

A NOVEL DINNER.

Did you get all the things down to the forks, Amos?

Amos Beeman started uneasily. The beans on the broad blade of the steel knife, unceremoniously arrested in their ascent, spilled over into his plate.

'Why, yes, I reckon so, 'Thusy—I reckon so,' he answered. 'I calculated to fetch them all, sure, this time. There was just a handful of them. I counted them off on my fingers so's not to miss anything.'

He held up one of his big, hairy hands regarded it speculatively. The second finger was not there, and the vacant place in the row suggested a possible difficulty. Amos looked at Mrs. Arethusa across the castor-bottles. Her round face bore a look of patient resignation. She stirred her tea and took a sip.

'You got the wrong hand again, Amos,' she said, mildly. 'There were five things. You don't tell, 'Thusy! Well, then, I skipped one certain. Aint that too bad? It was a mighty unfortunate dispensation that chopped off that finger, and I reckon I'm going to get into scrapes on account of it till the end of time. I can never seem to recollect to count things on 't'other hand.'

'Your recollecting machinery always was just a little in need of oiling, you know, Amos,' Mrs. Arethusa remarked, quietly.

Amos fortified himself with several mouthfuls of beans and visibly brightened. 'But I got the prunes, 'Thusy, that you were 'specially banking for—'

'The prunes?' 'Yes; they're out under the wagon seat. But Si Walker said they hadn't any stoned less ones—hadn't ever had any, nor ever heard of them. I told him I guessed you made a mistake. You thought you saw them advertised in the weekly.'

Arethusa Beeman suddenly began to laugh. 'He moved back her chair a little way to give herself more room.'

'Amos Azariah Beeman, if you aint the entertainingest man I ever saw!' she gasped, between the convulsions of her ample figure. 'You do beat all! What do you s'pose Si Walker thinks of my sending after prunes without stones in them?'

Amos smiled weakly in sympathy. 'Well, I thought it was a little queerish myself, 'Thusy, but I tried to suit you.'

'I've never made my Thanksgiving plum puddings with prunes in them yet,' Mrs. Arethusa chuckled. 'I've been accustomed to use raisins—'

'Oh! Why, yes.'

Mrs. Arethusa moved up to the table again and ladled out a generous saucerful of boiled rice, piling it high with sugar. 'Have some more tea, Amos, do!' she urged, forgivingly. 'You've no need to fret over the prunes. They'll do for sauce and I guess I can stave a few raisins.'

'I'll help you, 'Thusy—I don't forget it.' His good-natured face looked quite crestfallen. The constant hitches in his 'recollecting machinery' and his absent-mindedness were sources of unfeigned mortification to him. Fortunately for his wife, they possessed a certain power of entertainment that compensated largely for her trials on account of them. Moreover, Mrs. Arethusa was very fond of Amos.

She went about her dishwashing after dinner with the remnants of the laugh still lurking in her pleasant gray eyes and radiating little wrinkles from their corners.

'I don't know what Amos'll be doing next,' she said aloud to herself. 'He does beat all the way he goes on! When was it—day before yesterday?—no, day before that—came in right after dinner with the milk-pail half-full of milk. He looked real distressed and put out. Amos sets great store by this last cow. 'Thusy, he said, said he, 'I'm dreadful afraid she's drying up! Just look at that for a mess of milk, will you? And I had hard work to get that! I was considerably taken back till it came over me how it was. Well, Amos, I said, 'I don't know I blame her much. I don't know's any well-regulated cow would want to be milked at high noon! And Amos gave one look at the clock and another one at me, and then set down on the sofa and looked at a crack in the floor. He said afterward he guessed 'twas because we had sponge-cake for dinner, and it reminded him of supper.'

Mrs. Arethusa wiped the plates cautiously and put them away.

'Amos is the entertainingest man!' she said.

It was her habit to talk to herself over her work. 'Let her out,' she said, when she could not find the heart to banter Amos. And not for worlds would Mrs. Arethusa Beeman have talked over his shortcomings with the neighbors. So she made a confidante of herself, and had many a hearty laugh, and perhaps also a few as hearty sighs, over Amos's latest 'ways' as she moved about among her pans and dishes.

