

The Pimienta Pancakes

By O. Henry

"Fine!" he laughed. "Now, I must go and visit the bank before it closes."

"You can stay at least another minute," she begged, snuggling closer to him.

The bank closed without the proposed visit that day, but he was there as soon as the doors opened next morning. He wrote out a cheque for a generous amount which, somehow, did not "come across" with the usual dispatch. There was a whispered conference between the teller and ledger-keeper, and the money was at length paid over with the polite reminder that the account was slightly overdrawn.

Morley took the information with a little gasp, expressing incredulity. He had expected nothing like it, and thought there surely must be some mistake. When, however, he had looked over the credits in his bank book, he saw that the outfitting of the little shop in the "gap" had been really a costly undertaking.

The next three weeks were full of joyous activity, then the day of days, and Niagara. Never had the Falls looked so idyllic in their majesty, never the scent of growing things so sensuous. The air was full of song and spray. All was gorgeous and refreshing. Why Niagara must always be the paradise of brides is best known after once seen. Certain it is that the charm of the dashing waterfall, the beauty of the surrounding parks and the lure of leafy ambuscades excite the ecstatic vanities of the human heart.

"It's so lovely," whispered Shirley. "If the Falls could hear all the nice things said about them they'd roll back with vanity. But, Morley, dear, we mustn't stay much longer: I'm tingling to get back to the little shop."

"We can't stay here forever, Shirley, girly," he responded, "and we can come again and again, so if you wish to go back to the sweetest little store in the world, I'm willing."

He did not state that if they had stayed another day he would have the amusing experience of spending shinplasters. In fact, he actually tipped the porter with one.

"Morley!" gasped Shirley. "Whatever did you do that for?"

"I've too many of them," he explained. "I think I've cornered the shinplaster market."

"Morley, dear, is this the 'rainy day'?" she asked, anxiously.

"I'm afraid I have to make a few of them work," he laughed.

They found the "Zulus" were barely paying expenses. Rita Simpson had managed well, but she lacked Shirley's genius for selling. Morley found it expedient to transfer his belongings from the "Jungfrau" to the apartments above the store. Thus was one expense cut.

But the business had to pay, and it was Shirley's deep concern to make it pay.

"I have it," she announced, briskly. "All stores have their special sales in dull times. Let us have a 'Shinplaster Sale!'"

"And deprive me of my hobby?" he teased. "You may sell them all if you wish, but I don't think you'll make a nickel out of them," he laughed.

"Oh, I don't mean to sell them, goose! I mean to give them away as premiums!" she elucidated. "We'll offer to sell our dollar boxes of 'Zulus' for seventy-five cents worth of shinplasters."

"That's fine business—since you've all the shinplasters in the city."

"Oh, I don't mean to be unreasonable," she explained. "We'll offer to give one shinplaster with every box sold at the regular dollar price. In that way one can acquire shinplasters—and buy more chocolates with them. We'll put ads. in the papers telling of the advantages of having shinplasters for making small remittances by mail, no war tax, and so forth. Everybody expects to spend a dollar for chocolates, and when it is known that a twenty-five cent shinplaster goes with it, we'll have to double our forces to handle the crowds. Watch! The offer to give a box of chocolates for three shinplasters will appeal to the sporting element and others who have no special use for the handy little bills."

"Shirley, you're not only the sweetest girl in the world, but the brainiest. Any other girl would have taken a big risk in marrying me," said Morley, solemnly.

"I'd like to see any other girl marry you!" Shirley tossed back, and held her pouting lips up to his for the treatment more palatable than praise.

"The 'gap' without Shirley would always be a gap: with her it proved to be a mine."

WHILE we were rounding up a bunch of the Triangle-O cattle in the Frio bottoms a projecting branch of a dead mesquite caught my wooden stirrup, and gave my ankle a wrench that laid me up in camp for a week.

On the third day of my compulsory idleness I crawled out near the grub wagon, and reclined helpless under the conversational fire of Judson Odum, the camp cook. Jud was a monologist by nature, whom Destiny, with customary blundering, had set in a profession wherein he was bereaved, for the greater portion of his time, of an audience.

Therefore, I was manna in the desert of Jud's obmutescence.

Betimes I was stirred by invalid longings for something to eat that did not come under the caption of "grub." I had visions of the maternal pantry "deep as first love, and wild with all regret," and then I asked:

"Jud, can you make pancakes?"

