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DELICIE'S PIE.

Delcie was 11 years old. 'Old enough to do half her mother's work,' said old Mrs. Peters, across the way; but then, old Mrs. Peters always thought everybody lazy but herself.

'Old enough to stop racing and romping like a great Tomboy,' said prim Miss Henderson in the cottage at the south end of the garden; but then, Miss Henderson, from thinking children should be seen and not heard, had come to believe they should neither be seen nor heard, unless they were wanted to do errands and 'save steps.'

To be sure, Delcie did wipe dishes and set the table, and take care of her own room, but she hated it cordially. Her mother would never let her dust the china ornaments in the parlor, or help her frost cake, or make jelly, and Delcie felt rather abused at always having little every day bits of the house work turned over to her. She was burning to distinguish herself in some of the higher branches, and she was sure she could if only her mother would let her try.

But today house work took on an added charm, for her mother was obliged to leave home and the little girl was to stay alone all day and keep house. Early in the forenoon, just after the dishes were washed, and the beds made, and the kitchen swept, and the sitting room dusted and made dark again, and Delcie's mother had thanked goodness that there was neither washing nor ironing nor baking to be done, and she guessed she should get time to take a stitch or two on Delcie's new green and whiteingham dress, and if she didn't get it done pretty soon, what the child would have to wear was more than she knew. 'There comes a team,' called Delcie from the kitchen window, where she was watering the morning glories and horseshoe geraniums.

'It's Mr. Kendall from the Corners, and he's coming here, too,' said she a moment later.

'Then something has happened over to Aunt Roxy's,' said her mother, stepping quickly to the door to greet the middle aged farmer who drove into the yard and halted.

'Good mornin' Mis' Adams,' said he, 'what's the good word with you?' 'Oh we are all tolerably well,' said she; 'won't you come in, and how's all the folks over to the Corners? We didn't go over to meetin' Sunday, it rained so in the mornin'.'

'Can't stop,' said he in reply to her first question, and to the second: 'We're all well but your Aunt Roxy. She fell down the sular stairs this mornin' and broke her leg.'

'What in the world did she want to do that for?' said Mrs. Adams sharply.

A slow grin broke over the man's face.

'Wall, I dunno as she really did want to, but anyhow, she's done it, and got a summer's job on't, too, I reckon. Aunt Roxy ain't so young as she was once, and she ain't never goin' to be, nuther. And such a job as Philo Thompson and I had a gittin' her up stairs and onto the bed, you never see; Aunt Roxy's pooty hefty, ye know. My wife, she's over

there, and Uncle David he's gone after old Dr. Carrier, and they told me to hitch up and come after you. John's wife can't git there till night, nohow, Philo he's gone after her, and they'll take it kindly if you'll come over and stay till he gets back with her.'

'Well, now, I'm real concerned,' said Mrs. Adams. 'Of course I'll go, though I don't know how, noway; but of course, bein' it's Aunt Roxy, I feel called upon.'

She already had her apron off, and hung upon a nail behind the kitchen door, and finished her speech with her head in the bedroom closet, and her voice raised to be audible to the waiting farmer at the door.

'Do me up a clean apron,' she called to Delcie, 'and get my shawl out of the top drawer in the front chamber bureau, and my parasol, too, and don't break the handle off comin' down stairs. I'll jest slip on my indigo blue calico. I shall have dinner to get I suppose, and in less time than one would think the good woman was ready for her drive to the Corners.'

'Now, Delcie,' said she, as she settled her dress and opened her parasol, 'do be careful and do just as I have told you. You need not kindle a fire all day; there is plenty of cold meat and bread and butter for your dinner. Set the table for supper and I shall be home in time to build a stick fire and make a cup for your father and the boys. If you see a tramp coming down the road lock the doors. I shall worry all day, but if Aunt Roxy should choose this day to fall down stairs and break her leg, I don't see what I can do but go over and stay till John's wife comes. If your father had known it he wouldn't have taken both the boys down into the far lot to work, but it can't be helped now; and by this time Mr Kendall had convinced his steed that it was time to jog homeward, and the wagon rolled away down the read.

Delcie stood looking after it a minute and then went into the house. How quiet and lonely everything seemed; she would have felt a little afraid had it not been for her new fledged importance as housekeeper.

And now what should she do with her long day? It seemed very tame just to go into the pantry and get her own lunch of cold meat and bread and butter, and then set the supper table in just the every day fashion.

If only her mother had not told her she must not make a fire, she should have so liked to cook something. Not that she had ever cooked anything, but she was sure she could; cooking always looked easy when she watched her mother. To be sure there was the prohibition about the fire, but if she made something nice for tea, perhaps her mother would not mind it.

Suddenly a bright thought struck her; she would make a ripe currant pie. She knew just how, for she had heard her mother tell a neighbor only the day before.

