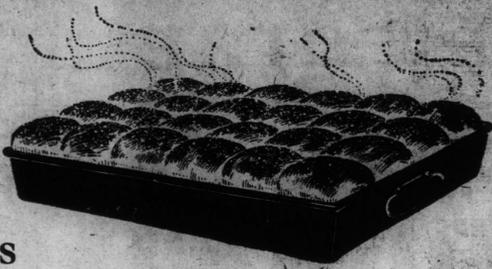


A Batch of Biscuits



Mother's make!
M—m—m!
What biscuit—what flavor—what tantalizing flakiness!

Broken into snow-white halves, could ever anything be more inviting! Scarcely.

It wasn't a happenstance, either. Experience has taught mother just how to heat her oven and just how to choose her flour.

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One in a Thousand, BUT TRUE TO THE LAST

CHAPTER XVIII.

THEO ARRIVES.

In the morning I receive a note from Theo, saying that she is coming by the express, and will be at Idleminster at half-past two.

"Then you have to go alone to meet her," says Adrian. "I cannot get out of barracks till four o'clock, at the earliest."

"Why?" I ask.

"Field day—that won't be over till two; and then there are stables and all the office work."

"I should think she would want to go out again this afternoon; she's sure to be tired."

"Oh, yes! I'll come straight back here. Now, I must be off. That othering full dress takes such a lot of getting into!" And so I am left alone.

When the servant comes to clear the table, I tell him to have the carriage ready at one o'clock; that will give me time to do a few things in the room.

"Tell Jenkins the open carriage," I add. I suppose Theo will turn up her nose at the stanhope phaeton.

I have plenty to occupy me this morning. I go first to Theo's rooms, to see they are quite comfortable. I put a few flowers in various places and suggest to Jane that a bow or two of blue ribbon would improve the appearance of the cover on the dressing table. But, when all is done I am fair to own that there is a great difference between this room and those at Park Royal. I wonder if the home at Thornton Charteris is very grand. Adrian says it is a nice sort of place, but that is such a very indefinite description. However the next time we get any leave, I shall see for myself. When I have finished everything I had to do, I find I have an hour to spare, so I take up a book, for lack of anything else.

I am ready when the carriage comes round, and think, as I step into it, what a superb equipage it is. The horses have not a speck of dust on their sleek satin skins and need no bearing reins to make them hold up their heads; they are the very embodiment of the pride of life. Jenkins is as smart as they are, and Mawson is the most irreproachable of footmen. For my own part, I most enjoy the stanhope phaeton, with the big gray tearing and pulling like a mad thing; these chestnuts are such well-behaved creatures that it is not half the fun sitting behind them—in fact, is no fun at all.

In St. Thomas Street I see Stewart and Edith Dare, and I pull up to tell Stewart that I will send in for her

engage during the morning, and come for her myself in the afternoon.

"My sister, Lady Lasselles, is coming to stay with us," I say; "so you must not expect very much gaiety."

"I shall be very glad to be quiet," Stewart says, with a soft laugh; "and I find the afternoons very dull now."

Edith laughs, and says she is very grateful. Apparently, Stewart does not see it.

When I reach the station, I have five or four minutes to spare, and leave the carriage and go into the waiting room, and warm my feet at the fire. Not that they are cold—quite the contrary—but I am getting nervous, and would do anything rather than wait in the carriage. When the train comes in, there is such a rush of people, that I think looking for Theo is like seeking for a needle in a bundle of hay; but at last I see her maid, whose face wears a helpless, frightened expression, bearing a dressing case, and behind her is Theo's pure, pale face, in its pathetic widow's bonnet. My courage and my resolutions to be very nice are fast deserting me; but, all things considered, I run up to her warmly enough.

"I am so tired," she says, as I kiss her.

"Yes, I am sure you are. Can your maid see after your luggage? Then we need not wait for her; she is to come in the dog cart, which is outside."

"I don't think all my things will go into a dogcart," says Theo, with a

horrified look. "We might take my dressing case with us."

"Oh, yes, and one or two smaller boxes, if you like!" I answer, hopefully.

As we emerge from the station, Theo eyes the empty carriage blankly.

"Why, where is Adrian?" she exclaims.