Jud laid down his six-shooter, with which he was preparing to pound an antelope steak, and stood over me in what I felt to be a menacing attitude. He further indorsed my impression that his pose was resentful by fixing me with his light blue eyes a look of cold suspicion.

"Say, you," he said, with candid, though not excessive choler, "did you mean that straight, or was you trying to throw the gaff into me? Some of the boys been telling you about me and that pancake racket?"

"No, Jud," I said, sincerely, "I meant

digging my spurs into the side of the counter and working with my twenty-four-inch spoon when I happened to look out of the window into the yard of Uncle Emsley's house, which was next to the store.

"There was a girl standing there—an imported girl with fixings on—philandering with a croquet maul and amusing herself by watching my style of encouraging the fruit canning industry."

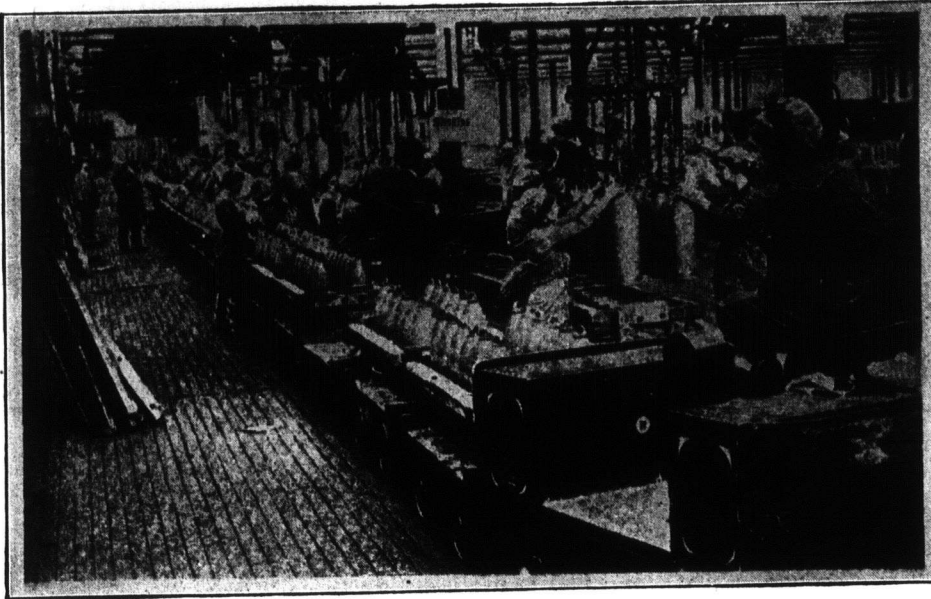
"I slid off the counter and delivered up my shovel to Uncle Emsley."

"That's my niece," says he; "Miss Willella Learight, down from Palestine on a visit. Do you want that I should make you acquainted?"

"The Holy Land," I says to myself, my thoughts milling some as I tried to run them into the corral. "Why not? There was sure angels in Pales— Why, yes, Uncle Emsley," I says out loud, "I'd be awful edified to meet Miss Learight."

"So Uncle Emsley took me out in the yard and gave us each other's entitlements."

"I never was shy about women. I never could understand why some men who can break a mustang before breakfast and shave in the dark, get all left-handed and full of perspiration and excuses when they see a bolt of calico draped around what belongs in it. Inside of eight minutes me and Miss Willella was aggravating the croquet balls around as amiable as second cousins. She gave me a dig about the quantity of canned fruit I had eaten, and I got back at her, flat-footed, about how a certain lady named Eve started the



At work in the department of an English munition factory.

it. It seems to me I'd swap my pony and saddle for a stack of buttered brown pancakes with some first crop, open kettle New Orleans sweetening. Was there a story about pancakes?"

Jud was mollified at once when he saw that I had not been dealing in allusions. He brought some mysterious bags and tin boxes from the grub wagon and set them in the shade of the hackberry where I lay reclined. I watched him as he began to arrange them leisurely and unite their many strings.

"No, not a story," said Jud, as he worked, "but just the logical disclosures in the case of me and that pink-eyed snoozer from Mired Mule Canada and Miss Willella Learight. I don't mind telling you."

