

Our Neighbors of the Tansy Patch

(Continued from page 7.)

Lily, "and when you read it, remember, oh pray, remember, that it was written by a being with a tired heart. I suffer greatly, Mrs. Bruce, from a tired heart."

I did not know whether this was a physical or an emotional ailment. Salome understood it to be the former and asked quite sympathetically,

"Did you every try a mustard plaster at the pit of your stomach, Miss?"

"I fear that would not benefit a weary heart, Miss Silversides," sighed Aunt Lily. "Possibly you have never suffered, as I have, from a weary, wounded heart."

"No, thank the Lord, my heart's all right," said Salome, briskly. "My only trouble is rheumatism in the knee joint. Ever have rheumatism in your knee joint, Miss?"

No, Aunt Lily's knee joints were all right. In fact, Aunt Lily proved to be a remarkably healthy woman. Her wearied heart evidently found no difficulty in pumping sufficient blood through her body and her appetite, as supper-time showed, as anything but feeble.

"When I can forget what might have been, I am happy," she sighed. "I have had my romance, Mrs. Bruce. Alas, that it should be in the past tense! I once thought I had found my true soul mate, Mrs. Bruce, and I dreamed of happy, real marriage."

"What happened that you didn't get married?" queried Salome, pricking up her ears. Salome is always rather interested in blighted romances, despite her grim exterior.

"A misunderstanding, Miss Silversides—a misunderstanding that severed two fond hearts. He wedded another. Never since that sad day have I met a man who could stir the dead ashes of my heart to tingling life again. But let us not talk of my sorrows, dear friends. Will you tell me how to can peas?"

When Aunt Lily went away I asked her to come again and she assured me that she would.

"I think you will understand me—I have always been misunderstood," she said. Then she trailed her blue draperies down the hill to the wood looking, when kindly distance had lent enchantment, quite a graceful, romantic and attractive figure.

"Did you ever hear such a lunatic, ma'am?" demanded Salome. "Her and her soul mates and her tired hearts! Her hair looks as if she'd swept it up with a broom and her nails weren't cleaned and her stockings were scandalous dirty. And yet, for all, there's something about the creature I like, ma'am."

That was the eventual verdict of our household upon Aunt Lily. In spite of everything there was a queer charm about her to which we succumbed. The same thing could be said of that absurd diary of hers, which she brought over

to us during our second summer. It was as ridiculous, and sentimental, and lackadaisical as Aunt Lily herself. And yet there was an odd fragrance about it that lingered in our memories. We could not, somehow, laugh quite as much over it as we wanted to.

T. B. was also an early and frequent caller. He was thirteen years old, in our first summer at the Patch. He had thick, fair, thatch-like hair and keen blue eyes—the only intelligent eyes in the family. He was, it developed, much addicted to creeping and crawling things; he always had bugs, toads, frogs or snakes secreted about his anatomy. The only time he ever had a meal with us a small green snake slipped from the pocket of his ragged shirt and glided over the table.

"Do you think he is *human*, ma'am?" Salome asked, with bated breath, after he was gone.

"He is a born naturalist," said Dick. "He is making a special study of ants this summer, it appears. Snakes are only a side issue at present. If he could be educated he would amount to something."

There did not seem to be much likelihood of this. T. B. himself had no illusions on the subject.

"There ain't any chance for me—never was and never will be," he once told me gloomily.

"Perhaps your grandmother would help you," I suggested.

T. B. grinned.

"Perhaps—when stones bleed," he said scornfully. "I don't s'pose the old beast has enough money. None of us knows how much she has got—she just doles it out. But she wouldn't give me any if she had pecks. She hates me. If there's any money left when she dies—s'posed she ever does die—Joe's to get it. He's her baby."

If Joseph—T. B. was the only one who ever called him Joe—was Granny's favorite he was not the favorite of anybody else. However we of the Tansy Patch might differ concerning the other members of the Conway family we all united in cordially detesting Joseph. He was such a sly, smug little wretch—"a born hypocrite, that child is, ma'am," declared Salome solemnly. We had no proof that it was really he who had cut off Doc's whiskers, but there was no doubt that it was Joseph who painted poor Una's legs with stripes of red and green paint one day. Una came home in tears, quickly followed by T. B. and Aunt Lily, the latter in tears also.

"I would rather have lost my right hand than have this happen, dear Mrs. Bruce," she wailed. "Oh, do not cherish it against us. Your friendship has been such a sweet boon to me. And turpentine will take it off—it can't be very dry yet."

"Jest wait till Granny goes to sleep and I'll lambaste Joe within an inch of his life," said T. B.

He did, too; when Granny awakened from her nap she heard the sobbing Joe's tale and shrieked oburgations at T. B. for an hour. T. B. sat on the fence and laughed at her; we could hear him and hear Granny also. Granny's vocal powers had not failed with advancing years, and every word came over distinctly to the Tansy Patch through the clear evening air.

"May you be eaten by pigs," vociferated Granny—and we knew she was brandishing her stick at the graceless T. B. "I'll bite your face off—I'll tear your eyes out—I'll rip your heart out! You blatant beast! You putrid pup!"

"Oh, listen to that awesome woman, ma'am," said Salome, shuddering. "Ain't it a wonder she isn't struck dead?"

But Granny was every inch alive—except that she could not walk, having what Aunt Lily called "paralattics in the hips." She was confined to a chair, generally placed on the back verandah, whence she could command a view of the main road. From this point of vantage she could scream maledictions and shake her long, black stick at any person or objects which incurred her dislike or displeasure.

Granny was of striking appearance. She had snow-white hair and dead-white face, and flashing black eyes. She still possessed all her teeth, but they were discolored and fang-like; and when she drew her lips back and snarled she was certainly a rather wolf-like old dame. She always wore a frilled widow's cap tied tightly under her chin, and was addicted to bare feet.

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