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Whereas

LOVE'S BAKERY! I am satisfied I have found the place now that I have been looking for all this time. I cannot describe to you the sensation of mingled astonishment, gladness, hope, doubt, anxiety, and balmy, blissful emotion that suffused my being and quivered in a succession of streaky thrills down my backbone, as I stood on the corner of Third and Minna streets, last Tuesday, and stared, spell-bound, at those extraordinary words, painted in large, plain letters on a neighboring window-curtain: "LOVE'S BAKERY." "God bless my soul!" said I, "will wonders never cease? Are there to be no limits to man's spirit of invention? Is he to invade the very realms of the immortal, and presume to guide and control the great passions, the impalpable essences, that have hitherto dwelt in the secret chambers of the soul, sacred from all save divine intrusion?"

I read and re-read that remarkable sign with constantly-increasing wonder and interest. There was nothing extraordinary in the appearance of the establishment, and even if it had possessed anything of a supernatural air, it must necessarily have been neutralized by the worldly and substantial look of a pyramid of excellent bread that stood in the window—a sign very inconsistent, it seemed to me, with the character of a place devoted to the high and holy employment of instilling the passion of love into the human heart, although it was certainly in keeping with the atrocious taste which was capable of conferring upon a vice-royalty of heaven itself such an execrable name as "Love's Bakery." Why not Love's Bower, or the Temple of Love, or the Palace of Cupid?—anything—anything anything in the world would have been less repulsive than such hideous vulgarity of nomenclature as "Love's Bakery."

The place seemed very complete, and well supplied with every facility for carrying on the business of creating love successfully. In a window of the second story was a large tin cage with a parrot in it, and near it was a sign bearing the inscription, "Preparatory School for Young Ladies" That is, of course, a school where they are taught certain things necessary to prepare them for the bakery down below. Not far off is also a "Preparatory School for Young Gentlemen," which is doubtless connected with Love's Bakery too. I saw none of the pupils of either of the schools, but my imagination dwelt upon them with a deep and friendly interest. How irksome, I thought, must this course of instruction be to these tender hearts, so impatient to be baked into a state of perfect love!

Greatly moved by the singular circumstances which surrounded me, I fell into a profound and pleasing reverie. Here, I thought, they take a couple of hopeful hearts in the rough, and work them up, with spices and shortening and sweetening enough to last for a lifetime, and turn them out well kneaded together, baked to a turn, and ready for matrimony, and without having been obliged to undergo a long and harrowing courtship, with the desperate chances attendant thereon, of persevering rivals, unwilling parents, inevitable love-quarrels, and all that sort of thing.

Here, I thought, they will bake you up a couple in moderate circumstances, at short notice and at a cheap rate, and turn them out in good enough shape for the money, perhaps, but nevertheless burnt with the fire of jealousy on one side, and flabby and “duffy” with lukewarmness and indifference on the other, and spotted all over with the salaratus stains of a predisposition to make the conjugal cake bitter and unpalatable for all time to come.

Or they will take an excessively patrician pair, charge them a dozen prices, and deliver them to order in a week, all plastered over with the ghostly vines and flowers of blighted fancies, hopes and yearnings, wrought in chilly ice-work.

Or, perhaps, they will take a brace of youthful, tender hearts and dish them up in no time, into crisp, delicate “lady-fingers,” tempting to contemplate, and suggestive of that serene after-dinner happiness and sociability that come when the gross substantial have been swept from the board and are forgotten in soft dalliance with pastry and ices and sparkling Moselle.

Or maybe they will take two flinty old hearts that have harbored selfishness, envy and all uncharitableness in solitude for half a century, and after a fortnight’s roasting, turn them out the hardest kind of hard-tack, invulnerable to all softening influences for evermore.

Here was a revolution far more extended, and destined to be attended by more momentous consequences to the nations of the earth, than any ever projected or accomplished by the greatest of the world’s military heroes! Love, the master passion of the human heart, which, since the morning of the creation had shaped the destinies of emperors and beggars alike, and had ruled all men as with a rod of iron, was to be hurled from the seat of power in a single instant, as it were, and brought into subjection to the will of an inspired, a sublimely-gifted baker! By some mysterious magic, by some strange and awful invention, the divine emotion was to be confined within set bounds and limits, controlled, weighed, measured, and doled out to God’s creatures in quantities and qualities to suit the purchaser, like vulgar beer and candles!

And in times to come, I thought, the afflicted lover, instead of reading Heuston & Hastings’ omnipresent sign and gathering no comfort from it, will read “GO TO LOVE’S BAKERY!” on the dead-walls and telegraph poles, and be saved.

Now I might never have published to the world my discovery of this manufactory of the human affections in a populous thoroughfare of San Francisco, if it had not occurred to me that some account of it would serve as a peculiarly fitting introductory to a story of love and misfortune, which it falls to my lot to relate. And yet even Love’s Bakery could afford no help to the sufferers of whom I shall speak, for they do not lack affection for each other, but are the victims of an accumulation of distressing circumstances against which the efforts of that august agent would be powerless.