To-day, however, there was too much to do to stop long to laugh. There were the raisins to stone and the currants to sort for the big plum pudding. Thanksgiving was only four days away, and Mrs. Arethusa's orderly soul allowed no hurrying and flurrying at the last minute. Her puddings were always ready at least two days ahead of time, and tasted all the better for it, too.

'I'll put in an extra handful of plums for little Emmie and the Dimples. They're master hands for plums, both of them. Children mostly are, I reckon.'

For Eben's folks were coming over to Thanksgiving this year for the first time for several seasons. They had only moved back to Forks Village within the year.

'I declare, I forgot to ask Amos if he called and invited them! I'm afraid he didn't,' Mrs. Arethusa exclaimed, dripping a plum raisin over the water-cup preparatory to its stoning. She wiped her fingers on her apron and hurried to the door.

'Amos! Amos! Amos!' she called.

'Here I be, 'Thusy! Here I be! What-wanted?' came back faintly from the grain house beyond the shed.

Mrs. Arethusa raised her voice to quivering shrillness; 'Did you stop at Eben's and ask them over for Thanksgiving?'

Amos's grizzled head appeared in the doorway. 'I did, 'Thusy, sure.'

Mrs. Arethusa breathed a sigh of relief and went back to her plums. There had been a good deal of doubt in her mind.

'Well, that's all right,' she said, contentedly. 'And of course they'll come, bless their hearts, big and little and in-between! They shall have the best meal I can cook for them! But I do hope Amos said things straight, just as I told him, so's not to have any misunderstanding. He's

a master man for mixing things, Amos is.' Then she added hastily, as she usually did to her self-communings about Amos, 'But I like him.'

He came in presently, rubbing his hands together. 'It's growing cold,' he remarked, 'and looks like snow, too. We'll have sledding for Thanksgiving after all, I guess, 'Thusy. There, I'll take hold and help you with the raisins.'

'What did Eben's folks say?' 'Eben's folks? Oh, yes; now what was it Emmeline said? He ran his fingers through his hair thoughtfully. 'Oh! Emmeline didn't say anything, that was it. She's sick abed. I saw Eben, and he said—Eben said—'

'Emeline sick abed, and you never told me, Amos Beeman!'

'I forgot to, 'Thusy—for a fact I did. I forgot it till this minute. And I tied a pink string on me somewhere, too, a purpose not to forget!'

'Where's the string?' Amos ruffled his hair wildly. 'Aint the least idea. I tied it on somewhere as sure's I'm sitting in this chair.'

'Maybe you tied it round that missing finger,' Mrs. Arethusa said, with mild sarcasm.

But Amos's bewildered face aroused her ready pity. She reached across the kitchen-table and patted his arm gently. 'There Amos don't you fret. You aint really responsible. There's enough sight worse things than forgetting, in the world. Just you tell me about Emmeline, now. What's the matter?'

'Sciatica, Eben says. Yes, I know 'twas sciatica, unless 'twas the phthisic.'

'Sciatica, I guess. Emmeline aint subject to the phthisic. Is she real sick, Amos?'

'Well, she can't sit up, so that's the end of their coming to Thanksgiving.'

'Aint that too bad? Now aint that too bad, Amos? Poor Mrs. Arethusa's face clouded over dimly. She took out the extra handful of plums for the Dimples and little Emmie, and carried it back into the pantry.

'I guess we'll finish stoning the raising tomorrow,' she said. 'I feel real tired now.'

Amos washed his hands and went into the sitting-room. In a few minutes he put his head in at the kitchen door again and said, cheerfully, 'We might have the young fry over to dinner, 'Thusy. I could fetch 'em over in the morning and back at night.'

'Why, so we might! Amos Beeman, you're a genius! And it would be a real treat to Eben and Emmeline, too.'

But it was decided not to say anything about the plan until Thanksgiving morning, to prevent all possibility of disappointing the children. Something might happen, of course.

Amos followed his good-humored face through the door, edging in sideways after an original fashion of his own.

'How many of them are there, 'Thusy?' he questioned, going back to his chair by the table.

