear Mrs.