

Respite

Willard huffed his way up the two steps to my front porch, collapsed into the wooden rocker and let his breath out with a long whistle. Although I was busy reading one of my Spiderman comics, it was hard to ignore such an entrance.

I knew his mind had been on his wife lately, rather than his normal “old guy” thoughts of eradicating the stain of creeping socialism and ill mannered behavior from the face of the earth. Maybe the two were linked together, because Willard’s pronouncements on anything he didn’t like often brought out the bad manners of others. It was like creating one’s own nemesis.

“It’s time for the rest home,” he said.

“Is it that bad, Willard? A nursing home?”

My friend looked down and shook his head. “She’s just getting worse and worse.”

“I’m awfully sorry, Willard. I know that you have worried over her health for some time now.”

“Years,” he said. “And not so much her health as her behavior.”

“It has caused you a lot of distress,” I said. I might have added, “and I’ve had to put up with you through it all.”

Willard sighed. “She just keeps getting worse. Constantly picking on me, always loadin me down with more and more chores that she dreams up.”

I certainly hoped Willard was not putting his wife away in a home because she was on his case about cleaning up the cellar.

“I can understand,” I said, “that a nursing home might be an option.” I put stress on the last word. “Where were you thinking of?”

“Sleepy Hollow,” he said. “They have a lot of terrific activities for the residents. I’ve visited old friends there. The food is good and the rooms are airy and the windows have deep shelves beneath the frame so you can place large plants on them to sit in the sun.”

“Willard,” I said, “your missus has never liked plants.”

“I know.”

“I suppose she might become interested. What kind of plants, Willard?”

“Oh, you know, “hibiscus, cyclamen, African violets”

“Those are *your* favorites, Willard.”

“Sleepy Hollow,” he said, “has the best food around, and a game room that’s second to none.”

“But you told me your missus absolutely hates games and prefers to read.”

“You can have your room painted any color you want before you get there. I want a soothing green.”

“But what if your wife doesn’t want her room painted green, Willard?”

“I never said my wife was going to Sleepy Hollow. I’m the one who’s going..

“You? Whatever for?”

“So I can sit around and watch poker on TV all morning. Lie by the pool all afternoon in the summer. No driveway to shovel the snow from, no garden to weed. No lawn to mow. Plus, my old girlfriend is there.”

“Willard, you can’t check in to a nursing home just to get away from your wife.”

“Why not? It’s a rest home and I need the rest.”

“You should try one more time to work things out. Try to live together.”

“What do you think we’ve been trying to do for the past 60 years without much luck?” he said.

“Maybe you both need a rest,” I said. “How about going in together? I’ve known couples who have done it.”

“I don’t think Hilda would like that.”

“Who is Hilda?” I asked.

“My old girlfriend,” he said. “She’s the reigning Bingo champion.”

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