

## Addendum 2

### Millie's Mother's Red Dress

It hung there in the closet, while she was dying, mother's red dress, like a gash in the row of old dark clothes she had worn her way in.

They had called me home, and I knew when I saw her, she wasn't going to last. When I saw the dress, I said,

"Why, mother, how beautiful? I've never seen it on you."

"I've never worn it," She said slowly.

"Sit down, Millie. I'd like to undo a lesson or two, if I can, before I go." I sat by her bed, and she sighed a bigger breath that I thought she could hold.

"Now that I'll be soon gone, I can see some things. Oh, I taught you good, but I taught you wrong."

"What do you mean, mother?"

"Well, I always thought that a good woman never takes her turn - that she's just doing for somebody else."

"Do here, do there, always keep everybody else's ones tended and make sure yours are at the bottom of the heap. Maybe someday you'll get to them; but, of course, you never do."

"My life was like that - doing for your dad, doing for the boys, doing for your sisters, doing for you."

"You did everything a mother could."

"Oh, Millie! It was no good - for him - for our. Don't you see? I did the worst of things. I asked nothing for me. Your father, in the other room, all stirred up and staring at the walls. When the doctor came in and told him, he took it bad - came to my bed and all but shook the life out of me."

"You can't die; do you hear me. What'll become of me? What'll become of me!"

"It'll be all right. It'll be all hard when I go. He can't even find the frying pan you know."

"And you children. I was a free ride for everybody, everywhere. I was the first one up and the last one down, seven days out of the week. I always took the toast that got burned and the very smallest piece of pie."

"I look at how some of your brothers treat their wives now, and it makes me sick because it was me who taught them, and they learned, they learned that a woman doesn't even exist - except to give. Why, every single penny I could save went for your clothes or your books even when it wasn't necessary. Can't even remember when I took myself downtown to buy something beautiful for me except last year when I got that red dress."

"I found I had \$20 that wasn't especially spoken for. I was on my way to pay it extra on the washer, but somehow I came home with this big box. Your father really gave it to me then."

"Where are you going to wear something like that to? Some opera or something?"

"And he was right, I guess."

"I've never, except in the store, put on that dress. Oh, Millie, I always thought if you take nothing for yourself in this world, you'd have it all in the next somehow. I don't believe that anymore. I think the Lord wants us to have something here and now, and I'm telling you, Millie, if some miracle could get me off this bed, you could look for a different mother, 'cause I would be one."

"Oh I've passed up my turn so long. I would hardly know how to take it, but I'd learn, Millie, I'd learn."

It hung there in the closet while she was dying, Mother's red dress - like a gash in the row of old dark clothes she had worn away her life in.

Her last words to me were, "Do me the honor, Millie, of not following in my footsteps. Promise me that."

I promised. She caught her breath, then mother took her turn in death.

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