The facts in the following case came to me by letter from a young lady who lives in the beautiful city of San Jose; she is perfectly unknown to me, and simply signs herself “Aurelia Maria,” which may possibly be a fictitious name. But no matter, the poor girl is almost heart-broken by the misfortunes she has undergone, and so confused by the conflicting counsels of misguided friends and insidious enemies, that she does not know what course to pursue in order to extricate herself from the web of difficulties in which she seems almost hopelessly involved. In this dilemma she turns to me for help, and supplicates for my guidance and instruction with a moving eloquence that would touch the heart of a statue. Hear her sad story:

She says that when she was sixteen years old she met and loved, with all the devotion of a passionate nature, a young man from New Jersey, named Williamson Breckinridge Caruthers, who was some six years her senior. They were engaged, with the free consent of their friends and relatives, and for a time it seemed as if their career was destined to be characterized by an

immunity from sorrow beyond the usual lot of humanity. But at last the tide of fortune turned; young Caruthers became infected with smallpox of the most virulent type, and when he recovered from his illness his face was pitted like a waffle-mould, and his comeliness gone forever. Aurelia thought to break off the engagement at first, but pity for her unfortunate lover caused her to postpone the marriage-day for a season, and give him another trial. The very day before the wedding was to have taken place, Breckinridge, while absorbed in watching the flight of a balloon, walked into a well and fractured one of his legs, and it had to be taken off above the knee. Again Aurelia was moved to break the engagement, but again love triumphed, and she set the day forward and gave him another chance to reform. And again misfortune overtook the unhappy youth. He lost one arm by the premature discharge of a Fourth-of-July cannon, and within three months he got the other pulled out by a carding-machine. Aurelia's heart was almost crushed by these latter calamities. She could not but be deeply grieved to see her lover passing from her by piecemeal, feeling, as she did, that he could not last forever under this disastrous process of reduction, yet knowing of no way to stop its dreadful career, and in her tearful despair she almost regretted, like brokers who hold on and lose, that she had not taken him at first, before he had suffered such an alarming depreciation. Still, her brave soul bore her up, and she resolved to bear with her friend's unnatural disposition yet a little longer. Again the wedding-day approached, and again disappointment overshadowed it; Caruthers fell ill with the erysipelas, and lost the use of one of his eyes entirely. The friends and relatives of the bride, considering that she had already put up with more than could reasonably be expected of her, now came forward and insisted that the match should be broken off, but after wavering awhile, Aurelia, with a generous spirit which did her credit, said she had reflected calmly upon the matter, and could not discover that Breckinridge was to blame. So she extended the time once more, and he broke his other leg. It was a sad day for the poor girl when she saw the surgeons reverently bearing away the sack whose uses she had learned by previous experience, and her heart told her the bitter truth that some more of her lover was gone. She felt that the field of her affections was growing more and more circumscribed every day, but once more she frowned down her relatives and renewed her betrothal. Shortly before the time set for the nuptials another disaster occurred. There was but one man scalped by the Owens River Indians last year. That man was Williamson Breckinridge Caruthers, of New Jersey. He was hurrying home with happiness in his heart, when he lost his hair forever, and in that hour of bitterness he almost cursed the mistaken mercy that had spared his head.

At last Aurelia is in serious perplexity as to what she ought to do. She still loves her Breckinridge, she writes, with truly womanly feeling—she still loves what is left of him—but her parents are bitterly opposed to the match, because he has no property and is disabled from working, and she has not sufficient means to support both comfortably. “Now, what should she do?” she asks with painful and anxious solicitude.

It is a delicate question; it is one which involves the life-long happiness of a woman, and that of nearly two-thirds of a man, and I feel that it would be assuming too great a responsibility to do more than make a mere suggestion in the case. How would it do to build to him? If Aurelia can afford the expense, let her furnish her mutilated lover with wooden arms and wooden legs, and a glass eye and a wig, and give him another show; give him ninety days, without grace, and if he does not break his neck in the meantime, marry him and take the chances. It does not seem to me that there is much risk anyway, Aurelia, because if he sticks to his singular propensity for damaging himself every time he sees a good opportunity, his next experiment is bound to finish him, and then you are safe, married or single. If married, the wooden legs and such other

valuables as he may possess revert to the widow, and you see you sustain no actual loss save the cherished fragment of a noble but most unfortunate husband, who honestly strove to do right, but whose extraordinary instincts were against him. Try it, Maria. I have thought the matter over carefully and well, and it is the only chance I see for you. It would have been a happy conceit on the part of Caruthers if he had started with his neck and broken that first; but since he has seen fit to choose a different policy and string himself out as long as possible, I do not think we ought to upbraid him for it if he has enjoyed it. We must do the best we can under the circumstances and try not to feel exasperated at him.