

CONVERSATIONS IN THE GARDEN

“Hi, there.”

“Are you talking to me?”

“Why, yes, of course.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever heard a talking plant before.”

“That’s okay. I’ve never heard a talking squirrel before either. Well, I take that back. I’ve heard you chattering on the fence sometimes when that cat comes around. But I have to assume that it is in your native language, because I certainly couldn’t understand what you were saying.”

“Yes. That cat can be so annoying sometimes. I don’t think he speaks squirrel either, because he never seems to grasp what I’m saying to him ... Do you only speak English?”

“Yes, I’m an English Rose.”

“Not from around here then? I think this is Florida.”

“I’m from England originally, but I love it here in Florida, which comes from a Spanish word for ‘full of flowers’, by the way.”

“Really? I guess I should pay more attention. I was born down inside that Live Oak tree over there. Perhaps you’ve seen my sister and I peek out from those holes in the trunk?”

“No, I’m sorry, I’ve never noticed. Sometimes I’m not very observant, you know, what with having to put out these beautiful flowers and all. It can distract you from other things.”

“Yeah. I’m not big on flowers. Now, you take nuts. I can get crazy for nuts. My home tree, the Live Oak, produces ample nuts for my family. Sometimes I like to get out and try something different, though. They serve some delicious peanuts and sunflower seeds here. You have to get here early, though, before the grackles and blue jays hog it all. If I’m running a little late and there aren’t many peanuts left, I have to hustle—grabbing one, burying it, and then going back for another. I hope I haven’t disturbed your roots while burying them.”

“No, no. You’ve been fine, although I’ve always wondered what you were doing. Is that one of the sunflowers over there?”

“Yeah, some of those grackles can get pretty messy, flicking seed all over the place. That one probably grew from one of those that the grackles threw over there. You do what you gotta do around here. I just hope I can remember where I buried all the peanuts.”

“Is that a peanut plant sprouting over there?”

“Yeah, it looks like it. I must have forgotten about that one.”

“Do you like my flowers? We English Roses have a lot more petals and petaloids than many other roses.”

“Petaloids? What are those?”

“Petaloids are modified leaves that have the form or appearance of petals.”

“Okay. That’s probably more than I need to know, but yes, you have beautiful petals and petaloids ... petal ...”

“Petaloids.”

“Yeah, petaloids ... Do any of these other plants around here talk?”

“Why, yes. They all do, except for maybe that shrinking English Violet over there. She’s kind of shy ... Don’t all squirrels talk?”

“Yes, I suppose they do.”

“Hey, Tex,” said the English Rose. “Have you met Mr. Squirrel?”

“Howdy,” said Tex. “I don’t reckon I’ve had the pleasure, pardner. It’s *Leucophyllum frutescens*, but my friends just call me Tex, short for Texas Sage.”

“Okay,” said the squirrel.

“Psst,” whispered Tex. “Your friend doesn’t talk much, does he, Rosy?”

“I think he’s probably still in shock from learning that plants can talk.”

“I reckon you know best, Rosy.”

A gentle breeze began to blow, and a screen door slapped against its frame ever so gently. An elderly lady walked towards the garden carrying a green pail.

The squirrel flicked his tail rapidly and said, “Sorry, Miss Rose, but I gotta amscray.”

The squirrel jumped on top of the neighbor's fence and traveled its length, then jumping on the next neighbor's fence and the next, until he was out of sight.

"Amscray?" questioned Miss Rose. "What does that mean? I've never heard that in English before."

"I believe it is a foreign language called Pig Latin," interjected the Azalea.

"Pig Latin?" asked Miss Rose. "Well, I guess we won't ever know what he meant."

"Now, hold on there, Rosy," said Tex. "If I'm not mistaken, I think Mr. Hickory over there might be able to help us. I think I heard some people calling him a pignut, which might mean he knows how to speak Pig Latin."

"Oh," said Miss Rose. "Oh, Mr. Hickory, hello."

"Are you calling me, madam?" answered the hickory in a deep voice.

"Why, yes," said Miss Rose. "Do you speak Pig Latin?"

