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frontier eccentricities

Mr. Bloucher

By Inez Schneider Whitney



Illustration by Emmet Rackley

Every spring, here came Mr. Bloucher.

Every fall, here came Mr. Bloucher.

He would be in the same old dilapidated buggy and driving the same old white horse.

"Hello there, Mr. Schneider," he would call to my father as he clambered out and Papa would say, "Glad to see you, Mr. Bloucher. Unhitch your horse and stay a while."

"That I will. I'll be glad for a rest."

He lived in Oklahoma City, and it took him several days to make the trip of about a hundred miles. He knew the latchstring always hung out at our house. Mama would always put an extra plate on the table, and he would share the hired hand's room.

His clothes were always untidy and not quite clean. His gray hair needed cutting; and when he ate, crumbs caught in his long handlebar moustache. His hands trembled, and there was always food on the floor around his chair. It was my job to sweep it up after he left the table. This wasn't hard to do, though, because there was a linoleum rug on the floor.

From Mr. Bloucher, my father mostly bought fruit trees for his orchard. Mr. Bloucher carried some of them with him and took orders for others to be sent by mail. He would drive around the neighborhood making calls but always seemed to make it back to our house at mealtime.

How well I remember his last visit. He arrived after supper. It was a chilly fall day. There was a roaring fire in the big range, and we were sitting around the kitchen table. A big two-gallon kettle half full of Mama's delicious chili was simmering on the back of the stove. She had made it for the next day. It did smell good. Mr. Bloucher kept looking toward the kettle and finally said, "Mrs. Schneider, if you'll give me a spoon and a bowl, I'll show you what I can do for that chili." And he did. He ate the whole thing.

About the time he finished, there was a knock on the door. It was our neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Reimers, and their little daughter, Edna. Edna and I were both in the second grade, and we were inseparable friends. The Reimers had come for a visit.

Mama and Papa and Mr. and Mrs. Reimers started playing pitch at the kitchen table. Edna and I went into the sitting room to play dolls. Mr. Bloucher said that he was tired and would just rest in an easy chair.

Mama had baked cherry pies that day and had made a little one for me. I showed it to Edna and told her that we could eat it later after we had played a while. I set it on top of my little toy cupboard. When we were ready to eat it, to our surprise, the little plate was empty. The temptation had been too great. Mr. Bloucher, sitting nearby, was devouring the last bite.

Edna and I started giggling, and Mr. Bloucher said, "What are you little girls looking at?"

We didn't reply--just giggled a little more. A grown man eating our little pie! How funny!

The next spring came. One day Papa said, "I wonder why Mr. Bloucher hasn't been by. I wanted some cherry trees. It'll soon be too late to put them out."

Not many days later, Papa was reading the Oklahoma City paper. Pointing to an article as he handed it to Mama, he said in a shocked voice, "Read this."

The heading said, "Recluse Found Dead in Shack." Mr. Bloucher, who lived in a one-room shack at the edge of town, hadn't been seen for several days. One day his horse began

whinnying. A neighbor went over, pushed open the door, and found Mr. Bloucher lying on the floor dead. Police were called. When they searched the house, they found over \$13,000 in twenty-dollar bills in the bottom of an old trunk. That was quite a fortune in 1914. No survivors were ever found. What a sad ending for Mr. Bloucher. ■

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INEZ SCHNEIDER WHITNEY graces our pages again. WESTVIEW values Mrs. Whitney's contributions sent to us from Arlington, Virginia.

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