

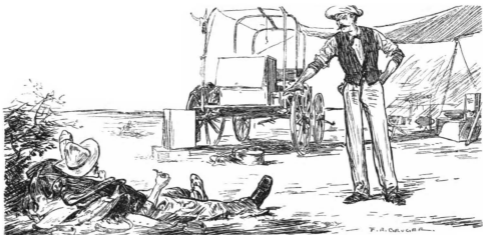
McCLURE'S MAGAZINE

Contents for December, 1903

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THE PIMIENTA PANCAKES

BY

O. HENRY

ILLUSTRATED BY FREDERIC R. GRUGER

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 Odom, the camp cook. Jud was a monologist by nature, whom Destiny, with customary blundering, had set in a profession wherein he was be-reaved, for the greater portion of his time, of an audience.

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

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 ante-

lope 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 upon 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 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 untie 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 Cañada 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 baaed or grunted or been in peck measures. So, I gets on my bronc and pushes the wind for Uncle Emsley Telfair's



"AN IMPORTED GIRL WITH FIXINGS ON"

store at the Pimienta Crossing on the Nueces.

"About three in the afternoon I threw 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 of me, with Uncle Emsley busy chopping away with the hatchet at the yellow clings. I was feeling like Adam before the apple stampede, and was 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 'em 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 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.



“‘AFTERNOON!’ SAYS I TO HIM”

“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 Cañada.’

“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 bronc’s ear, ‘with Birdstone Jack, the hired mule from Sheep Man’s Cañada. Did you get that, old Leather-and-Gallops?’

“That bronc 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 of 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 cownmen. 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 stewpot 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 bronc.

“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 a 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.’

“‘Ah,’ says he, just like that—‘Ah, I’m glad to know you, Mr. Judson. I’m Jackson Bird, from over at Mired Mule Ranch.’

“‘Just then one of my eyes saw a road-runner skipping down the hill with a young tarantula in his bill,’ and the other eye noticed a rabbit-hawk sitting on a dead limb in a water-elm. I popped over one after the other with my forty-five, just to show him. ‘Two out of three,’ says I. ‘Birds just naturally seem to draw my fire wherever I go.’

“‘Nice shooting,’ says the sheep man, without a flutter. ‘But don’t you sometimes ever miss the third shot? Elegant fine rain that was last week for the young grass, don’t you think, Mr. Judson?’ says he.

“‘Willie,’ says I, riding over close to his palfrey, ‘your infatuated parents may have denounced you by the name of Jackson, but you sure molted into a twittering Willie—let us slough off this here analysis of rain and the elements, and get down to talk that is outside the vocabulary of parrots. That is a bad habit you have got of riuing with young ladies over at Pimienta. I’ve known birds,’ says I, ‘to be served on toast for less than that. Miss Willlella,’ says I, ‘don’t ever want any nest made out of sheep’s wool by a tomitit of the Jacksonian branch of ornithology. Now, are you going to quit, or do you wish for to gallop up against this Dead-Moral-Certainty attachment to my name, which is good for two hyphens and at least one set of funeral obsequies?’

“‘Jackson Bird flushed up some, and then he laughed.

“‘Why, Mr. Judson,’ says he, ‘you’ve got the wrong idea. I’ve called on Miss Learight a few times; but not for the purpose you imagine. My object is purely a gastronomical one.’

“‘I reached for my gun.

“‘Any coyote,’ says I, ‘that would boast of dishonorable—’

“‘Wait a minute,’ says this Bird, ‘till I explain. What would I do with a wife? If you ever saw that ranch of mine! I do my own cooking and mending. Eating—that’s all the pleasure I get out of sheep raising. Mr. Judson, did you ever taste the pancakes that Miss Learight makes?’

“‘Me? No,’ I told him. ‘I never was advised that she was up to any culinary manœuvres.’

“‘They’re golden sunshine,’ says he; ‘honey-browned by the ambrosial fires of Epicurus. I’d give two years of my life to get the recipe for making them pancakes. That’s what I went to see Miss Learight for,’ says Jackson Bird, ‘but I haven’t been able to get it from her. It’s an old recipe that’s been in the family for seventy-five years. They hand it down from one generation to another, but they don’t give it away to outsiders. If I could get that recipe, so I could make them pancakes for myself on my ranch, I’d be a happy man,’ says Bird.

“‘Are you sure,’ I says to him, ‘that it ain’t the hand that mixes the pancakes that you’re after?’

“‘Sure,’ says Jackson. ‘Miss Learight is a mighty nice girl, but I can assure you my intentions go no further than the gastro—’ but he seen my hand going down to my holster and he changed his similitude—‘than the desire to procure a copy of the pancake recipe,’ he finishes.