'One egg, a cup of sugar and a cup of ripe currants, well beaten together, and baked with crusts, and I haven't had time to make one this year, for all we are so fond of them,' her mother had said.

That sounded easy enough, Delcie thought. But there was the crust; she had a vague idea that pie crust was compounded of flour and water, lard or butter, and she knew that the water must be cold for her mother was very particular about having it drawn from the depths of the well, but about the proportions she knew nothing. She would run down the garden and ask Miss Henderson. She tossed on her hat, and shutting the door carefully behind the hollyhocks, and knocked at Miss Henderson's back door.

'Please, Miss Henderson,' she began, 'mother has gone away, and will you tell me how to make pie crust? I want—' but Miss Henderson held up her hands in such horrified amazement that Delcie stopped.

'Don't tell me Delcie Maria Adams that your mother has gone off and left you to look after things. Don't you dare to meddle with the flour or lard, nor anything, till your mother gets back, but do you go and sit on the door step and sew your seam, and I'll be up by and by and see that you're not up to any mischief. I think it a real temptin' o' providence,' but by this time Delcie was half-way back behind the hollyhook hedge.

'Hateful old thing,' she said to herself as she paused on the door step. 'She won't find me sewing any seam, I can tell her. I will go over and ask old Mrs. Peters, and she started off again across

the road this time, through a little white gate and down a narrow path, bordered on each side with grass pinks and camomile.

Old Mrs Peters was sweeping off the back porch. 'Please Mrs. Peters,' began Delcie once more, 'mother has gone away, and can you tell me how to make pie crust? I want—' but she got no farther, for Mrs. Peters' look of amazement exceeded, if possible, that of Miss Henderson.

'Don't tell me, Delcie Maria Adams that a great girl like you don't know how to make pie crust! When I was your age I could cook anything, and took the prize for brown bread, a silver plated mug gold lined, and it's on the mantle-tree now. It does beat all how shiftless girls are brought up nowadays,' but just here the gate closed with an indignant bang.

'Where's your mother gone?' screamed Mrs. Peters, but Delcie did not answer. She threw herself into the big rocking chair in her mother's kitchen, and scolded vigorously to herself.

'She's worse than Miss Henderson, but I'll make a currant pie now, see if I don't, and first of all I'll go and pick the currants.'

This was soon accomplished, although it took more than Delcie supposed to fill a cup after they were stripped from the stems; in fact, she had to pay a second visit to the bushes to get enough. Then she pressed them into a big yellow bowl with blue and white stripes around it, broke an egg over them, after dropping one on the clean pantry floor, added a cup of sugar and began to stir. It did not mix as smoothly as her mother's, owing to the fact that the egg was not beaten before it went in, but she stirred the mass together as well as she could, although the bowl was hard to manage, and she spilled a part of the contents over the cooking shelf, and her apron.

Then came that dreadful crust. She dipped out a liberal quantity of flour, added a portion of lard 'by guess' and poured in some water. It did not work to her satisfaction; it was altogether too moist; an English cook would have told her that she had 'put out the miller's eye.' She added more flour, and worked away courageously. It was a long while before she could roll it out, and then she was dismayed by the quantity of it. But Delcie was blessed with a happy disposition, and she consoled herself by thinking 'perhaps mother could use it.' She covered her plate with a thick and ragged crust, poured in her currants, and after various mishaps succeeded in getting it covered and into the oven.

Then she bethought herself of the fire, and recalled the fact that her mother's pies were always placed in a hot oven.

'But I don't see what possible difference it can make,' soliloquized Delcie. I believe it would be a great improve-

ment to get the mixing all done, and the things all in the oven, and then make up a good fire, and bake them all up and done with it. I'm going to try it anyway. My teacher says if everybody did just as his forefathers did, there never would be any improvements or inventions, and if my foremothers all built their fires first and put their pies in the oven afterwards I'm going to do the other way.'

It was great fun to see the flames curl up around the nice white chips which she could pick up in such profusion around the chopping block, but all the while she had a secret consciousness that she was doing a forbidden thing. The fire blazed merrily, and Delcie closed the oven damper, as she had often done for her mother, filled the stove with wood, and bethought herself of her lunch.

The sight of the dishes she had used about her baking did not improve her appetite, and she knew that she must wash them, and return them to their places. This was a part of housekeeping Delcie was quite familiar with, and at last the pantry was restored to its accustomed order, though she could not help thinking there were more dishes to wash after that one pie than her mother would have used for the big Saturday baking.