"Oh, he couldn't come!" I reply. "He's commanding officer just now, and there is a field day this morning."

"Oh!" in a disappointed tone. "Whose carriage is that?" for next to ours is a smart mail phaeton.

"It must belong to some of our people," I say, "for the groom has a cockade."

As I speak, Col. Cardyllion comes out of the station and mounts to the front seat, lifting his hat to me as he drives off.

"Who is that?" says Theo, languidly.

"That's Col. Cardyllion," I answer. "I wonder what has brought him back so soon? Adrian did not tell me he was expected."

"Adrian's colonel?" she says, with a fainter degree of interest than she had evinced before.

"Yes. What do you think of him?"

"He travelled down with me," she answers. "He is a wonderfully handsome man."

"So I think."

Having seen Theo's wretched maid in tolerable safety, we start for home and I continue the subject we have been speaking about.

"He is the next heir to the dukedom of Idleminster; his father was Lord Alfred Cardyllion, and his mother was as rich as a Jew."

"Really? Is he married?"

"Oh, he is the most determined woman hater in existence!"

"You don't say so; it is quite interesting!" she says, a little scornfully.

"It is a great pity," I continue; "because, if he won't marry, the title becomes extinct. All the girls here are wild about him, but they say no woman in the world will ever conquer him. He is like the rock of Gibraltar." I end with a feeble attempt at wit, "quite impregnable."

"Poor man," she laughs; "what a romantic story!"

"He is so handsome, too," I say, regretfully.

Theo turns and looks at me keenly.

"Why, Audrey," she exclaims, with that little, hard, silvery laugh of hers, "you are quite enthusiastic about him! Surely, you are not, like all the other girls here, quite wild about him, are you?"

"I am a married woman," I answer, quietly; "and we Luttrells are not people of that class. I think a married woman who would give a second thought to any man besides her husband is a creature so despicable as to make good wives shudder."

It is hardly to be wondered at that Theo makes no further remarks to me of that kind. She maintains a discreet silence for some time, then starts quite a different topic.

"I suppose Adrian will be back by the time we arrive?"

"Oh, dear, no," I answer, cheerfully; "not until late! They spend a long time over luncheon; and then, there are stables and all the office work."

"But Adrian doesn't go to the stables?"

"No; but he has to be somewhat about."

"I wonder he does not leave them to some of the others to-day," she says, petulantly, and with marked emphasis on the last words.

"He can't possibly shirk duty for anyone," I cry. "Why, he wouldn't do that even for me!" At which my sister converts her perfectly straight nose into one of the kind which has been so graphically described as "up-lifted." The transformation is only temporary, and I am glad and relieved when she restores it to its original form; for the other is not becoming to her.

"I have a young lady coming to-morrow to stay a few days," I say, presently. "I hope you won't mind?"

"Oh, dear, no!" with the utmost indifference. "Who is she?"

"Her name is Stewart Dare. She is a Scotch girl, and is now staying with an aunt in Idleminster. Her younger sister, Edith, is just engaged

to Capt. Cust, of the Culrassiers."

"Is she coming?"

"Oh, no! I was really afraid to ask her; Capt. Cust would be so disgusted at having five miles to come to see her, instead of less than one, as he has now. How are Lady Lasselles and the girls?" I say, suddenly remembering that I have not asked after them yet.

"Oh, they are very well! What awful tongues they all have to be sure! I declare they nearly drove me mad. It was 'clack-clack' from morning to night! I don't think anything annoys me so much as incessant conversation."

"It is a little tiresome," I answer. "I thought of having the two girls, and one of them from Rest, to stay here for a little time."

"Not while I am here, please!" cries Theo, sharply.

"I meant when you are gone," I say, calmly. "There is the house—you can just see it through the trees; we shall be there in five minutes. I am sure you must be faint for want of something to eat."

We drive through the lodge gates as I speak, and a moment later draw up at the door, and, as Theo reaches the top step, I bid her welcome, with all the stately courtesy I am capable of.

I lead the way upstairs, and see that she has all that she can want, and go away, telling her luncheon will be ready when she comes down. I feel, as I slip off my hat and jacket, that I am getting on very well. One can be so different in one's own house.

(To be Continued.)

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