

# THE BAKER'S DOZENTH.



GROUP of girls were gathered on the hotel piazza at Pigeon Cove, one lovely summer day, when the waves of the lake danced under a fleet of boats with pretty gay awnings, and the wooded shores sloped in exquisite curves to the water's edge. The cool breeze from the water fluttered the dainty morning costumes of the maidens, making them look like a flock of white birds just about to take wing. In the centre of the group stood a young girl of small but elegant figure, with a pair of roguish blue eyes, a mischievous face, dimpled cheeks, and a head that the sun seemed to have kissed to a golden radiance.

"How many adorers have you now, Kitty?" one of the girls asked this little personage, who seemed to be the queen of the coterie.

"Hush!"

"Have you enslaved any fresh ones since day before yesterday?"

"Of course she has," said Louise Stuart, a tall, dark-eyed girl. "Do you suppose twenty-four hours ever pass without bringing new worshippers to the shrine? All ranks and conditions of men are represented among her adorers. She regards neither age nor previous condition of servitude."

"I have counted them upon my fingers," said little Rosa Maylie. "There are just twelve, adding in Fred Hatton, who stammered dreadfully, poor fellow. It would take him at least half a day to propose."

"I have discovered," said Louise, "that she has her pockets stuffed with notes in all languages. The professor from C—College has written to her in Sanskrit, with a literal translation appended."

"How absurd you are, girls!" cried Kitty, who had been half choked with laughter while the discussion of her admirers proceeded. "Don't speak so loud, Rose; uncle will hear you. He would be horrified if he suspected me of flirting."

"Oh, you dear innocent!" cried the others in a chorus of laughter.

"You have twelve on the hooks already," said Rose, "you must find the thirteenth. A baker's dozen would be a real triumph. I might ask my cousin Arthur down for a few days. He is quiet, but he would do to make up the number."

"You need not trouble," said Louise, "number thirteen will make his appearance soon enough."

"There he is now!" cried they, simultaneously, as the tall figure of a stranger appeared at the end of the shady walk that led up to the hotel. "Behold the man of destiny!"

"Do keep quiet," murmured Kitty, as the new-comer, with quick military strides, approached them. On mounting the steps he shot one keen glance towards the group. In a moment a servant had appeared and taken his card.

"Wonder who it is?" said Rose.

"He has asked for uncle," said Kitty, under her breath. "It must be that horrid Captain Heath."

"Never mind; he will soon be at your feet, and he will make the baker's dozen," said Rose. "They say there's luck in odd numbers. I shouldn't wonder if you married him."

"Married him!" repeated Kitty with scorn. "I detest him."

"Do you know him?"

"No, not personally; but I have had his virtues dinned into my ears. He was my uncle's aide in the war, and nursed him through a fever. He was a very young man then, and uncle looks upon him as a son. For years he has been stationed out among the Indians, and I have been dosed with his letters. Bah! he is a piece of perfection—the moral law in trousers and boots. I detest that kind of a man!"

Just then there was a sound of knocking with a staff or crutch from the direction of the little parlour where the old general usually smoked and read his papers.

"There's a summons for me," said Kitty, with a pretty little grimace, as she skipped away. "Don't you all pity me!"

"I wonder we don't hate her," said Louise Stuart; "but she is lovable if she is a flirt. There is nothing bad in her nature; and of course it is not her fault if every man she sees falls directly at her feet. She can't marry them all."

"And it is natural she should like to play with them as a very young kitten plays with a mouse," said one of the others.

"I am sure I should," broke in Rose, "if I had the power. But Kitty is shrewd; she knows that most of them are after her money."

Meantime Kitty, with a sulky face and backward air, was entering her uncle's room. The old General sat in his favourite arm chair. He had a face that flushed easily up to the roots of his white hair. He wore an artificial limb that gave him a good deal of trouble, and had taken it off to rest. Now his face was beaming with joy, like a full-blown penny.

"Puss," he said, exultingly, and rubbing his hands softly together, "Captain Heath has come. The dear boy's arrival makes me feel twenty years younger."

"I supposed he had come," said Kitty, standing behind the chair. "For I saw him and guessed who he was; but I don't like him."

"Don't like him!"

"No, I don't. He is one of those insufferably good and proper persons I have always detested."

"By heavens!" cried the General, getting more fiery in the face, and thumping with his stick, "you shall like him, or I will know the reason why."

"Unfortunately, uncle," said Kitty, in an exasperating tone, "you cannot command my feelings as you would aatoon of soldiers."

"You obstinate, wilful little baggage"—his face was a rich purple now—"if the boys should give me one half the

trouble you do, I would order them out and have them shot!"

"But you can't shoot me, uncle, because I don't like your paragon. And why, pray, should I like him?"

"Like him!" shouted the old man, "I tell you he saved my life—that he is one of the best officers and noblest men that ever trod the earth. Only a brainless and empty-headed girl can afford to despise a brave man. You are not worthy to kiss his shoes, you silly child!"

"I hope you don't expect me to perform that ceremony, uncle?"

