

# A STORY FOR WIVES.

"COME round to Guy's to night, Ned," said a young acquaintance to Edward Nichols, as they stood exchanging a few words at the corner of a street, where they had paused for a moment or two ere taking their different ways homeward.

"What's to be done there?" inquired Nichols.

"Nothing very particular. But do you come round, and I'll promise you a pleasant evening."

"I believe I'll stay at home with my wife," replied Nichols.

"Well, just as you like," said the other. "Happy to see you at Guy's; but, if you find it more agreeable at home, stay there. Should the time, however, from any cause, hang heavy on your hands, just drop round and help us to spend an hour or two. My word for it, you'll find more than one agreeable companion."

The young men parted, and Edward Nichols pursued his way homeward. The latter had been married about two years.

On entering the room where his wife was sitting, Nichols saw, with a feeling of disappointment, that there was a cloud upon her brow. The cloud had appeared so often, that he was getting discouraged.

"Is anything wrong, Margaret?" he asked kindly.

"No," was the brief reply, uttered in a complaining tone of voice.

Nichols sighed, and turning to the crib in which their babe lay sleeping, bent over it and looked down upon its pure, sweet face.

"Don't wake that child, Edward," said his wife, in a fretful voice. "I've been more than an hour trying to get her asleep."

Nichols stood a moment or two, still gazing upon the tranquil face of the child, and then raised himself from his stooping posture, fixing his eyes, as he did so, upon the countenance of his wife. There was not an expression in it that a man could love. A peevish unhappy temper had, for the time, absorbed every attraction. The husband felt repulsed. Leaving the room without a remark, he went down to the parlor, and taking a book, sat and read until tea was announced.

There was no pleasant light in the face of Mrs. Nichols as she joined her husband at the table.

"Don't you feel well, Margaret?" he asked.

"My head aches," was returned.

"The sorry. What has caused it?"

"Dish water," ejaculated Mrs. Nichols, interrupting what her husband was about to say, and setting down the teapot she had lifted, with a jar upon the tray. "Such tea!" she added, as she took off the lid and looked within the teapot. Then she rang the table-bell, and the maid made her appearance.

"Haven't I told you over and over, don't fill the teapot in this way? You've made tea enough for a dozen people, but it's as weak as dish water. Hur! Pour it out and draw fresh tea, and don't fill the pot more than a quarter full."

Jane looked vexed at this sharp rebuke; but removed the tea.

Mrs. Nichols gave vent to a number of angry remarks about the trouble she had to get any thing done right, and very amiably expressed the wish that her husband had the trial of housekeeping for a short time. He would, in that case, it was her opinion, have more sympathy with her.

Nichols was hurt at this gratuitous remark, but said nothing. He had no wish to make still heavier the clouds that came between him and the bright sunshine, and experience told him that such would be the effect of almost anything he might utter.

Five unhappy minutes passed before Jane came in with the newly-made tea. Not a word had been spoken for nearly the whole of this time. But Mrs. Nichols's pent-up feelings could restrain themselves no longer.

"It's too bad!" she exclaimed, addressing the cook. "I'm out of all patience with such doings. Pray see that my wishes are better attended to in future."

The girl muttered something as she retired, and then Nichols and his wife were alone again. Both ate in silence, but very sparingly. On rising from the table, the wife went up to her chamber, while the husband took refuge in the parlor, and sought to forget his uncomfortable sensations in the pages of an interesting book. In this he was not successful.

The pressure upon his feelings was too great. He loved his wife, and would have done almost anything to make her happy; but being of a cheerful temper himself, and fond of social intercourse, he could neither comprehend nor be indifferent to her fretful, moody, unhappy state. They pained him exceedingly, and at times awakened thoughts in his mind, the knowledge of which would have been to his wife a more real cause of pain than any from which she gathered so much unhappiness.

While trying to find in this book he was reading a pleasant recreation, Mr. Nichols remembered the invitation of his young friend Anderson to meet him and some pleasant companions and pass an hour at Guy's tavern. His mind no longer took in the meaning of the sentences on the page before him. Soon after, he closed the book, and, rising from his chair, walked for a short time about the rooms. There was a struggle in his mind between duty and inclination. He believed that it was his duty to remain at home with his wife, while inclination drew him strongly toward the friends at Guy's. Had his wife been in a pleasant mood; had she made home bright with smiles of affection, both duty and inclination would have been on the same side. But, alas! this was not so. At home there was a repellent sphere; while, at a certain point away from home, there existed a strong attraction.