At last she felt at liberty to run out of doors and play, but first she thought she would take a peep at her pie. Alas! instead of the brown and toothsome delicacy she expected to see, she opened the oven door upon a blackened and ruined mass. The burned juice covered the oven floor, and a pungent and bitter smoke poured out into her face. She hastily closed the oven door upon the

dreadful wreck, and ran out of doors. Down the garden she sped, never stopping till she reached her favorite retreat amid the boughs of a wide spreading apple tree whose low branches she could easily mount. When she was comfortably ensconced in her own especial place where one limb made a seat and another was just right for her back, she gave way to tears, free and hot.

But such violent emotion would not last long, and presently Delcie sat up and pushed her wet hair out of her eyes. Then she remembered that she had not shut the door, and who knew but that dreadful tramp of whom her mother had warned her would make his appearance? She did not much care if he did: in fact she rather hoped he would come and carry off the pie with him, and then she laughed at herself for even supposing that a tramp could taste that horrible thing. She would never go near it again—never, never.

By and by she saw Miss Henderson go up through the garden to pay her promised visit. The little girl sat still, though the lady called, 'Delcie,' and at last stepped into the kitchen. 'What if she should find that pie?' said Delcie to herself. 'If she smells the smoke she will certainly open the oven door and then!—she does I will jump over the back fence and run straight to Catamount hill and never come back again.' But apparently Miss Henderson did not find the pie, for in a moment or two she came out of doors and went home.

At last the gathering shadows warned the unhappy girl that it was time to go in and set the supper table, and she slowly descended from her perch. She did not go near the stove, and after everything was in readiness, she went out to the gate to wait and watch. At last her father and her two tall brothers came up the road.

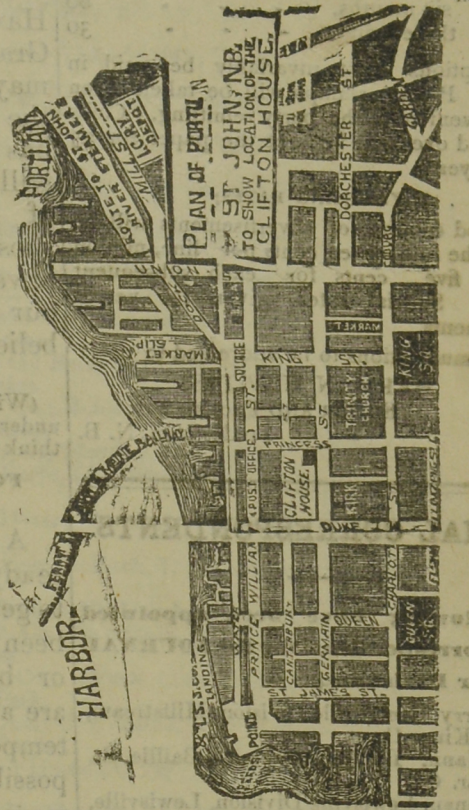
'Well, little woman,' said her father, 'where's the mother, and is supper ready?' Delcie explained, but before her story was finished, the wagon containing her mother drove up.

'Well, I declare, father,' began the good woman, as divested of shawl and bonnet she tied on a long apron and bustled about with her kindlings and tea kettle. 'I thought I should have been here first, but I'll have a cup of tea for you in a few minutes. And I shall be glad of one myself. I have hardly stopped to take a bite all day. I turned to and baked, the first thing I did; a good long row of pies, and a couple o' loaves o' cake and some gingerbread and fried a batch o' doughnuts. I thought John's wife would have her hands full and it would be some comfort to see a full cupboard, and 'twas Aunt Roxy's baking day anyway. I guess the old lady's in for a long siege. I'll just clap this pan o' beans into the oven to warm,' and suiting the action to the word she opened the oven door. Delcie wished the floor would open too, but it didn't.

'Delcie Maria Adams!' exclaimed her mother, turning round upon the culprit. Poor Delcie! this was the third time on this unhappy day that she had been called by her full name. It was more than she could bear; she burst into tears, and tried to sob out a confession amid the questions of her mother, and the laughter of her brothers. Her father drew her into the shelter of his strong arms, and hid her burning face upon his shoulder.

'Never mind, my dear,' said he soothingly, 'only ask mother next time you want to cook, and you shall mess to your heart's content. My mother was a famous cook, and I shall be glad to have my little daughter like her. I have her old recipe book in her own handwriting, and some day you shall have it. She could make wonderful riz cake, such as you can't get nowadays for love, to say nothing of money, and she was a master hand at punkin sauce, which everybody has forgotten how to make in these days of canned stuff and fancy kickshaws. And you shall learn to make 'em too.' And Delcie did.

'I want a bow,' said a lady to a clerk in a dry goods store. The clerk, wishing to do something smart, drew himself up and said: 'I'm at your service, ma'am.' Yes, 'said the lady, eyeing him disapprovingly, 'but I want a white, not a green one.' The clerk went to measuring tape immediately.



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