

“THE BOY THATA WAS SCARET O’ DYIN’”

by Annie Trumbull Slosson

Once there was a boy that was dreadful scaret o’ dyin’. Some folks is that way, you know; they ain’t never done it to know how it feels, and they’re scaret. And this boy was thata way. His health was sort o’ slim, and mebbe that made him think about sech things more. ‘Twas a long time ago, this was – the times when posies and creatures could talk so’s folks could know what they was sayin’.

And one day, as this boy, his name was Reuben – I forgot his other name - as Reuben was settin’ under a tree, cryin’, he heered a little bit of a voice – small and thin and soft like – and he see ‘twas a posy talkin’. And it talked in a kind o’ pinky-white voice, and it says,

Benj: What are you cryin’ for, Reuben?

Reuben: ‘Cause I’m dreadful scaret o’ dyin’, that’s why!

Benj: Dyin’! Scaret o’ dyin’? Why, I die myself every single year o’ my life.

Reuben: You’re foolin’, you’re alive this minute.

Benj: ‘Course I be. But I’ve died every year since I can remember.

Reuben: Don’t it hurt?

Benj: No! It’s real nice. You see, you get kind o’ tired o’ the sun shinin’ so hot, and the wind blowin’ you to pieces. So it’s nice to kind o’ hang your head down, and get sleepier and sleepier, and then find you’re droppin’ off. Then you wake up jest ‘t the nicest time o’ year – why, I like to die, I do.

Reuben: But I ain’t a posy And mebbe I won’t come up!

Well, another time Reuben was a settin’ in the lower pastur’, cryin’ again, and he heered another cur’us little voice. ‘Twas a little, wooly, soft, fuzzy voice, and he see ‘twas a caterpillar a-talkin’ to him. And the caterpillar says:

Caterpillar: What you cryin’ for, Reuben?

Reuben: I’m powerful scaret o’ dyin’, that’s why.

Caterpillar: Dyin'! Why, all my fam'ly die, and when they wake up they're jest splendid – got wings, and fly about, and live on honey and things. Why, I'm 'lottin' on it!

Reuben: But I ain't a caterpillar And maybe I won't wake up at all.

Well, there was lots o' other things talked to that boy --- trees and grass and crawlin' things -- that was allers a-dyin' and livin' and livin' and dyin'. And Reuben couldn't help thinkin' o' what they all said.

One summer he began to fall up faster and faster. And one day he was layin' on the bed and lookin' out o' the east winder, and the sun kep' a-shinin' in his eyes till he shet 'em up, and he fell fast asleep. He had a real good nap; and when he woke up he went out to take a walk.

And he begun to think o' what the posies and trees and creatures had said about dyin', and how they laughed at his bein' scaret at it, and he says to himself:

Reuben: Why, someways I don't feel so scaret today, but I s'pose I be.

And jest then what do you think he done? Why, he met an Angel. He'd never seed one afore, but he knew it right off. And the Angel says:

Angel: Ain't you happy, little boy?

Reuben: Well, I would be, only I'm so dreadful scaret of dyin'. It must be terr'ble cur'us To be dead.

Angel: Why You BE dead.

AND HE WAS!!!