At length Nichols went up stairs, with his mind made up to remain at home, if

he found his wife in a more cheerful and companionable state,—or to spend the evening at Guy's, if no change for the better were visible. On entering his wife's chamber, he found her at her work—stand engaged in sewing. She did not look up, nor speak.

"Does your head feel any better, Margaret?" he asked, kindly.

"No," was the only response, made in a low, constrained voice.

"It is not good for you to sew, if your head aches," resumed Mr. Nichols, still in a very kind voice.

"But to this no answer was given. 'I'm going out for a little while,' said Mr. Nichols."

"Well," was the brief reply to this communication. And still she sewed on without once lifting her eyes from her work.

As Mr. Nichols was altogether in earnest, he now turned away and left the room. The moment he did so, his wife let her work fall upon her lap, and, raising her head, listened in an attitude of much interest. She heard her husband descend the stairs, pause at the hat-stand for his coat and hat, and then move along the hall, and finally passed out through the street-door. The moment the jar of the door was heard, she burst into tears and wept bitterly. She did not again resume her work. For awhile, a tear her tears ceased to flow, she sat in a dreamy, reflective attitude.

"Ah me!" she at length sighed, "I wish I had more control over myself."

On leaving his house, Edward Nichols proceeded direct to Guy's Hotel. If there had been sunshine at home, there would have been no attraction for him abroad. If he could have found companionship in his wife, he would not have felt the least inclination for such dangerous companionship as he was now seeking.

"Is Mr. Anderson here?" inquired Nichols of the bar-keeper at Guy's.

"You'll find him at number eight," was the answer. "It's on the second floor, at the far end of the passage."

To number eight Nichols repaired. As he approached the door, loud and merry voices were heard within. He did not hesitate to enter, for the voice of Anderson was distinguished among the rest.

"Nichols!" exclaimed the individual just mentioned, coming forward and grasping the hand of the new-comer. "I thought you'd be here. Right glad am I to see you!"

Quite as warm was the welcome extended by three other young men, all of whom were acquaintances of Nichols. They were sitting around a table, on which were brandy and cigars.

"Help yourself," said Anderson, placing a decanter and tumbler before Nichols.

The latter did not hesitate about complying with this request, but poured out a stiff class of brandy and drank it off.

"Take a cigar," was the next invitation.

The cigar was accepted and lit. Nichols began to feel himself more and more at home every moment.

"What's the business on hand?" he enquired, after he had commenced smoking.

"To enjoy ourselves," was replied. At this moment a servant entered with a number of dishes on a tray, and commenced laying the table.

"Ah! some eating to be done, I see," remarked Nichols.

"And some drinking in 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 whiskey 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 and 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 yes."

"The temptation is certainly strong. Is the feeling 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 up on any subject."

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

In truth the arguments were strong. But Nichols was not prepared to yield at once to their persuasion. He could not help thinking of the wife he had left at home, and whenever her image arose 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 cheerful,

loving, social intercourse, were worth them all. In the midst of those sensual joys he sighed for the purer and higher delights of home.

But as the repeated draughts of wine and brandy were added to 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. Many things about the house had worried her through the day. 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 remand the evil spirit of complaint, but let it still reign over her.

The consequence 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 stayed out so long. Ten o'clock at last came, and still he was away. She now began to hearken for approaching footsteps, and to listen to 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 in 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 stayed 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 shrill 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 from it. 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 the entrance was 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.

At 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 humor than you were in at tea-time." 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 she sank 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 humor. Happened she wasn't. So went to Guy's. First-rate oysters and terrapin. Didn't promise to go again; but I 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, ugh! 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 ha'n'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, a w 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.

Oh! what a wretched night was that for poor Mrs. Nichols. Wretched beyond conception. With great difficulty she succeeded in removing her husband's clothes, and getting him covered up in bed. Then, unable herself to sleep, she passed the greater part of the time till morning in weeping or self-reproaches.

There had existed for Mrs. Nichols no real cause of unhappiness out of herself. Her husband, though not wealthy, was in good circumstances, and supplied every reasonable want she could desire. He was, moreover, a kind, cheerful, even tempered man, domestic in his habits and feelings, and rather more disposed to seek intellectual



than sensual pleasures. Of social intercourse he was fond. With such a husband it would seem that almost any woman could be happy; and Mrs. Nichols was happy in her way. She loved and respected her husband; but, unfortunately for both her peace of mind and his, she was naturally of a fretful temper, which, by long indulgence, had grown into a disease; moreover, she had not the best of health, but indifferent health was not dependent on mental causes. It required only a little to disturb the even current of her feelings; and when this current was once disturbed it took some time for it to run clear.