“‘You ain’t such a bad little man,’ says I, trying to be fair. ‘I was thinking some of making orphans of your sheep, but I’ll let you fly away this time. But you stick to pancakes,’ says I, ‘as close as the middle one of a stack; and don’t go and mistake sentiments for syrup, or there’ll be singing at your ranch, and you won’t hear it.’

“‘To convince you that I am sincere,’ says the sheep man, ‘I’ll ask you to help me. Miss Learight and you being closer friends, maybe she would do for you what she wouldn’t for me. If you will get me a copy of that pancake recipe, I give you my word that I’ll never call upon her again.’

“‘That’s fair,’ I says, and I shook hands with Jackson Bird. ‘I’ll get it for you if I can, and glad to oblige.’ And he turned off down the big pear flat on the Piedra, in the direction of Mired Mule; and I steered northwest for old Bill Toomey’s ranch.

.. It was five days afterward when I got another chance to ride over to Pimienta. Miss Willella and me passed a gratifying evening at Uncle Emsley's. She sang some, and exasperated the piano quite a lot with quotations from the operas. I gave imitations of a rattlesnake, and told her about Snaky McFee's new way of skinning cows, and described the trip I made to Saint Louis once. We was getting along in one another's estimations fine. Thinks I, if Jackson Bird can now be persuaded to migrate, I win. I recollect his promise about the pancake receipt, and I think I will persuade it

.. 'Pancake Avenue,' says I, with a wink, to show her that I was on about the family receipt, and couldn't be side-corralled off of the subject. 'Come, now, Miss Willella,' I says; 'let's hear how you make 'em. Pancakes is just whirling in my head like wagon wheels. Start her off, now—pound of flour, eight dozen eggs, and so on. How does the catalogue of constituents run?'

.. 'Excuse me for a moment, please,' says Miss Willella, and she gives me a quick kind of sideways look, and slides off the stool. She ambled out into the other room, and



.. 'PANCAKE AVENUE,' SAYS I, WITH A WINK..

from Miss Willella and give it to him; and then if I catches Birdie off of Mired Mule again, I'll make him hop the twig.

.. So, along about ten o'clock, I put on a wheedling smile and says to Miss Willella: 'Now, if there's anything I do like better than the sight of a red steer on green grass it's the taste of a nice hot pancake smothered in sugar-house molasses.'

.. Miss Willella gave a little jump on the piano stool, and looked at me curious.

.. 'Yes,' says she, 'they're real nice. What did you say was the name of that street in Saint Louis, Mr. Odom, where you lost your hat?'

directly Uncle Emsley comes in in his shirt sleeves, with a pitcher of water. He turns around to get a glass on the table, and I see a forty-five in his hip pocket. 'Great post-holes!' thinks I, 'but here's a family thinks a heap of cooking receipts, protecting it with firearms. I've known outfits that wouldn't do that much by a family feud.'

.. 'Drink this here down,' says Uncle Emsley, handing me the glass of water. 'You've rid too far to-day, Jud, and got yourself over-excited. Try to think about something else now.'

.. 'Do you know how to make them pancakes, Uncle Emsley?' I asked.



“DRINK THIS HEKE DOWN,” SAYS UNCLE EMSLEY”

“Well, I'm not as apprized in the anatomy of them as some,” says Uncle Emsley, “but I reckon you take a sifter of plaster of paris and a little dough and saleratus and corn meal, and mix 'em with eggs and buttermilk as usual. Is old Bill going to ship beeves to Kansas City again this spring, Jud?”

“That was all the pancake specifications I could get that night. I didn't wonder that Jackson Bird found it uphill work. So I dropped the subject and talked with Uncle Emsley a while about hollow-horn and cyclones. And then Miss Willella came and said ‘good night,’ and I hit the breeze for the ranch.”

“About a week afterwards, I met Jackson Bird riding out of Pimienta as I rode in, and we stopped in the road for a few frivolous remarks.

“Got the bill of particulars for them flapjacks yet?” I asked him.

“Well, no,” says Jackson. “I don't seem to have any success in getting hold of it. Did you try?”

“I did,” says I, “and 'twas like trying to dig a prairie dog out of his hole with a peanut hull. That pancake receipt must be a jookalorum, the way they hold on to it.”

“I'm most ready to give it up,” says Jackson, so discouraged in his pronunciations

that I felt sorry for him; “but I did want to know how to make them pancakes to eat on my lonely ranch,” says he. “I lie awake of nights thinking how good they are.”

