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ROY'S LEMON ICE

By Nancy Byrd Turner.

The long road trailed like a gray string up the hill, and Roy trudged it slowly, dragging the express wagon after him. His mushroom hat drooped, and the face beneath it was hot and red; the wagon creaked complainingly. Yet he kept on with patience, because he was eight years old today, and because the burden in the wagon was a block of ice being hauled homeward from Mrs. Kean's ice-house to freeze a treat for his birthday feast. These were two splendid reasons for keeping on; and at the top of the hill he braced himself and went a little faster.

The road turned here and ran between long fields before it dropped into a patch of woods a quarter of a mile further on. Where one of these fields met the road sat a small house—so small and so white in the glare of the sun that it hurt your bare eyes. Roy never passed the place on a summer day without feeling uncomfortable. He fancied that the walls were blistered. As he creaked by now, he glanced toward it out of the corner of his eye, then stopped short. Some-

one was waving feebly from the window.

Roy knew who, well enough. It was old Miss Drusie Allen, a cripple, who spent her days alone in the little house while her nephew and his wife were out plowing and washing for a living. Miss Drusie had not walked for years. She was too drawn up with rheumatism even to be helped by crutches and canes, and from morning till night she had to sit huddled in a chair by the window.

Roy dragged his wagon to the doorstep, and, dropping the tongue, trotted inside. He took off the drooping mushroom, baring his little, wet head. "Did you call me, Miss Drusie?" he asked.

"Yes, I did," the old lady piped back, fretfully. "I want a bit i' company; I want somebody or something to make me forget for a piece of a minute this scorching heat that's a-burning up my old bones."

Roy knew that she wanted him to sit down and talk to her, but he knew, too, that he could not at this time, so he cast about in his mind for something else to do for her.

The tiny room was stuffy and dreadful. One window was down; it had fallen, Miss Drusie said, when she tried to "h'ist" it higher with her crumpled old hands. The sunlight poured in hot and white through unshaded panes.

"To-day I'm going to fix you," Roy promised, "and to-morrow I'll come and talk."

For fifteen minutes he was very busy, but at last he drew a long, satisfied breath. He had raised the window, and across the glaring upper sash, by dint of much reaching and climbing, panting and puffing, had fastened up the battered shade that had fallen a week ago. The shade made a cool, green light in the yellow room, and a little flicker of blessed breeze stirred though beneath it.

Then he beat up Aunt Drusie's flat pillow and brought her a leafy branch from the roadside to keep away the flies with. She looked pleased and happy. "You're good as a gal," she told him.

Roy looked at her weary old face and another thought came to him. "Now," he said, "want a glass of lemonade—iced lemonade?"

"You're a-foolin', sure!" Aunt Drusie cried, shrilly. "I ain't tasted iced lemonade sence I was taken down, two years ago, boy. And I'm that thirsty this minute, my throat's parched." She gazed at him eagerly.

Roy was glad he had remembered the lemons, bought at Mr. Kean's store for the birthday treat, and the small lump of ice tucked in beside the larger one. He set about his task with great earnestness, but it takes a long time to make lemonade when you do not know very much about it in the first place, and when you have to rummage around in every corner for spoon and nicked glass and a tiny "dip" of sugar.

He finished at last, though, and held up in triumph the cracked tumbler filled to the brim with cold, acid liquid that tinkled as it moved. Aunt Drusie nearly fell from the chair in



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her eagerness as she reached for it with both hands. When Roy looked back at the door, her head was thrown back and she was drinking long draughts as though she would never get enough.

Presently the wagon was creaking dustily on again through the scorching sun, and it was a weary little team, indeed, that came to a halt before the kitchen steps at home. Mother appeared at the door, flushed and rather worried. "I've been waiting and waiting—" she began.

"I had to stop and 'tend to Miss Drusie Allen," Roy explained, "but I've got the ice!"

He stooped happily and pulled aside the cloth and the thick, green oranges that covered his freight. Then, "mother!" he cried. There was no ice left—only a small piece about the size of a dinner-plate. The soaking wagon-body told the tale: the rest of his ice had melted away in the fierce, unshaded heat by the Allen door.

Through a blur of bitter tears Roy caught sight of the empty freezer awaiting its delicious contents. "I

had to fix Miss Drusie," he said, brokenly. "It—it took longer than I thought it would."

He sat down on the lowest step and pulled his hat over his blinking eyes. Mother sat down, too, and in a very little while she knew the whole story.

Then she got up briskly and bathed the hot face in cool water and washed the poor, dusty feet. "Now!" she said, "there's plenty of ice left for a big frosty pitcher of lemonade, and look what's waiting to go with it!"

Roy brightened at the huge chocolate cake, topped by eight slim, white candles, their wicks standing straight and ready. "We'll have a big time after all," he said.

"Mother," he remarked, drowsily, at twilight, very full of cake and lemonade, and very sleepy, "maybe this was Miss Drusie's birthday, too. Did she ever have a birthday?"

"Many and many a one," mother answered.

"To-morrow," Roy planned, nodding gently, "I'll take her a slice of cake and a candle and ask her all about it." When he had finished the last word he was fast asleep.—S.S. Times.

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