

Johnny-Cake

(Marion Brier, in 'Christian Endeavor World.')

Sarah Adams stood in the low doorway of the little three-roomed log house, and, shading her eyes from the bright rays of the setting sun with one small, sunburned hand, kept eager watch across the prairie. Presently she caught sight of a stalwart figure striding along beside the yoke of slow-plodding oxen. Her face lighted up, and, catching her sunbonnet off its peg by the door, she tripped down the track that led across the prairie.

The days seemed long and a little lonely alone there in the wee log house, and she almost always watched for Tom at sundown, and went out part way across the field to meet him on his way home from work. Tom had always been her favorite brother; and when, two years before, in the spring of 1855, he had decided to go out into what was then the far West and take up land in the new country, she had at once expressed her determination to accompany him and keep house for him. The home folks tried their best to dissuade her, vividly picturing the hardships and privations she would have to endure as a pioneer in a newly-settled country. But she was not needed at home; and, feeling that Tom did need her, she closed her ears to all their arguments, and resolutely she started out on the journey that carried her many hundred miles to the West, as soon as Tom had located his claim and built the little log house upon it.

The next year had been a trying one. All the crops except the corn had failed; their small supply of vegetables gave out long before spring; money was very scarce, and the nearest market over forty miles away; so there was little but corn in the settlement to eat. Nevertheless, Tom and Sarah had kept up brave hearts and worked on courageously, confident that sooner or later their broad acres would bring them prosperity.

This evening Sarah drew a long breath of relief when at last she fell into step beside Tom.

'Do you know,' she began, excitedly, 'there was a whole half-dozen Indians at the house this afternoon? I was so frightened! I just can't get used to them; I believe I'm more afraid every time that they come. They wanted something to eat, just as they always do, and they didn't like it a bit because I didn't have anything but johnny-cake for them. They poked all around to see if there wasn't something else, and then they made me go down cellar after some more butter for them. O I was so scared! I expected every minute they would slam the trap-door shut, and fasten me down there, and then set fire to the house. I tell you it didn't take me long to get the butter that time. They ate up everything that was cooked in the house. I thought they never would go away. But after the longest time they did go.'

'And you are alive to tell the story?' Tom laughed, good-naturedly. 'Haven't you learned not to be afraid of those old fellows yet, sis?' he went on. 'They won't hurt you. It is a shame that you have to feed the lazy scamps, though;

but as long as it's only johnny-cake I don't care very much if they do eat it all up.'

It was Sarah's turn to laugh now. 'Do you suppose we will ever want to eat another slice of johnny-cake or more hulled corn or hominy as long as we live? It doesn't seem to me that I'll ever want to see any again. We've had corn in some shape dished up for breakfast, dinner, and supper till I'm sick of the sight of it.'

'It has got to be pretty monotonous, that's a fact,' Tom assented emphatically. 'I suppose we ought to be thankful that we've got johnny-cake; but I'm afraid it's a blessing that I don't properly appreciate any more.'

The oxen, left to themselves, had gone on to the zigzag rail fence that marked the pasture, and now stood patiently waiting by the bars. So Tom followed them to take off the heavy yoke and turn them into the pasture, while Sarah went on into the tiny kitchen to get supper.

It was all on the table an hour later, when Tom came in. A fresh-baked, golden-brown johnny-cake, fresh butter, thin, crisp slices of fried pork, a little glass pitcher of molasses, and a second johnny-cake sweetened with molasses and called cake. Everything in the little kitchen was spotlessly clean, but somehow the supper did not look appetizing to the two who sat down at opposite ends of the table; twenty-one meals each week almost identical with it, varied week after week only by hominy or hulled corn, had somewhat dulled their appetites for the fare.

Sarah laid down her first slice of johnny-cake half-eaten. 'I believe I'd rather starve than eat any more johnny-cake,' she said, making a grimace at the unoffending plate of brown slices.