"I know how it will be," continued the old man, boiling over with wrath. "You will throw yourself away on one of those whipper-snappers, those ape-faced dandies, who don't know the butt end of a musket from a nuzzle. They are after your money—the money it is supposed you are going to inherit from me. But if you marry one of those brainless fools you will not inherit a penny of mine; I will cut you off with a shilling."

The tears came into Kitty's eyes. She rushed around the chair sobbing, and threw herself into the old man's arms.

"Oh, uncle," she cried, in a choked voice, "leave all your money away from me if you like, but don't be so savage! Love me a little as you did when I was a child."

The old man sat rigid as iron, still blowing off steam. His temper soon cooled, letting his warm heart assert itself. He was half-inclined to take the girl in his arms, to forgive and pet her into smiles; but she was still bedewing his shirt-front with tears when a knock resounded upon the door. Kitty at once sprang to her feet, wiped her wet face and adjusted her ruffled plumes. She was as exquisitely pretty as a dewy rose. In a moment Captain Heath was standing in the room in his dress uniform. If not strikingly handsome, he had at least a tall, manly figure. His keen grey eyes saw in a moment that there had been a tempest during his absence, and that the thunder-clouds were not entirely dispersed. When her uncle managed to present him, Kitty bowed in a stiff and constrained fashion, which the Captain returned with formal politeness, and, in a moment after, she had made her escape from the room.

That evening Captain Heath stood in a corner of the ball-room—it was the occasion of the weekly "hop"—a mere looker-on in Venice. He knew no one; he was not a dancing man and Kitty did not seem to be aware of his existence. In her pale blue costume of some shimmering stuff she was bewilderingly pretty, and her admirers hovered round her like bees around the queen rose of the garden. The Sanskrit professor was there, with locks freshly dyed the hue of the raven's wing and with his hands thrust into a pair of white gloves miles too long.

"Shall I reserve a square dance for you, dear professor?" said Kitty, consulting her tablets, and with the air of a siren.

The poor man shook his head and gave her a sorrowful smile. At that moment he would willingly have sacrificed all the languages, dead and living, for the privilege of capering round the room with his charmer.

"Never mind," she said, beaming upon him, "when I get through this gallop I will come back and you shall improve my mind and tell me about prosody, as you promised."

"Miss Kitty," said the delighted professor, laying the limp finger end of his glove on his heart, "you are already mistress of the universal language."

Young Detmore was impatiently waiting to claim Kitty for the next dance. Among his friends he was familiarly known as "the baby," because of his pretty pink-and-white complexion and his ways, which were "childlike and bland." Baby had a beautiful pair of long blonde side-whiskers, which it was said he crimped with an iron every day.

"How can you stand talking to that old mummy?" said he, with a pout, as soon as he got possession of her.

"Oh it is such fun to make him think he is the object of my secret admiration!"

The Captain Heath overheard the remark and turned away in disgust. "She is a cut-and-dried flirt," said he to himself, "the one thing in all the world I abhor." This young hero, fresh from the wilds, had watched the ball-room scene with much scorn. Now he went to the old General, and sat snuggling with him in the pleasant gloom of the summer evening.

"Well, my boy," said the old man, after a few moments of silence, "what do you think of her?"

"Of whom, sir?"

"My niece, of course."

"Oh, she's a beauty."

"But she wouldn't suit you, would she?"

"There is no question of that, sir. I shouldn't suit her. I can see that she looks upon me as an unlicked cub, a specimen fresh from the woods. And the truth is, I have been out of the world so long that I have old-fashioned notions of women. These modern girls are bewildering to my mind. I should never know how to approach one of them."

"Kitty isn't made of spun glass," said the old man. "She's a deuced obstinate, hard-bitted little jade. When she gets her head set, you couldn't ront her with your heaviest artillery. You see, his voice softening, 'the girl has been an orphan from babyhood, and I have sadly spoiled her. But if she married a true man—not one of those sneaking civilians, but a brave honest soldier—she would be constant as the sun.'"

"I see what you mean, dear General," said the Captain, with emotion in his voice; "but don't think of it, sir, it cannot be, and he extended his hand."

The old General grasped the outstretched hand in his.

"Robert," said he, "how can I help thinking of it? You and that girl are all I have in the world, and I had hoped to keep you near me in my old age."

After that poor Kitty had hard lines with her uncle. There were constant twinges in his leg, and he was always in a vile humour when she was present; but she often heard him laughing uproariously with the Captain when alone in their private sessions. Toward the young man himself she was studiously polite, and he met her in the

same spirit. She flirted more desperately than ever. Baby Detmore was the favourite of the hour. She boated with him, danced with him, played croquet with him, rode with him, and spent long afternoons rambling with him in the delightful laurel woods that skirted the lake.

"I am disappointed in my calculations about the baker's dozen," Ross said to her one evening, as they stood in the warm glow of the sunset on the piazza, the beautiful radiance shining on Kitty's burnished hair. "I thought you would have that tall Captain at your feet long before this; but the Baby seems to be the favourite. Do you know, I've caught the Captain looking at you with a sardonic expression of mingled admiration and disapproval! It would not be strange if you were weaving your coils about him. They say to hate is the surest way to begin love. Who knows but number thirteen may be the winning horse, after all!"

