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AUNT MARY ANN

Continued from page 8

had tried to be such a help at the time of the wedding, and had ended by being so in the way. As Hilda had no mother, she had offered to take her mother's place, coming over every evening, for a fortnight previous to the event, to watch the progress of the *trousseau*, to praise and to admire and hinder Hilda with her sewing. One night she had brought two gifts—a centre piece and a d'oyley, with calling cards attached, from Julia and herself, and three times she had reminded Hilda "not to get the cards mixed."

But the climax had come when Hilda finally agreed to let her run the luncheon, and Aunt Mary Ann, waiting on the table herself, had gone from guest to guest with the enquiry: "There are seven courses. Will you have soup?"

A firm, springy step on the walk brought her back to the present. She was in the hall, and had the light turned on before her husband could open the door.

He let in a draught of cold air and she snuggled into his embrace for he had been away since the day before.

"I can look up to you," she said, kissing the cleft in his chin.

"Who was insinuating that you could not, little girl?" said Clayton.

"No one. But Aunt Mary Ann advised me to marry a tall man. She said more trouble came through not being able to look up to your husband than through anything else."

"I hope you'll always be able to do that, little woman. Speaking of Aunt Mary Ann, she was on the train yesterday. She was taking a basket of live stock to the city—a clothes basket—hens, I think it was. She got off at every station between here and Brighton for fear she would miss her own. The fourth time I saw the conductor pick her up in his arms—basket and all—and deposit her on the platform of the train. He was ripping mad, and he told her that if she dared to get off again before she reached her destination she might stay there."

"Oh, Clayton. Why didn't you look after her?"

"We were on different cars; and, to be frank, I dislike traveling with fussy people. Is supper ready, dear? I'm famished."

Hilda hurried out to the kitchen. Her husband followed her and thrusting a hand into his coat pocket, drew out the mail. There was one letter for Hilda, which he threw on the kitchen table.

"What does that mean?" he asked, a little coldly.

Hilda turned from the stove in surprise, and picking up the letter, which had been opened, drew forth the single

sheet and perused its contents swiftly.

"It's the end of the year," she said, looking her husband frankly in the eyes, "and there is a deficit in the church funds. All the members were asked to help wipe it out. I am a member, so I sent ten dollars."

"I thought it was addressed to me or I would not have opened it," said Clayton. "There's just one thing that I wish to be fully understood, Hilda, you may have all the money you want to spend on yourself, but I don't believe in subscribing to the church or to foreign missions. I was brought up in a house where all the spare money was given to the church, and I saw my mother wear her life out slaving and slaving, and trying to make ends meet."

She lifted the supper, and all through the meal there was a grim silence.

Later, when the dishes were washed, she threw herself on the divan and closed her eyes.

Clayton took up a book and pretended to read. Finally the tension grew unbearable. He threw down his book, and crossing the room, knelt beside the divan.

"What is it, dear?" he asked.

"My head aches."

"Oh, Clayton," she cried, taking his big hand in two of hers, "I can't bear to quarrel."

Clayton lifted her head from the pillow and held her close.

"We won't, dear," he said.

"I think I would always rather give in to you than have any coldness spring up between us—even when I thought you were in the wrong." Clayton held her closer.

"You grow more alike after you've been married awhile—unconsciously." Hilda shivered.

"Clayton, dear, would you like me to be like Aunt Mary Ann when I'm old?"

"Heaven forbid!"

"And yet at my age she was soft and pretty and pliable—generous, too."

"It's a big stretch of imagination," said Clayton, drolly.

"Clayton"—Hilda's fingers closed tensely over her husband's—"when we were married you asked me if I would like a regular allowance, and I said 'No.' May I change my mind?" There was a long silence.

At last Clayton spoke. "Am I such a miser, little girl, that you alter your mind in four months? All that is mine is yours, dear, and to-morrow I shall see that our bank account is made joint. And"—he drew a deep breath as though the resolution cost him something—"you may spend the money as you like."

"Thank you, dear."

SPRING ALMANACS

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off on this whipping. Where did you get those symptoms of typhoid you told me you had?"

Joe whimpered a little; but soon solved the mystery of all our troubles by the astonishing confession: "I got 'em outen a nalmanc over in Fred's room!"

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed I, dropping the stick. "I believe the whole family got their sickness outen a nalmanc."

That elusive memory wasn't from a past incarnation after all: it was just the same old almanacal theory.

"Joe," said I suddenly, "you're a treasure to your mother." And in my exuberance of gratitude I made a foolish offer. "I'll bake you a turnover for every almanac you find and burn," I promised. "We will clear the atmosphere of 'symptoms,' and that will be equal to destroying germs."

Then I went to Fred's room. On the wall at the side of his bed hung his source of misery. I opened its pages only to be surprised at the many symptoms of kidney disease which were my own daily companions, though they had not held my attention before. I often had a pain in the back—especially after doing my own work, and then helping the men folks out on theirs, weeding a couple of hours. "That tired feeling," well! I guess every rancher's wife has that occasionally.

Fred's almanac pointed to the disease with one hand, and to the "cure" with the other, while it preached loudly of the failures of doctors to help the patient even. In Melinda's room was another death indicator, and I grew so dizzy over its many and intricate paths to the grave as almost to believe that I too was either apoplectic or epileptic.

On the sitting-room table lay a hot-bed of dyspepsia which John had just left off studying, to lie on the lounge and moan as he gripped his waist between two weak hands. No wonder he thought he was doomed. No man could revel in all those symptoms daily and live. I gathered all these sources of contagion and destroyed them by fire. The remnants of the "cures" I collected and poured down the drain.

A few days later I found that my indebtedness to Joe amounted to thirty-two turnovers. He had proven himself a financier on a sure proposition, and had begged from the stores and borrowed from the neighbors many extra almanacs before I wakened to his methods; thereby earning for himself a steady diet of pastry. But the family, lacking fuel to feed the fires of imagination, became healthy and able-bodied once more.

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