

Down By The Berry Patch

"Angie"

Rita Luks

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"Uncle Andy's coming up the driveway and he's got a lady with him!" The kids scampered into the living room and found places to sit; mostly on the floor, reserving furniture spots for the adults. Sitting on the floor in the living room wasn't unusual, but sitting in wait for Uncle Andy and the lady with him wasn't something that would ordinarily take precedence over anything else they doing. What was the attraction?



The kids had used some of their excess energy to run up the hill and get into place while I waited at the breezeway door while Andy and the lady—holding hands—slowly made the climb to the top. They obviously were enjoying each other's company; laughing, talking, and taking their time. From my vantage point, it was quite obvious my brother was coming to introduce a serious friend. Just a bit over half way up the hill she started hacking and, when they got to the top, the first words out of lady friend's mouth were, "God damn those cigarettes!"

Andy gave me a bear hug and said they just stopped by so we could meet Angie.

"Come on it. They kids came running in and said Uncle Andy was coming with a lady. I didn't see the two of you racing them up the hill."

Angie burst into a fit of raucous laughter. No one else found the remark particularly amusing.

Andy sat down in the prized rocker; so prized the first kid downstairs in the morning often called it for the entire day and spent the rest of the day trying to push a brother or sister out of it, claiming she called it first.

Angie plopped down on the end of the couch nearest his chair. She crossed her legs in unlady like fashion and slumped into a too comfortable position. The snags, pills and a black paint stain on the fabric of her gold knit slacks seemed to fight each other for attention. They were forced to compete with her orange and brown flowered silky knit blouse that was missing two buttons, and pulled apart between two others, that held on to gapping material, as they strained to wrench the shirt together at her bust line. She was wearing scuffed brown oxfords that had white laces in them—knotted where they had broken—and nylons that were rolled down around her ankles.

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Photo Caption: Andy and Rita

She had a habit of running her finger through her long frizzy hair that hung over her shoulders and was ratted into a swirl on the top of her head, then set off with an artificial gardenia.

Andy looked at her adoringly. The kids offered her pop or coffee and jumped up to get it for her. No one acknowledged the slurping sounds when she sipped her coke.

We talked about how pleased everyone was to meet Angie, how the two of them had met, how special we felt that they'd drive all the way from Flint to come see us, and what the kids were building by the wood pile at the foot of the hill. Angie tossed her head back and laughed loudly about everything; funny or not. It was difficult not to fixate on her decayed teeth.

Abruptly, Angie stood up and said she had to go down and get something out of the truck. As soon as she was out of the room Andy asked, "Sweet, isn't she? And pretty, too."

I hoped the kids would recognize this as one of those rare times we talked about; when it was better to tell a little white lie than speak the truth. "She's nice."

They had learned the lesson well. There wasn't anything more said about Angie. Lot's of questions about Uncle Andy's new truck and questions about how many cans he was finding on his pop can route. He'd pick up cans and toss into the bed of the truck on his way to work as an electrician at Buick and cash them out at a party store on the way home.

Suddenly we were all aware of Angie standing in the archway. She had naturally curly, short red hair and was wearing brown slacks, a well fitting blouse and sandals. Her laugh was gentle and her teeth were white.

Andy looked at her and asked, "Was I right?"

"You were right," she acknowledged.

She told us, " I was worried about meeting Andy's family and he told me I didn't have a thing to worry about. He said his family would accept anyone he brought to meet them, and even if they had their doubts, they would welcome me and treat me nicely."

Angie became instant family. Who could resist someone with enough gumption to pull off such a stunt before she even knew us? A perfect match for Andy. She was one classy lady...with an outlandish sense of humor.

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