

The Time of Roses

(Isabel Gay, in 'Presbyterian Banner.')

Aunt Almy was the only one at home. The others had gone away at five o'clock in the morning; gone with as much seriousness of aspect, as much implication of weight on their minds as if the occasion to which they were to lend their presence were a funeral instead of a wedding. Aunt Almy knew that it did not beget levity to carry one's best scoop bonnet in its band box, and one's best frock pinned up in a sheet, for a drive of twenty miles over a rough country road; especially with so little elbow-room as is afforded by a narrow buggy and a farm wagon with an extra seat added that the whole family, with the sole exception of Aunt Almy, might witness Ad's wedding.

Aunt Almy would have assumed almost any inconvenience if she only might have gone, for Ad—short for Adoniram—was the darling of her heart, and the girl he was marrying held a place but second to him in his aunt's affections. But there was an unwritten law in the family that when it was necessary that anyone should stay at home Aunt Almy should be that one. She had usually borne such dispensations with fortitude, and it did not fail her that early, dewy June morning when she stood at the gate, waiting to see them start. Ad and Lucy, his sister who was to act as bridesmaid, were in the buggy. Lucy was looking cross; she had not slept well, owing to the protuberant curl-papers which covered her head, screened now by a green barege veil. Moreover, she was encumbered with a huge parcel, enwrapping an exceedingly stiff white frock. To keep this frock free from wrinkles would be Lucy's sole object in life for several hours. She paid no attention to Aunt Almy, who came forward and laid her hand on one of the front wheels just as Ad was about to pick up the reins.

'Good-bye, my boy. God bless you,' she said. So much of yearning affection was there in the words that even Lucy turned her head to look at her aunt. Ad gave one look into the gentle eyes that had never gazed with aught but love on him, and let the reins lie. He took her face in both his hands, and kissed her three times; kissed her reverently as he would kiss his bride, then he drove away.

The heaviness suddenly lifted from Aunt Almy's spirit. She went to the wagon in which sat her sister with her husband and the younger members of the family, save Ben, the daring second son, who, at the last moment, had rebelled at going in the overcrowded wagon, and had rushed off to the barn to fling a saddle on the colt, a fiery young animal with a will as undisciplined as Ben's own.

The boy and his steed were coming through the lane back of the house now. Their advance was slow, owing to the colt's determination to travel in circles instead of a straight line. Ben's face was white, not from fear but from inflexibility. His father and mother watched him with foreboding, his young brothers and sisters with admiration mingled with terror.

'If that boy don't get his neck broke it'll be a mercy,' said Mr. Wellman, gloomily.

'You ought to 'a' made him go in the

wagon,' said Mrs. Wellman, rebukingly. Then they all watched in silence.

Before very long the colt, fully convinced of the steady hand on the rein, and the sharp sting which followed his ambitious plunges, showed evidence of a change of heart. He shot straight ahead and settled into a swift gallop. Ben's relatives caught the flash of his smile as he dashed past them, and the triumphant wave of his hand just before he disappeared round a bend in the road, and all felt relieved.

'I guess he'll be all right,' said Mr. Wellman.

'Then we'd better go,' said his wife, from the depths of her sunbonnet. The scoop bonnet in the box at her feet would not be assumed until they were almost within sight of the bride's house. 'Almy, if you don't get time to make the doughnuts just let 'em go; we'll have enough without them,' she said to her sister.

'Oh, I'll manage to get time. I promised Molly the last time she was here to make doughnuts for her wedding supper.'

'I know, but there's a good deal to be done, and supper ought to be ready about as soon as we get here. Drivin' four or five hours makes folks pretty hungry, you know.'

'I know. Don't you worry, Elvy; things'll be all right.'

'I hope so,' said Mrs. Wellman. 'Hiram, what are you waitin' for?'

'For you to have the last word,' said Mr. Wellman, jocosely. Then he gave a cluck that started his great horses forward.

When they were out of sight Aunt Almy went back to the house and surveyed her field of operations. Its extensiveness would have baffled a woman of to-day, but it had no terrors for Aunt Almy.

'I'll get the flowers first,' she said. 'They're fresher than they'll be after the sun's been on them a while.' Soon she was moving among the rosebushes, cutting their blooms lavishly.

'I'm very fond of roses,' she said. 'I believe they're my favorite flower. I think most folks like them best. There's been so many nice pieces written about them. There's that one in the English Reader: I wonder if I can remember it. I used to know it by heart. It begins,

"The rose had been washed, just washed
in a shower,

Which Mary to Anna conveyed.

The plentiful moisture encumbered the
flower,

And weighed down its beautiful head."

'That's the first verse. Then there's that pretty piece in Ben's new song book:

"It was not in the winter

Our loving lot was cast.

It was the time of roses;

We plucked them as we passed."

'I like that. I hope Ben will learn the right tune for it. I think I'll put a bunch of white roses on the biggest poundcake. They'll trim it up so. Molly'll look like a pink rose herself. My! but I would have liked to go to that wedding.' Poor Aunt Almy sighed deeply as she uttered the wish. Then she plied her scissors faster than ever.

It was past noon before she was free to make her doughnuts. The house was in a

state of beautiful order, and everywhere downstairs exhaled a pleasing odor of roses and cake.

After she had made and drank a cup of tea Aunt Almy took a final survey of the living room in which the wedding feast was spread. She could find no fault with it. The table, her chief concern, was a mass of color and fragrance. The fare was in accord with the unspoiled rural ideas of half a century ago. There were plates of immense puffy biscuits, known as lightcakes; there were platters of cold ham and chickens; dishes of young beet pickles, and richly tinted jellies and preserves; others held that delicacy known to some as Dutch cheese, to more as pot cheese, and to most it was familiar under the uneuphonious name of smear-case, and was always so spelled. There were canned peaches to be flanked by pitchers of yellow cream; there were decorative and anxiously compounded floating islands; there were delectable cherry pies, and there were pound cakes, sponge cakes, and 'raisin cakes,' not many of the latter; raisins were too scarce and high-priced. To these Aunt Almy meant to add the doughnuts, for which she was famous. There were few brides within a radius of ten miles who did not beseech her services in the making of this now despised and much-condemned little cake.

It would have been difficult for anybody but the most hopeless dyspeptic to despise Aunt Almy's doughnuts. In appearance, perhaps, they could not challenge comparison with the many-hued and fancifully devised and ornamented small cakes of the latter-day confectioner. They were only brown, sweet, delicious, and—digestible. And when they were covered with the pounded and sifted sugar that Aunt Almy meant to add as an extra touch to-day it must be maintained that they were beautiful as well as good.

'I wonder if I'd ought to have used so many eggs for the floating islands,' mused Aunt Almy, as she drained her teacup. 'I want a dozen for the doughnuts, and I hope I'll find them. So many of the hens ain't laying now, and we've used such a sight of eggs lately. I'll go right out and see.'

She went to the barn and searched diligently in the boxes and barrels and mangers which served as hen's nests. She was disappointed at the result. Only ten eggs disclosed themselves to her anxious eyes.

'I suppose I'll have to make them do. I might have managed with sixteen eggs instead of twenty for the custard. Lots of folks only take four to a quart of milk, but when your rule is five it goes against you to break it. Well, there's no use waiting for any more. Our hens never lay late in the day.'

She returned to the house and began her orderly preparations. First, she collected enough wood to last until the final doughnut should be fried. Then she got out the heavy iron kettle, put some lumps of firm white lard into it, and set it on the stove. She rolled sugar and beat eggs. She changed her mind about the kettle of lard and set it on the back part of the stove.

'I guess I'll get them all ready before I fry any. I want to make some fancy