"Madam, I am a *Carya glabra*. I speak Pig Latin, as well as four other languages."

“Good,” said Miss Rose. “What does am-scray mean?”

“Arrivederci,” answered the hickory.

Miss Rose and Tex tilted their branches in a puzzled kind of way.

“Sayonara,” said the hickory.

“Jumpin horny toads!” exclaimed Tex. “Don’t you know what it means in English?”

“Scram,” replied the hickory.

“Oh, I get it,” said Miss Rose. “He left because Lady Wilkerson came out.”

“Lord have mercy,” said Tex. “Why didn’t he just say that in the first place?”

“Look, Tex,” said Miss Rose. “Lady Wilkerson has someone with her.”

“Yeah, kinda looks like a young sprout,” replied Tex.

When Lady Wilkerson reached the garden, she said, “Good morning, all my lovelies. Ah, Miss Rose, I believe you have outdone yourself this morning—one, two ... seventeen glorious flowers (Miss Rose held her foliage and her flowers erect with pride after Lady Wilkerson’s inspection). And

you, Tex, you still look as tough as nails in this dry weather (Tex kind of flexed his branches for Lady Wilkerson to see).

“Grandma, are you really talking to the plants?” asked Becky.

“I sure am,” answered Lady Wilkerson.

“And they answer you back?”

“They most certainly do.”

“I can’t hear them, Grandma,” said Becky.

“Well, this garden is like most any other garden, except it’s my garden. And all these plants are my friends. Now, you and I are friends, aren’t we, Becky?”

“Yes, Grandma.”

“When we talk, I can hear you and you can hear me, right?”

“Yes.”

“Well, in the garden, when I talk to my friends, they can hear me just like you can hear me. But when the plants talk back to me, they are silent. I can’t hear them talk, but I can see them talk.”

“I’m confused, Grandma.”

“Come, let me show you, Becky ... let’s take Miss Rose, here. When I came out here this morning, she told me that she was very happy.”

“I didn’t hear her say that,” said Becky.

“But remember what I said. She speaks in silence. Look at her and tell me why you think she might say, ‘I’m very happy this morning’.”

“Well, she has lots of pretty flowers this morning ... so, I guess ... that is how she says ‘I’m very happy, this morning’.”

“You did not hear her talk, but you saw her talk, didn’t you?”

“Oh ... I get it.”

“And look at old Tex there. It’s been a dry summer and some of the other plants are wilting badly, but not old Tex. Tex is telling me that it’s going to take a lot more than a little dry weather to get him down. His leaves still look strong, and he is still putting out those pretty little purple flowers. Now, look at those zinnias that are wilting. They are saying to me that they are sad. Their leaves are sagging, and their flowers look wimpy. They are telling me, ‘Please give us some water’. Can you see them talking, too?”

“Yes.”

“And how should we talk back to them?”

“Um ... say you're sorry while you give them some water?”

“You got it.”

“What about that plant over there? The one with that humongous flower branch.”

“That's an interesting one, Becky. Do you remember when Grandpa died last year?”

“Yes.”

“We had a funeral for him, and I told you he was going to live with God now. Well, this plant is a cactus, and it is telling us that it is getting ready to die and go up to live in a new garden with God.”

“How is it telling us that, Grandma?”

“When it is getting ready to die, it sends up that ... what did you say?”

“Humongous.”

“That humongous flower stalk. When it is done flowering, it will die. Remember all the flowers we had at Grandpa's funeral? Well, if you look closely, you can see that this plant has hundreds of

little flowers on its stalk. That's kind of God's way of sending flowers to its funeral. And look at all its friends, the bees, paying their respect to the cactus. But you know what's also interesting about this plant when it dies?"

"What's that, Grandma?"

"Do you remember when all of Grandpa's kids and grandkids joined hands in a circle around Grandpa's casket?"

"Yes."

"Look at all the kids and grandkids in a circle at the base of this cactus."

"Oh ... that's kind of like when you said that Grandpa will continue to live when all his children live."

"Oh, you're so smart."

"But before today, I didn't know how to talk with the garden."

"Now you do."

"Now I do."

