I’m going on year three in a house I fondly call Grey Gardens, named after the decrepit mansion made famous in the 1975 documentary with the same title. Given the latest estimates to do everything I want outside, my fantasy of getting curb appeal like the house from the movie Father of the Bride won’t be a reality anytime soon. But now that a rug’s finally down in the dining room, after an obsessive, exhaustive, nationwide search that would make anyone wonder what took me so long and why it cost so much to find something that plain and simple, I’m feeling ready for company.

This Thanksgiving, I’m hosting Mom and Dad—and my inner control freak-perfectionist threatens, as usual, to drain the life out of the occasion. The holiday pressure builds from the moment we begin planning this issue every summer and accumulates until I can no longer repress my fury over something as minor as the Piggly Wiggly selling out of Brussels sprouts. Last year, after an internal hissy fit in the beverage aisle—how could they possibly be out of light tonic water?—I nearly ran down a woman with my cart in a reckless huff to the checkout. The saying on her T-shirt read like a billboard: FANCY PROBLEMS, all scripted out in glittery sequins.

Fancy problems. I’ve come to realize I should count them as blessings, because they usually arise from gifts of abundance. (Chances are, if you’re reading this magazine, you have a few of them yourself!) From our teens through retirement, we’re pressured to focus on achieving and acquiring, and that habit, reinforced everywhere in pop culture, becomes a powerful addiction fueled by a subconscious fear of never being or having enough. I’m not knocking ambition, but there’s a reason why the richest among us, who seem to have it all, often turn out to be miserable: They have fancier problems than you or I could ever imagine.

Like faith, gratitude for what we have right now requires constant practice. If we let go of the idea that happiness lies just ahead, as soon as we fulfill our wish list for a better home/job/relationship/haircut/rug, we can experience greater joy in ordinary life, no matter our circumstances. It hit me on my parents’ last holiday visit. I was getting dinner on, wanting to make a good impression, worried about timing all the cooking just right, mortified by the bare rug pad in the dining room, and feeling slightly annoyed that Mom wasn’t jumping up to help. As I looked across the room to check on them, a sudden wave of tenderness cut through the cloud of angst: There they were, lounging on the kitchen banquette, reading books, oblivious to my multitasking, relaxed as ever. I savored this moment of parent-child role reversal and gave thanks, as I will again this year, for having them here in good health, with so much food and love to go around the table.

Wishing you and yours the happiest Thanksgiving.