Hardly any thing could have been more ungrateful to Mrs. Nichols than the April-day life he had led since his marriage. He had no confidence in the smiles of the morning, for too often the brightest smiles were drowned in tears at his evening return. Thus it had been going on for two years, and Mr. Nichols was getting discouraged. Instead of gaining self-control, his wife seemed to be losing the little portion she had possessed at the time of their marriage. The consequences growing out of one of her periodical fits of despondency and ill-humor we have just described.

Ere this, although her husband had never complained, Mrs. Nichols had often felt that it was wrong to give way so much to her feelings; and she had often tried to force back the unhappy spirits that came intruding themselves into her mind. But it was hard to break a long continued habit. Her resistance was feeble, and the barriers she sought to interpose quickly swept away.

The rebuking words of her husband, uttered in his drunken, unreflective state, dragged the veil from before her eyes, and gave her to see the true relation she bore him, and how she had been gradually alienating him from herself and home. And the dreadful consequences of that alienation! How the thought made her shudder!

It is no wonder that Mrs. Nichols had no inclination for sleep, nor that she spent most of the hours of that dreadful night in tears.

It was long past daylight when Mr. Nichols awoke. The sun was shining brightly into the room from the open curtains; but all was silent. He raised himself up and looked around. On a sofa lay his wife asleep. Tears were glistening on her pale cheeks. His head ached, and his mind was confused. Some moments elapsed before he was able to comprehend the meaning of what he saw and felt. Gradually, then, the memory of his evening's debauch grew distinct, and there was a faint recollection of what he had said to his wife on coming home.

With a deep sigh the unhappy man threw himself back upon his pillow; that sigh penetrated the ears of his wife, and she started up with an answering sigh. Nichols perceived this, and let his lids fall—teigning slumber. He saw nothing, but he heard his wife approaching—he felt her breath upon his forehead, as she bent over him. What was that upon his cheek, the sudden touch of which sent a thrill along his nerves? It was a tear! A stifled sob was now heard. And then his wife moved from the bedside.

Oh, how wretched they both were! Oh, how intensely did both shrink from the moment when they should look into each other's conscious faces! Shame, deep shame and mortification were in the heart of one; and self-reproaches and fear in the heart of the other.

For half an hour did Nichols continue to feign sleep. He could not make up his mind to meet his wife after the debauch he had indulged in on the previous night, and for which he now heartily despised himself.

"Ah!" he sighed, as he lay musing over the unhappy aspect of affairs, "if Margaret would only control herself a little more. If she would only make home the pleasant place it should be, nothing could tempt me abroad into such companionship."

At length, as he lay with such thoughts filling his mind, a sigh moved his lips, and, forgetting that he was acting a part, his eyes unclosed. Mrs. Nichols was standing near, looking upon his face.

"Are you not well, Edward?" she asked, stepping to the bedside quickly, and laying her hand gently upon his forehead. Her voice was low, earnest, and tender.

"Not very well, dear," returned Nichols, in a subdued manner, his lids falling upon his cheeks as he spoke.

Mrs. Nichols pressed her lips to his forehead, and then laid her face, now wet with tears, against his.

"Thus was the matter reconciled between them, and never after was there the remotest allusion thereto. Days passed before the pressure on the feelings of both was sufficiently removed to permit their hearts to bound lightly; yet, during the time, they were particularly kind towards and considerate of each other.

In due time, the sunshine came back again, and it was a more permanent sunshine. Stronger reasons for self-control were seen to exist by Mrs. Nichols than were before apparent to her mind, and she called into exercise a

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PROVINCE OF QUEBEC, } SUPERIOR COURT  
DISTRICT OF MONTREAL, } No. 283.

Dame Albina Provost, of the City of St. Henry, in the district of Montreal, wife common as to property of Hubert Groux, gentleman, of the same place, duly authorized a *curator ad litem*, has instituted an action in separation as to property against her said husband, this day.  
Montreal, 28th January, 1888.

**BEAUDIN, CARDINAL,**  
LORANGER & ST. GERMAIN,  
Attorneys for Plaintiff.

PROVINCE OF QUEBEC, } SUPERIOR COURT.  
DISTRICT OF MONTREAL, } No. 668.

Dame Orise Dagenais, of the City of Montreal, in the district of Montreal, wife common as to property of Joseph Papias, grocer, of the same place, duly authorized a *curator ad litem*, has instituted an action in separation as to property against her said husband, this day.  
Montreal, 19th January, 1888.

**BEAUDIN, CARDINAL,**  
LORANGER & ST. GERMAIN,  
Attorneys for Plaintiff.

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