

"And come drinking into the bargain," said one of the company, smiling.

"Hope you've come prepared with a good appetite." This was said by Anderson.

"It's in a fair condition," returned Nichols—"Never fear but what I'll do my part."

Soon the table was covered with oysters, cooked in various styles, terrapin and chicken salad, with all the condiments and accessories of a luxurious supper. To these were added two or three kinds of wine, also brandy, and hot whisky punch.

Upon these the five young men "with appetites" went to work, exhibiting an eagerness, not to say greediness, such as may be seen in animals who have been for a considerable time without food. As their appetites began to flag a little they were sharpened by the punch or brandy.

"Good feeding this, Nichols," said Anderson, coarsely, looking across the table at his friend, the invited guest.

"First rate," replied Nichols, in a tone of voice that evinced the satisfaction he felt. "How often do you meet to enjoy yourselves after this fashion?"

"About once a week."

"Ah! so often?"

"Yes. Shall we put your name down as one of our number?"

"I don't know. I must think about it."

"#Say you."

"The temptation is certainly strong. Is the feeding always as good?"

"Always. And so is the drinking. Shall we put your name down?"

"Not now. I'm a deliberate sort of a person. Slow to make my mind up on any subject."

"Oh, well take your time. But, if the arguments before you do not prove conclusive, I will set you down for an anchovite."

In truth, the arguments were strong. But Nichols was not prepared to yield at once to their persuasions. He could not help thinking of the wife he had left at home; and, whenever her image rose in his mind, he lost, for the moment, all pleasure in what was before him. Even with the gay companions and the choicest things to tempt his appetite, he felt, that for him, a smiling happy wife, with books, and a cheerful loving intercourse, were worth them all. In the midst of these sensual joys he sighed for the purer and higher delights of home.

But after repeated draughts of wine and brandy added, the superabundant appropriations of rich food, both the mental and moral perceptions of Nichols became obtuse. It was nearly eleven o'clock when the supper party broke up, and the young men separated.

The lonely hours spent on that evening by Mrs Nichols were hours of self communion, not unmingled with self reproaches. She was conscious of not having made the home of her husband attractive; and yet, she felt hurt that he should have gone away because she did not appear to be happy. In the morning she had felt nervous, and, instead of forcing down a spirit of complaint, had rather encouraged its approaches. This being so, evening found her completely under a cloud. Though glad

at her husband's return, she failed to exercise a due self-control. She did not rebrand the evil spirit of complaint, but let it still reign over her.

The consequences we have seen. Long before the hour of ten arrived, Mrs. Nichols began to look for her husband's return, and to wonder why he staid out so long. Ten o'clock at length came, and still he was away. She now began to hearken for approaching footsteps and to listen for his well known tread among the many sounding feet that echoed along the pavement.

"What can keep him so late!" she asked herself with a rising emotion of anxiety.

At length all became still on the street. The murmur of voices was hushed, and only now and then was heard the footfall of a solitary passenger.

Mrs. Nichols now began to feel alarmed as well as anxious. Never before had her husband staid out until so late an hour unless he had given special notice of his intended absence. Where could he be? In vain she asked herself this question. Eleven o'clock came, and still he was away. As the watchman's voice, giving notice of the hour, came loud and still on the air, her babe awoke, and its cries filled the chamber. Some minutes were spent in hushing it to sleep, and then the troubled wife stood again at the window, listening for the footsteps of her husband.

Hark! Surely that is his tread! And yet in something it differs therefrom. It lacks the evenness and firmness of his step. Nearer to the window bends the anxious wife; and now she is listening with a breathless eagerness. It must be her husband; yet, why should there be a change in his walk? He is at the door. He has paused. Mrs. Nichols's face is pressed against the window pane. Her eyes are striving to pierce the darkness, but she sees nothing. Hark! Yes! It is her husband. He has ascended the steps, and now she distinctly hears the rattling of his night-key in the lock. Why does he not enter? What keeps him so long at the door? It is not locked against him.

At last an entrance is effected! The door swung heavily open, and struck against the wall with a jar. Then a shuffling sound of feet was heard, and then the door closed with a loud bang.

By this time the heart of Mrs. Nichols was throbbing with a new and strange fear. What could this mean! Eagerly she listened as her husband moved along the passage, and came with a kind of lumbering noise up the stairs. A moment or two and the door of her chamber was thrown open and he came in. One glance was sufficient. It revealed the blasting truth that he had come home in a state of intoxication.

"Good evening, Mistress Nichols!" said he, as he staggered in. "I hope to find you in a better humour than I did at teatime." He spoke sarcastically.

The poor stricken wife could not utter a word. She stood as if fixed to the spot, her cheek blanched and an expression of the deepest grief on her countenance.

"Hope you've enjoyed yourself," he continued as he sunk into a chair, his head falling on one side almost to his shoulder.

"I have enjoyed myself first rate. Prime oysters and terrapin, wine, brandy, punch, and good fellowship. First-rate! Better than moping at home with a wife in the dumps! Didn't intend to go, said I would not. Liked home best—that is, home when the good lady is in a good humour. Happened she wasn't. So went to Guy's First rate oysters and terrapin—didn't promise to go again; but guess I will. Eh, Maggy! what do you say? Got over your pet? Any sunshine yet? I like sunshine—always did. But clouds and thunder, u. u! They're my especial horror."

Mrs. Nichols could bear this no longer. Tears gushed from her eyes, and she covered her face with her hands and wept violently.

"That's always the way," said Nichols, fretfully. "Always crying or scolding; or else looking as if you hadn't a friend in the world. I'm getting sick of this. But no matter, no crying, no gloomy looks at Guy's. That's the place for a man to enjoy himself!"

"Edward! Edward!" exclaimed the wretched wife, now approaching her husband, and laying her hand upon his arm, "Don't talk in this way or you'll kill me!"

"No danger," he replied coarsely. "A woman isn't so easily killed. She's got as many lives as a cat. But say, Mag! Have you any brandy in the house? I must have one more glass to-night."

And Nichols arose, but in doing so, he reeled across the room and fell upon the bed, where he remained, and was soon snoring loud in a drunken slumber.

(Conclusion next week.)

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