

## CHAPTER XVII. THE PROOF OF THE PUDDING

Felicity was cumbered with many cares the next morning. For one thing, the whole house must be put in apple pie order; and for another, an elaborate supper must be prepared for the expected return of the travellers that night. Felicity devoted her whole attention to this, and left the secondary preparation of the regular meals to Cecily and the Story Girl. It was agreed that the latter was to make a cornmeal pudding for dinner.

In spite of her disaster with the bread, the Story Girl had been taking cooking lessons from Felicity all the week, and getting on tolerably well, although, mindful of her former mistake, she never ventured on anything without Felicity's approval. But Felicity had no time to oversee her this morning.

"You must attend to the pudding yourself," she said. "The recipe's so plain and simple even you can't go astray, and if there's anything you don't understand you can ask me. But don't bother me if you can help it."

The Story Girl did not bother her once. The pudding was concocted and baked, as the Story Girl proudly informed us when we came to the dinner-table, all on her own hook. She was very proud of it; and certainly as far as appearance went it justified her triumph. The slices were smooth and golden; and, smothered

in the luscious maple sugar sauce which Cecily had compounded, were very fair to view. Nevertheless, although none of us, not even Uncle Roger or Felicity, said a word at the time, for fear of hurting the Story Girl's feelings, the pudding did not taste exactly as it should. It was tough--decidedly tough--and lacked the richness of flavour which was customary in Aunt Janet's cornmeal puddings. If it had not been for the abundant supply of sauce it would have been very dry eating indeed. Eaten it was, however, to the last crumb. If it were not just what a cornmeal pudding might be, the rest of the bill of fare had been extra good and our appetites matched it.

"I wish I was twins so's I could eat more," said Dan, when he simply had to stop.

"What good would being twins do you?" asked Peter. "People who squint can't eat any more than people who don't squint, can they?"

We could not see any connection between Peter's two questions.

"What has squinting got to do with twins?" asked Dan.

"Why, twins are just people that squint, aren't they?" said Peter.

We thought he was trying to be funny, until we found out that he was quite in earnest. Then we laughed until Peter got sulky.

"I don't care," he said. "How's a fellow to know? Tommy and Adam Cowan, over at Markdale, are twins; and they're both cross-eyed. So I s'posed that was what being twins meant. It's all very fine for you fellows to laugh. I never went to school half as much as you did; and you was brought up in Toronto, too. If you'd worked out ever since you was seven, and just got to school in the winter, there'd be lots of things you wouldn't know, either."

"Never mind, Peter," said Cecily. "You know lots of things they don't."

But Peter was not to be conciliated, and took himself off in high dudgeon. To be laughed at before Felicity--to be laughed at BY Felicity--was something he could not endure. Let Cecily and the Story Girl cackle all they wanted to, and let those stuck-up Toronto boys grin like chessy-cats; but when Felicity laughed at him the iron entered into Peter's soul.

If the Story Girl laughed at Peter the mills of the gods ground out his revenge for him in mid-afternoon. Felicity, having used up all the available cooking materials in the house, had to stop perforce; and she now determined to stuff two new pincushions she

had been making for her room. We heard her rummaging in the pantry as we sat on the cool, spruce-shadowed cellar door outside, where Uncle Roger was showing us how to make elderberry pop-guns. Presently she came out, frowning.

"Cecily, do you know where mother put the sawdust she emptied out of that old beaded pincushion of Grandmother King's, after she had sifted the needles out of it? I thought it was in the tin box."

"So it is," said Cecily.

"It isn't. There isn't a speck of sawdust in that box."

The Story Girl's face wore a quite indescribable expression, compound of horror and shame. She need not have confessed. If she had but held her tongue the mystery of the sawdust's disappearance might have forever remained a mystery. She WOULD have held her tongue, as she afterwards confided to me, if it had not been for a horrible fear which flashed into her mind that possibly sawdust puddings were not healthy for people to eat--especially if there might be needles in them--and that if any mischief had been done in that direction it was her duty to undo it if possible at any cost of ridicule to herself.

"Oh, Felicity," she said, her voice expressing a very anguish of

humiliation, "I--I--thought that stuff in the box was cornmeal and used it to make the pudding."

Felicity and Cecily stared blankly at the Story Girl. We boys began to laugh, but were checked midway by Uncle Roger. He was rocking himself back and forth, with his hand pressed against his stomach.

"Oh," he groaned, "I've been wondering what these sharp pains I've been feeling ever since dinner meant. I know now. I must have swallowed a needle--several needles, perhaps. I'm done for!"

The poor Story Girl went very white.

"Oh, Uncle Roger, could it be possible? You COULDN'T have swallowed a needle without knowing it. It would have stuck in your tongue or teeth."

"I didn't chew the pudding," groaned Uncle Roger. "It was too tough--I just swallowed the chunks whole."

He groaned and twisted and doubled himself up. But he overdid it. He was not as good an actor as the Story Girl. Felicity looked scornfully at him.

"Uncle Roger, you are not one bit sick," she said deliberately.

"You are just putting on."

"Felicity, if I die from the effects of eating sawdust pudding, flavoured with needles, you'll be sorry you ever said such a thing to your poor old uncle," said Uncle Roger reproachfully.

"Even if there were no needles in it, sixty-year-old sawdust can't be good for my tummy. I daresay it wasn't even clean."

"Well, you know every one has to eat a peck of dirt in his life," giggled Felicity.

"But nobody has to eat it all at once," retorted Uncle Roger, with another groan. "Oh, Sara Stanley, it's a thankful man I am that your Aunt Olivia is to be home to-night. You'd have me kilt entirely by another day. I believe you did it on purpose to have a story to tell."

Uncle Roger hobbled off to the barn, still holding on to his stomach.

"Do you think he really feels sick?" asked the Story Girl anxiously.

"No, I don't," said Felicity. "You needn't worry over him.

There's nothing the matter with him. I don't believe there were

any needles in that sawdust. Mother sifted it very carefully."

"I know a story about a man whose son swallowed a mouse," said the Story Girl, who would probably have known a story and tried to tell it if she were being led to the stake. "And he ran and wakened up a very tired doctor just as he had got to sleep.

"'Oh, doctor, my son has swallowed a mouse,' he cried. 'What shall I do?'

"'Tell him to swallow a cat,' roared the poor doctor, and slammed his door.

"Now, if Uncle Roger has swallowed any needles, maybe it would make it all right if he swallowed a pincushion."

We all laughed. But Felicity soon grew sober.

"It seems awful to think of eating a sawdust pudding. How on earth did you make such a mistake?"

"It looked just like cornmeal," said the Story Girl, going from white to red in her shame. "Well, I'm going to give up trying to cook, and stick to things I can do. And if ever one of you mentions sawdust pudding to me I'll never tell you another story as long as I live."

The threat was effectual. Never did we mention that unholy pudding. But the Story Girl could not so impose silence on the grown-ups, especially Uncle Roger. He tormented her for the rest of the summer. Never a breakfast did he sit down to, without gravely inquiring if they were sure there was no sawdust in the porridge. Not a tweak of rheumatism did he feel but he vowed it was due to a needle, travelling about his body. And Aunt Olivia was warned to label all the pincushions in the house. "Contents, sawdust; not intended for puddings."