"I was punching then for Old Bill Toomey, on the San Miguel. One day I gets all ensnared up in aspirations for to eat some canned grub that hasn't ever mooded or baed or grunted or been in peek measures. So, I gets on my brone and pushes the wind for Uncle Emsley Telfair's store at the Pimienta Crossing on the Nueces."

"About three in the afternoon I throwed my bridle rein over a mesquite limb, and walked the last twenty yards into Uncle Emsley's store. I got up on the counter and told Uncle Emsley that the signs pointed to the devastation of the fruit crop of the world. In a minute I had a bag of crackers and a long-handled spoon, with an open can each of apricots and pineapples and cherries and green gages beside me, with Uncle Emsley busy chopping away with the hatchet at the yellow clings. I was feeling like Amas before the apple stampede, and was

fruit trouble in the first free-grass pasture—'Over in Palestine, wasn't it?' says I as easy and pat as roping a one-year-old."

"That was how I acquired cordiality for the proximities of Miss Willella Learight; and the disposition grew larger as time passed. She was stopping at Pimienta Crossing for her health, which was very good, and for the climate, which was forty per cent hotter than Palestine. I rode over to see her once every week for a while; and then I figured it out that if I doubled the number of trips I would see her twice as often."

"One week I slipped in a third trip; and that's where the pancakes and the pink-eyed snoozer busted into the game."

"That evening, while I set on the counter with a peach and two damsons in my mouth, I asked Uncle Emsley how Miss Willella was."

"Why," says Uncle Emsley, "she's gone riding with Jackson Bird, the sheep man from over at Mired Mule Canada."

"I swallowed the peach seed and the two damson seeds. I guess somebody held the counter by the bridle while I got off; and then I walked out straight ahead till I butted against the mesquite where my roan was tied."

"She's gone riding," I whispers in my brone's ear, "with Birdstone Jack, the hired mule from Sheep Man's Canada. Did you get that, old Leather-and-Gallops?"

"That brone of mine wept, in his way. He'd been raised a cow pony and he didn't care for snoozers."

"I went back and said to Uncle Emsley: 'Did you say a sheep man?'"

"I said a sheep man," says Uncle again. "You must have heard tell of

Jackson Bird. He's got eight sections o grazing and four thousand head of the finest Cotswolds south of the Arctic Circle."

"I went out and sat on the ground in the shade of the store and leaned against a prickly pear. I sifted sand into my boots with unthinking hands while I soliloquized a quantity about this bird with the Jackson plumage to his name."

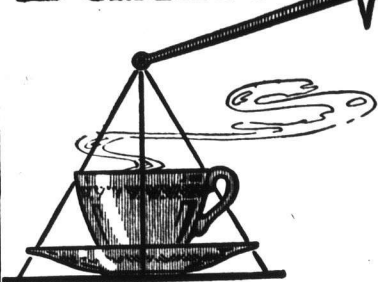
"I never had believed in harming sheep men. I see one, one day, reading a Latin grammar on hossback, and I never touched him! They never irritated me like they do most cowmen. You wouldn't go to work now, and impair and disfigure snoozers, would you, that eat on tables and wear little shoes and speak to you on subjects? I had always let 'em pass, just as you would a jack-rabbit; with a polite word and a guess about the weather, but no stopping to swap canteens. I never thought it was worth while to be hostile with a snoozer. And because I'd been lenient and let 'em live, here was one going around riding with Miss Willella Learight!"

"An hour by sun they come loping back, and stopped at Uncle Emsley's gate. The sheep person helped her off; and they stood throwing each other sentences all sprightly and sagacious for a while. And then this feathered Jackson flies up in his saddle and raises his little stewart of a hat, and trots off in the direction of his mutton ranch. By this time I had turned the sand out of my boots and unpinned myself from the prickly pear; and by the time he gets half a mile out of Pimienta, I singlefoots up beside him on my brone."

"I said that snoozer was pink-eyed, but he wasn't. His seeing arrangement was gray enough, but his eyelashes was pink and his hair was sandy, and that gave you the idea. Sheep man?—he wasn't more than a lamb man, anyhow—a little thing with his neck involved in a yellow silk handkerchief, and shoes tied up in bow-knots."

"Afternoon!" says I to him. "You now ride with an equestrian who is commonly called Dead-Moral-Certainty Judson, on account of the way I shoot. When I want a stranger to know me I always introduce myself before the draw, for I never did like to shake hands with ghosts."

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