"Granny wakened from her nap and shrieked objurgations at T. B. for an hour."

Our Neighbors at the Tansy Patch

"Every one of them is crazier than the others, ma'am" vehemently asserts Salome, maid-of-all-work

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PART I.

WHEN, during our second summer at the Tansy Patch, the whiskers of one of our cats were cut off mysteriously we always blamed a small boy pertaining to a family living near us, behind a thick spruce grove. Whether e were right or wrong in this conclusion I cannot say. None of us, not even our redoubtable Salome, cared to accuse any member of this family openly. We had too well-founded dread of "Granny's" tongue. So nothing was ever said about "Doc's" whiskers, and our amiable relations with our neighbors remained undisturbed.

They were certainly a curious assortment. Salome always referred to them as "Them lunatics behind the bush," and asserted vehemently that "everyone of them is crazier than the others, ma'am." She thought it quite dreadful that Dick and I should allow the children to consort with them so freely; but the children liked them, and we ourselves found an endless source of amusement in their peculiarities. They were even better fun than our cats, we thought.

The head of the house was a handsome, middle-aged man whom we seldom saw and with whom, save on one memorable occasion, we never had any conversation. His legal name appeared to be William Conway. His offspring called him "Paw," Aunt Lily always referred to him pathetically as "My poor brother," and Granny called him "My worthless skinamulinx of a son-in-law." What his wife had called him I wot not. She had died, it appears, eight years previously, when Millicent Mary Selina Munn Cook Conway had been born. If she resembled her mother it is not probable that her bereaved spouse sorrowed as one without hope.

When Timothy Benjamin, the oldest son—better known, it may be said as T. B.—paid us a long, friendly, first call, Salome had asked him bluntly, "What does your father do for a living?"

"Nawthing, mostly," was T. B.'s frank and laconic response.

"Then how do you get along?" demanded Salome.

"My old beast of a granny has a little money. We live on that," said T. B. easily. "Folks round here call paw lazy, but he says no, he's just contented."

"Does he never work?"

"Nope. He fiddles and fishes. And he hunts for buried treasure."

"Buried treasure?"

"Yip—down on them sand-hills 'cross from the hotel. He says Captain Kidd buried millions there. He keeps a-digging for it, paw does. Says when he finds it we'll all be rich."

"Your father'd better be digging in his garden," said Salome, severely. "I *never* saw such a scandal of weeds."

"That's what Granny says," retorted T. B.

Salome was squelched for the time being. The thought that she and Granny could be of the same opinion about anything enraged her into silence.

Of Mr. Conway's prowess as fisherman and treasure-seeker I know nothing, but I can testify to his ability as a violinist. When he fiddled, on his tumble-down "back stoop," on the summer evenings, the music that drifted over to the Tansy Patch, through the arches of the spruce wood, was enchanting. Even Salome, who prided herself on her ear for music, admitted that.

"It's angelic, ma'am, that's what it is," she said with solemn reluctance. And to think that lazy good-for-nothing could make it! What could Providence have been thinking of, ma'am? My good, hard-working brother John tried all his life to learn to play well on the fiddle and he never could. And this Bill Conway can do it without trying. Why, he can almost make me dance, ma'am."

That would have been a miracle, indeed! But Dick and I often did dance, on our own stoop, in time to the witching lilts of the invisible musician beyond the spruces.

In appearance Mr. Conway looked like a poet run to seed. He had a shock of wavy, dark auburn hair, a drooping moustache and a goatee, and brilliant brown eyes. He was shy or unsociable, we did not know which. At all events, he never came near us. "Jest too lazy to talk, that's all," T. B. assured us. "Paw hasn't nothin' again' yous."

The first member of the family to call on us—and the only one who ever paid us a formal call—was Aunt Lily—Miss Lilian Alethea Conway, according to the limp, broken-cornered card she left behind. The formality of her call consisted in her leaving this card. For the rest, she stayed the afternoon, took supper with us, and then remained for the evening.

"I am not, my dear Mrs. Bruce, a soulless society woman," was her somewhat unnecessary introductory remark. She swam up the steps—she really had a very graceful walk—and subsided limply into a rocker. She wore a rumpled dress of pale blue muslin with a complicated adornment of black velvet ribbon, and her long, thin arms were encased in cream lace gloves—remarkably nice gloves, of their kind, at that. Some of Granny's money must have gone into those gloves. She had a pale, freckled face and reddish hair. Yet she was not absolutely lacking in beauty. Later on I saw her once in the moonlight and was surprised by her good looks. Her features were quite classical and if she had known how to do anything with her hair she would have been a pretty woman.

I asked her to come into the house, but she assured me she preferred to remain outside.

"I love to sit and watch the golden bees plundering the sweets of the clover," she said dreamily, clasping her lace-covered hands. Neither bees nor clover were noticeable about the Tansy Patch, but that did not worry Aunt Lily. She rolled her large, blue eyes upon me and added,

"I adore the country, Mrs. Bruce. The city is so artificial. Don't you truly think the city is so artificial? There can be no real interchange of soul in the city. Here, in the beautiful country, under God's blue sky, human beings can be their real and highest selves. I am sure you agree with me, Mrs. Bruce."

I did, or pretended to; Salome and I knitted the afternoon away while Aunt Lily swayed idly and unceasingly in her rocker, and talked quite as idly and unceasingly. She told us all there was to be told about her family and herself. She kept a diary, it appeared.

"I must have some place to pour out my soul in, Mrs. Bruce," she said pathetically. "Some day, if you wish, I will show you my journal. It is a self-revelation. And yet I cannot write out what burns in my bosom. I envy my niece Dorinda her powers of expression. Dorinda is a poetess, Mrs. Bruce. She experiences the divine afflatus. My poor brother can express the deepest emotions of his soul in music, but I can only wield my halting pen. Yet my journal is not devoid of interest, Mrs. Bruce, and I should not object to sharing it with a sympathetic friend."

"I should like to see it," I assured her—sincerely enough, for I suspected that journal would be rather good fun.

"I will bring it to you some day then," said Aunt

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