Tom looked at her quizzically. Presently his face broke into a slow smile. 'I'll tell you what let's do, sis,' he said. 'Let's go visiting. If we can only get one good square meal that isn't johnny-cake, maybe we can come back home and eat corn again for another six months.'

Sarah set down the cup of milk that was serving her for supper, and looked up quickly. 'That would be all right if everybody else wasn't living on johnny-cake, too,' she said; 'but nobody around here has any white flour: the Smiths haven't, or the Wrights, or the Browns, or the Whitcomes, or the Bennetts.' She counted the names off on her fingers, shaking her head at each one.

Tom's face fell. 'Well,' he said, 'johnny-cake it is, then, to the end of the chapter. We'll have to make up our minds to the inevitable, which in this case is spelled johnny-cake.'

Sarah was in a brown study, her eyes fixed absent-mindedly on the plate of johnny-cake. Suddenly her face lighted up, and she clapped her hands together very softly.

'I knew there must be someone!' she exclaimed. 'Don't you remember that the Nelsons got a sack of flour just a little while ago? We'll go there! And we'll go to-morrow. How far is it over to their place, Tom?' she ran on excitedly.

'To Nelson's? It's a good twelve miles. We would have to start early if the oxen got us over there in time for dinner.'

But Sarah was nothing daunted. 'I'd go

fifty miles if there was a slice of white bread there,' she insisted. 'Can you get away to-morrow, Tom?' she inquired, anxiously. 'Don't say you can't.'

Tom reflected. 'Why, yes, I guess I can manage a day off all right,' he said at last. 'I don't suppose I ought to, but I'll put in extra time the rest of the week. I don't know but I could work enough harder after eating a slice of white bread to make up for lost time,' he concluded, smiling broadly.

So it was decided. Early the next morning they set out across the prairie in the big lumber-waggon behind the slow-plodding oxen. They were both hilariously happy, and enjoyed the holiday like care-free children.

It was nearly eleven o'clock before they came in sight of the log house where the Nelsons lived. Sarah gave a little sigh of satisfaction.

'O but I am ravenously hungry,' she exclaimed. 'I didn't eat a mouthful of my breakfast this morning, and a twelve-mile ride behind old Ned and Jerry is enough to sharpen any one's appetite.'

Tom laughed. 'I feel sorry for that sack of flour,' he declared. 'It won't recognize itself by the time we leave.'

'I'm sure Jane'll make some biscuits for dinner,' Sarah reflected. 'Just think of it, Tom; white baking-powder biscuits! Doesn't it make your mouth water?'

When they drove up to the door, Mrs. Nelson greeted them with the hearty pleasure that the pioneers in a new country always feel at the sight of a neighbor. She directed Tom to the field where Mr. Nelson was at work, and took Sarah into the neat little sitting-room. 'Oh I'm so glad you came,' she exclaimed heartily. 'It seems the longest time since I have seen anybody. I expect I'll talk you almost to death.'

But in a few moments she excused herself. 'Now I'll leave Annie and Georgie to entertain you while I go and get the dinner,' she said. 'They can take you out to see where my flower-garden is going to be. Everything is coming up as nice as can be.'

So Sarah went with the children to see the flower-beds where the tiny plants were just breaking their way through the dark ground to the sunlight. She stooped over one bed after another, trying to distinguish the different plants. Sarah was passionately fond of flowers, but to-day she was conscious of giving them divided attention. The greater share of her thoughts was in the kitchen, speculating over those white biscuits that she was sure were in process of construction.

She was glad when at last Mrs. Nelson came out and blew the dinner-horn to call the men in from the field. It seemed to Sarah that they were unusually slow in getting to the house, feeding the oxen, and washing for dinner. She made up her mind that if they were half as hungry as she was they would move quicker.

But at last everything was ready, and they proceeded to the kitchen where the dinner-table was set. Sarah gave one look at it, and then almost choked between a hysterical desire to laugh and a desire to cry. There was on the table a platter of thin, crisp slices of fried pork, a great plate of golden johnny-cake, a pat of fresh