'What—children?' Mrs. Arethusa wheeled about from the sink and faced him. Was there ever a man before who didn't know how many grandchildren he had? And when she had taken such pains to keep Amos informed, too, and drilled him in all the little names and childish peculiarities, from young Eben's twin crowns on top of his curly head to the bewitching little 'cracker-pricks' that gave a name to the Dimples!

She had been all over them again and again, and Grandfather Amos has learned them by heart, apparently. He loved the grandbabies heartily, but he would forget about them, to Mrs. Arethusa's keen distress.

To him all children looked very much alike, he averred, and as for numbers, how could anybody count them when they never kept still, and were always getting mixed up together? Sometimes there would be eleven, it seemed, and then again only five or six!

Mrs. Arethusa turned back to her dishpan. 'But I like him,' she murmured. 'I like him just as he is.' She watched the knives and rain-pans and set them on the drain.

'There are five of them, Amos; don't you remember?' she said, quietly. 'There's Eben Junior and Mary Catherine—she's named for Emmeline's great-aunt—that brought her up—and little Emmie—she's got blue eyes and straight hair—and Amos Azariah—brown eyes, curly hair, named after you—and the Dimples. She's the baby, with all the dimples and a pug nose.'

Amos listened attentively, checking off the names on his outspread fingers. Fortunately he chose the right hand, and the fingers sufficed.

'Why, yes, so there are—five. Eben and Mary and Emmie and the Dimples—' He paused in doubt.

'And Amos Azariah.' He went off with a pleased face, still saying his lesson.

Thanksgiving day came, ushered in by a bright sunrising as anyone could wish. The snow lay, crisp and speckless, in the earth's lap. Chickadees swung on the bare apple-tree boughs and twittered as merrily as if it were summer. Beyond the grain-house, in a roomy barn-yard, the hens were out in force and scuttled about, lifting their feet gingerly and leaving little finely pencilled tracks in the snow.

Amos was up early, getting down the old red rug and oiling the harness. His face shone with thanksgiving. Now and then he stopped work to listen to the chickadee chorus in the trees round the corner of the wood-shed. He was thinking what a beautiful world it was; and his plain, upright soul sang a Thanksgiving song of its own.

'I wish we could help them, Amos,' said Mrs. Arethusa with a pitying sigh. 'There don't seem to be any poor folks at the Forks.'

'Well, no, there don't. 'Thusy. But now I think of it, I saw some dreadful hungry, peaked-looking children over there the other day. I gave them that bag of soda cracker I got at the store—that's where it went to! I haven't remembered till this identical minute, but I know I bought them all right.'

Mrs. Arethusa's knife and fork dropped with a subdued clatter. 'Where do they live, Amos? Can't we send them something today?'

Amos threaded his hair with his fingers reflectively. Then he brightened. 'Oh, yes—that's it. They live close by Eben's folks, in the old Higgins house. I saw them playing in the yard. They had the pindlingest faces you ever saw, 'Thusy. I don't believe the little creatures ever had

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a whole meal of victuals at once in their lives!

Mrs. Arethusa went to the pantry and brought out the chicken-pie.

Indoors, Mrs. Arethusa bustled about the kitchen, getting breakfast. Her soul, too, was full of the joy and thankfulness in the world outside the windows.

But she was very busy. The puddings and pies and cakes were ranged invitingly along the lower pantry shelves, and the turkey, flanked on either side by chicken-pie and spareribs, sat in proud state on the kneading bread. She rearranged them at every trip into the pantry, and looked at them with satisfied content. How the children would enjoy them!

Emmie should dish out the cranberry-sauce—she was such a careful little woman, Little Amos should sit next to big Amos, and the Dimples next to grandma herself, in the black walnut high chair up in the attic. She must go up and bring it down right after breakfast. The dictionary, in a common chair, would boost up little Amos enough. So she went on planning till Amos came in for breakfast.

As they sat looking into each other's pleasant faces across the big, old-fashioned castor, they talked over their reasons for being thankful, and felt to pitying the great masses of unthankful, poverty-stricken souls in the land.

'We don't need it, Amos,' she said, 'and I'll pack a basket of other things, too. I want you to leave them at the Higgins house. Now don't forget it, Amos! she implored.'