“You keep on trying for it,” I tells him, “and I'll do the same. One of us is bound to get a rope over its horns before long. Well, so-long, Jackey.”

“You see, by this time we was on the peaceffullest of terms. When I saw that he wasn't after Miss Willella I had more endurable contemplations of that sand-haired snoozer. In order to help out the ambitions of his appetite I kept on trying to get that receipt from Miss Willella. But every time I would say ‘pancakes’ she would get sort of remote and fidgety about the eye, and try to change the subject. If I held her to it she would slide out and round up Uncle Emsley with his pitcher of water and hip-pocket howitzer.

“One day I galloped over to the store with a fine bunch of blue verbenas that I cut out of a herd of wild flowers over on Poisoned Dog Prairie. Uncle Emsley looked at 'em with one eye shut and says:

“Haven't ye heard the news?”

“Cattle up?” I asks.

“Willella and Jackson Bird was married in Palestine yesterday,” says he. “Just got a letter this morning.”

"I dropped them flowers in a cracker barrel, and let the news trickle in my ears and down toward my upper left-hand shirt pocket until it got to my feet.

"'Would you mind saying that over again once more, Uncle Emsley?' says I. 'Maybe my hearing has got wrong, and you only said that prime heifers was 4.80 on the hoof, or something like that.'

"'Married yesterday,' says Uncle Emsley, 'and gone to Waco and Niagara Falls on a wedding tour. Why, didn't you see none of the signs all along? Jackson Bird has been courting of Willella ever since that day he took her out riding.'

"'Then,' says I, in a kind of yell, 'what was all this zizzaparoola he give me about pancakes? Tell me *that*.'

"'When I said 'pancakes' Uncle Emsley sort of dodged and stepped back.

"'Somebody's been dealing me pancakes from the bottom of the deck,' I says, 'and I'll find out. I believe you know. Talk up,' says I, 'or we'll mix a panful of batter right here.'

"I slid over the counter after Uncle Emsley. He grabbed at his gun, but it was in a drawer, and he missed it two inches. I got him by the front of his shirt and shoved him in a corner.

"'Talk pancakes,' says I, 'or he made into one. Does Miss Willella make 'em?'

"'She never made one in her life and I never saw one,' says Uncle Emsley, soothing. 'Calm down now, Jud — calm down. You've got excited, and that wound in your head is contaminating your sense of intelligence. Try not to think about pancakes.'

"'Uncle Emsley,' says I, 'I'm not wounded in the head except so far as my natural cogitative instincts run to runts. Jackson Bird told me he was calling on Miss Willella for the purpose of finding out her system of producing pancakes, and he asked me to help him get the bill of lading of the ingredients. I done so, with the results as you see. Have I been sodded down with Johnson grass by a pink-eyed snoozer, or what?'

"'Slack up your grip on my dress shirt,' says Uncle Emsley, 'and I'll tell you. Yes, it looks like Jackson Bird has gone and humbugged you some. The day after he went riding with Willella, he came back and told me and her to watch out for you

whenever you got to talking about pancakes. He said you was in camp once where they was cooking flapjacks, and one of the fellows cut you over the head with a frying pan. Jackson said that whenever you got overhot or excited, that would hurt you and made you kind of crazy, and you went to raving about pancakes. He told us to just get you worked off of the subject and soothed down, and you wouldn't be dangerous. So, me and Willella done the best by you we knew how. Well, well,' says Uncle Emsley, 'that Jackson Bird is sure a seldom kind of a snoozer.'

During the progress of Jud's story he had been slowly but deftly combining certain portions of the contents of his sacks and cans. Toward the close of it he set before me the finished product — a pair of red-hot, rich-hued pancakes on a tin plate. From some secret hoarding place he also brought a lump of excellent butter and a bottle of golden syrup.

"'How long ago did these things happen?'" I asked him.

"'Three years,'" said Jud. "They're living on the Mired Mule Ranch now. But I haven't seen either of 'em since. They say Jackson Bird was fixing his ranch up fine with rocking chairs and window curtains all the time he was putting me up the pancake tree. Oh, I got over it after a while. But the boys kept the racket up."

"'Did you make these cakes by the famous recipe?'" I asked.



"'TALK PANCAKES'"

"Didn't I tell you there wasn't no receipt?" said Jud. "The boys hollered pancakes till they got pancake hungry, and I cut this receipt out of a newspaper. How does the truck taste?"

"They're delicious," I answered. "Why don't you have some too, Jud?"

I was sure I heard a sigh.

"Me?" said Jud. "I don't never eat 'em."