"Don't talk slang, Rose," said Kitty, with dignity. "You know nothing about the Captain; he is a misogynist."

"Good heavens! Kitty, what is that?"

"I don't know. It is a word I hear the professor use."

"When I want to hurl an epithet of withering contempt at a man," laughed Louise, "I shall call him a misogynist."

That night Kitty stole away from the dance and entered the General's little parlour, filled with the sweet shadiness of the summer evening. There were two cigars that shone like stars, and the two friends were telling campaigning stories, fighting their battles over again. The deep, sonorous voice of the Captain went on steadily for half an hour. He used the best and tersest English, and the picture he drew was graphic and spirited. It was an account of a very daring exploit, in which he had taken the principal part, but in the recital he kept himself out of sight.

"Why, puss, is that you? I thought you were dancing your feet off," said the General, in great surprise.

"I did not care about dancing to-night," said Kitty, as she came slowly forward.

"Bring me the candle, child."

He had not spoken so kindly for weeks.

Kitty brought the candle, and as she did so the Captain turned his back and looked out of the window. She was in white, and there was a bunch of forget-me-nots in the bosom of her dress. She put up her face to be kissed, like a spoiled child.

"Love me a little, to-night, uncle," she whispered; "I am as blue as I can be."

The old man could not help kissing her fondly and stroking her hair; and as he did so the little bunch of forget-me-nots fell out. When she left the room the Captain picked them up unseen, and put them somewhere inside his coat.

Poor Kitty's fair weather did not last long. The next morning her uncle, in a towering rage, sent for her.

"Sit down there," he said, pointing to a chair opposite, and she obeyed. "What is this I hear about your engagement to that idiot, Detmore?"

"I don't know, sir."

"And you don't know," cried he, "that he is an unprincipled knave and a brainless fool. His father is a reckless gambler in Wall-street, covered up with debts that he hopes his son's marriage to an heiress will help him to pay. But, by heaven, not a copper of my fortune shall go that way. Promise me that you will not engage yourself to that young ape, or that you will break with him if you have had the folly to do so already, or you will never see a shilling of my money after I am gone."

There were legal-looking documents on the table before the old man.

"Do you promise?" he cried, holding a pen suspended in his hand.

"No," she said, as she rose indignantly to her feet. "I cannot be frightened by threats," and she swept proudly from the room.

Kitty carried her sun hat in her hand—a pretty broad-brimmed Leghorn, trimmed with a trailing vine. Dry-eyed and pale, her small mouth set in a rigid line, she walked swiftly down the path that led to the laurel wood. She had no more than reached the shade when young Detmore sprang into the path before her.

"Oh, Kitty, dearest Kitty," he began, eagerly, "I am so glad to find you here! I have something very particular to say."

"Stop," cried Kitty, imperiously, "and listen to what I have to say to you. I am a poor girl, Mr Detmore. I have not a penny of my own in the world. Go and tell the other young men at the hotel that my uncle has willed all his fortune away from me."

The young man stood as if petrified, and she swept on down the path before him.

A quarter of a mile of rapid walking through the undergrowth brought Kitty suddenly against the professor, who had carried his lesson out into the shade. In a moment he had confronted her, his sorrow face beaming.

"I am so glad to find you here alone!" said he. "For days I have sought an opportunity to speak to you."

"Don't do it," said Kitty, with tragic despair; "let me speak to you. I am a poor girl, and it is all a mistake about my being an heiress. My uncle has willed away from me every penny of his money."

"Miss Mortimer," exclaimed the professor in a pained and reproachful tone, "how could you think me so mercenary? I have loved you for yourself alone."

"Don't, don't!" cried Kitty in a plaintive tone. "You are a good man—worlds above me, but I could not marry you. I should be a millstone around your neck."

She ran from him abruptly and dashed into the thick woods farther and farther, deeper and deeper, losing breath, then stopping to listen if she were followed. She was in a strange place, where large sombre trees grew. It was late in the afternoon; the sun was setting, the twilight gathering round her, when she rested on a mossy log and leaned against a tree trunk, with her feet in the ferns. She was sobbing because she felt utterly miserable, dejected and abandoned. And stealthily the night came on. Suddenly there was a crunching and crackling of bushes near by, and Kitty sprang up with a little nervous scream.

"Don't be afraid," said a deep, manly voice she well knew. "Miss Mortimer," said Captain Heath, "you here alone, miles away from the hotel! I know the aversion you cherish toward me," he added, "but you must allow me to see you to the house."

Kitty tried to hide her tear-stained face. "I know that you dislike me, Captain Heath," she answered, "and it is unnecessary for you to impose so disagreeable a task upon yourself. I can walk quite as well alone."

"Miss Mortimer," said he, ignoring this speech, "I see that you have been weeping, and know that you have