'No, 'Thusy. I won't eat any Thanksgiving dinner myself if I mean the good to eat for once in their lives.' Amos registered the vow with solemn strokes of his knife against his plate.

'I just recollected,' he continued, 'who they are. I asked Si Walker about them. Their pa's in the hospital with something incurable, and their mages out washing and choring. They haven't lived in these parts long.'

After breakfast the pung jingled up to the back door, and the chicken-pie and basket were stowed away in it, with plenty of robes and wrapping for Eben's children. Mrs. Arethusa stood watching till the crunching of the rusty runners grew faint in the distance. She set the table, and tended the cooking turkey and bubbling pots with great care.

Back and forth from pantry to table and from stove to sink she travelled tirelessly. By a quarter before eleven o'clock everything was ready, even to little Amos's boasting dictionary and the quaint besprigged pinafore on the Dimples' high chair, and she sat resting and listening by the window. There they were; no; that was the Gaieties going by, down to Elnathan's to dinner.

Her peaceful mind would have been sadly ruffled if she could have known of the countless depths of abstraction into which Amos had plunged on his towardward way. Just one of his old absent-minded fits; but to attack him, Arethusa rocked on Thanksgiving day! Mrs. Arethusa! There! that was old Dolly's step in the squeaking snow and she could hear the children's clatter.

She hurried to the door with outstretched arms. 'Bless the dear little souls! Grandma's delighted glad to see them—' she cried, cheerily. Then she started back in consternation as the pung of tow-headed little folks emptied itself before her.

'Amos Azariah Beeman!' she ejaculated. 'O Amos Azariah Beeman!'

Amos turned inquiringly. 'Well, 'Thusy—why, 'Thusy? He hurried toward her. 'What's it? Aint there five of them 'Thusy? I counted five for sure. You said there was five!'

The children stood about bewildered, sucking their little cold fingers. One of them began to cry. Mrs. Arethusa's warm heart expanded instantly. She threw open the door wide and hustled them in.

'You go right in and get warmed up,' she said, kindly. Then she closed the door and stood outside. 'Amos,' she said, 'you've been and brought the wrong children! These must be the hungry-faced children that live next to Eben's.'

Her voice vibrated indignantly until she read the misery on poor Amos's countenance. With a sudden impulse, then, she began to laugh.

'Well, if you aint the entertainingest man, Amos Beeman! If you don't beat all!'

Through the window she saw the children staring eagerly at the loaded table. Their thin little faces looked sharp with desire.

'Poor little things!' Mrs. Arethusa murmured. 'They shall eat the whole tableful if they want to.'

'I guess it's the Lord's doing, Amos,' she said, raising her voice. 'I guess it's all right. You put up Dolly and come straight in. I'll dish up dinner. These children are starving to death. We'll

make it all up to our children Christmas. Aint it lucky they weren't expecting to come!'

The dinner was a grand success. The five little towheads bobbed ecstatically over five heaped-up plates that were emptied and filled again astonishingly often. In a world of Thanksgiving dinners, there could scarcely have been one more thoroughly appreciated and eaten up! And Mrs. Arethusa exclaimed more than once under her breath, 'It was the Lord's doings!'

Amos's puzzled, troubled face smoothed out and beamed benevolently about him. There was little need of his sacrificing his own dinner to keep his vow of the early morning, and he ate with relish, in the brief intervals of serving the five hungry little guests.

But one mystery was never cleared up. Mrs. Arethusa failed ever to discover the fate of her chicken-pie. It had vanished from Amos's memory as completely as from the bottom of the old red pung—Annie Hamilton Donnell, in Youth's Companion.

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Bridgetown, Dec. 14, by Rev. F. P. Greatorex, Henry S. Jones, to Topsy S. James.

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Barrington, N. S., Dec. 9, by Rev. James Billington, Nehemiah Kendrick, to Gretchen Crowell.

Clarks Harbor, Dec. 3, by Rev. A. M. McIntosh, Ossey M. Nickerson to Winifred Raymond.

Smithtown, N. B. Dec. 9, by Rev. G. M. Young, Benjamin K. Nowell, to George E. Nowell.

DIED.