

twists, and the lard might get too hot before I'd notice it.'

By two o'clock the long white kitchen table was covered with pale-yellow rings and intricate twists, awaiting their plunge into the liquid fat. Aunt Almy was carefully testing the heat of the lard before intrusting a cake to its depths.

'It's just ready,' she said, as she watched a faint blue smoke arise from it. 'I'll put a couple of sticks in the stove, and that will keep the heat about right.'

The sticks were put in, a handful of doughnuts gathered up, when Aunt Almy suddenly let them fall. The fat, cross dog chained on the back porch had barked furiously.

'There's some stranger coming,' she said, in vexation. 'Who can it be?'

'Hallo! hallo!' shouted a masculine voice, and Aunt Almy went to the door.

A waggon piled with a medley of bags, yellow and blue crockery and gleaming tinware stood in front of the gate. A low-spirited looking horse was between the shafts. The proprietor of the travelling store leaned forward from the high seat, smiling affably.

'How d'ye do, Almy? how's things to-day?'

'They're about as usual, thank you, Mr. Green.'

'Why, no, they ain't,' said Mr. Green. 'I heard you folks was havin' a weddin'.'

'The wedding ain't here; it's to Squire Ellis's. Molly Ellis is marrying Ad today. They're married by this time.'

'Why ain't you there?'

'Somebody had to stay at home,' said Aunt Almy, with a worried glance over her shoulder at the kettle of lard.

'And it's always you, ain't it? Say, Almy, come here a minute; I want to tell you something.'

'I'm awful busy—'

'I won't keep you but a minute.'

With extreme reluctance Aunt Almy pattered down to the gate, and looked expectantly at Mr. Green's quizzical face.

'I'm as hungry as a hunter,' he said, impressively. 'Ain't had a bite since morning. Expected to get my dinner at Stebbinses', but found the place all locked up tight as a drum. Folks all gone to the weddin', I s'pose.'

'I s'pose so,' said Aunt Almy, nervously. 'I'd be pleased to ask you in, Mr. Green, and get you a meal, but I'm that busy I don't know which way to turn.'

'I don't want no meal,' said Mr. Green, hastily. 'But if you've got a piece o' pie and a few doughnuts handy I'd be much obliged for 'em.'

'Wait a minute.' Aunt Almy hurried as fast as her feet would carry her to the spring-house, from which she soon emerged with a plate of provisions. She handed the plate to Mr. Green, who took it gingerly.

'Rhubarb pie,' he said, then glanced casually at the cherry trees in the yard. Undeniably ripe fruit was showing among the leaves. 'Kinder late for rhubarb pie, ain't it?'

'We're still making it,' said Aunt Almy, with dignity. 'Good-day, Mr. Green.'

But Mr. Green still detained her, more by force of his look than anything else. 'Is them seed cakes?' he inquired, indicating the substantial rounds on the plate.

'Yes,' said Aunt Almy, retreating into the yard and shutting the gate.

'I don't like 'em. The seeds gets into my hollow teeth.'

'Then give them to the first child you meet,' said Aunt Almy, turning her back.

'Wait just a minute. You haven't got any rags you'd like to exchange for a new milk-pan, or a nice blue bowl that'd look handsome on the table with apple butter in it?'

'No!' said Aunt Almy. 'I told you twice I was awful busy. Bring the plate back next week, please. Good-bye.'

'Good-bye,' mumbled Mr. Green, with his mouth full of pie. He jerked at the reins, and his dejected horse plodded on.

'I never see the beat of that man,' said Aunt Almy, indignantly, as she scurried into the house. 'He's the worst beggar—oh, my! my! my!'

The stove was red hot over the entire top, and the now thick blue smoke rising from the lard, threatened to turn to brown in another instant.

'What shall I do!' cried Aunt Almy, distractedly. 'The kettle's so heavy and so hot. I'm afraid it'll take fire.'

Something had to be done, and without loss of time. The dishes were quickly cleared from the kitchen sink, and armed with a couple of dish cloths, Aunt Almy approached the kettle. With a supreme effort she lifted it and bore it in safety as far as the sink. There the exertion of elevating it over the ledge of the sink, combined with the cruelly hot handle, proved too much for her. She foresaw the inevitable result, but was powerless to avert it. The kettle found its resting-place with a thud, and Aunt Almy's right arm was splashed to the elbow with the hot lard.

Never before had she known such pain as was hers for the next two hours. Not a soul was in reach; even Mr. Green was wholly out of sight. At first, suffering too much to fix her mind on remedies, she could only groan and pace the floor. But when the intolerable smart settled into a vindictive, steady burning she strove to recall what she knew concerning the proper treatment of such injuries. Apple butter was good, but the last jar of apple butter had been emptied the week before. Suddenly she remembered to have heard that white of egg was a sovereign application. She went to the barn, and returned in despair. The hens had completed their labors before she gathered in the eggs for the doughnuts. What should she do!

For a little while her fortitude gave way. Then her sense of duty to others, always dominant, asserted itself. By and by Aunt Almy rose and set the kettle of lard on the stove once more. It was not long before she was alternating between the table and the stove with plates of cooked and uncooked cakes. She never told how she struggled that afternoon with nausea, with faintness, with utter collapse.

At four o'clock most of the doughnuts were cooked. Aunt Almy had grown quite calm in spirit, although her arm still burned relentlessly, and was completing her task with the same orderliness that she had observed in her work of the morning.

There was a movement on the porch. The dog had risen and was shaking himself. He lay down again, his chain clanked and his tail beat the floor of the porch.

'Somebody's coming, and it's one of the

family. Thank God!' said poor Aunt Almy.

A horseman dashed along the road, and stopped at the gate. A moment later Ben came buoyantly into the kitchen.

'I'm home,' he announced, gayly. Then he caught sight of the sublimated composure of his aunt's face.

'What is it?' he asked, in consternation.

Aunt Almy mutely held out her blistered arm. Ben gave one long look at it, and turned away. He went to the door and apparently looked out. He saw nothing.

After a moment he went up and kissed the faded cheek. 'I'll be back soon,' he said, huskily. In an instant the colt's feet were twinkling down the road.

Ben was back soon; too soon for the good of the dripping young horse that stood trembling at the gate.

'I have the right things, aunty, and the doctor told me how to use them,' he said, unrolling bandages, and producing two bottles, one holding linseed oil, the other lime-water.

'The colt, Ben?'

'I'll take care of it when I've taken care of you. You must be quiet the rest of the day. Mrs. Peterson will be here in a little while, and she'll look after things. I told her you'd had an accident.'

'Dear, dear! it's awful good of her to come. I know everything will be all right. Hannah Peterson's worth two women like me.'

'No; she's not. There's nobody in the world like you.'

'Now, I'll sugar my doughnuts,' said Aunt Almy, when her nephew awkwardly but gently fastened the last string.

'Aunty, whatever made you try to keep up after being hurt like this? You ought to have let the doughnuts go.'

'I had to keep up, Ben. It would have been miserable for Ad and Molly and the rest of the folks to come home to such a place as this would have been if I had given up.'

'Not as miserable as it was for you to be here alone this afternoon. Now I'll go and look after the colt.'

In the evening at supper Aunt Almy was seated opposite her darling Ad and pretty Molly. Molly wore a dress of green silk with a profusion of gimp trimming, in which she looked more beautiful than any rose. She helped herself daintily to the doughnuts when they were passed, and smiled brightly into the pale, worn face, full of a beautiful peace, across the table.

'You didn't forget, did you, Aunt Almy?'

Her young husband answered her. 'When you know Aunt Almy as well as I do, Molly, you will know that she never forgets anything or anybody except herself.'

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