

KATE BOYNTON'S MISTAKE.

"But where's Ned?"

"Oh! he's gone off to the lodge again. I declare I got quite out of patience with him lately. When we were first married, he never left the house of an evening; but now he's off sometimes two or three nights a week. And he's so aggravating about it, too. He won't tell me a word of what they do, or what they talk of; and if I get out of patience—as what woman of spirit will not at times?—he won't retort, or answer me back, but just says, in his quite way, "Ah! I'm sorry you take it that way. By-by, dear; I hope you'll get your eyes open some day, and not look at this matter as though you were a child." As though I were a child, indeed! If I acted half as much like a child as his treatment would indicate, he might have some excuse for it."

And Kate stopped, quite out of breath, as her visitors' "things" were taken off, and gathered into a huge bundle in her arms, preparatory to being carried into another room.

"So Ned has become a full-fledged Mason, has he?" queried John Apthorp, as Kate returned from the other room.

"Yes," answered she, "I guess 'full-fledged' is a good word to use. That is what they apply to geese when they arrive at maturity, and I warrant it'll grace him as well. They're all a parcel of geese, to spend their time at lodge meetings, whether they're Masons, Sons of Temperance, Sons of Malta, or whatever they call themselves. Better stay at home with their wives, or take them with them to some lecture or concert or the theatre."

Kate did not stop to think that she had little cause for complaint on this score, for she averaged at least two nights a week at some such entertainment, besides frequently attending a matinee. But women who part from their husbands as Kate had from Ned that evening, seldom stop to reason, and Kate was no exception to the general rule.

"Well," said John, "Masonry is something of a humbug. I wish he were here to-night, so we could make up a hand at whist or euchre. Nellie, here, said, coming over, that it had been some time since we had had a game."

"So it has," responded Kate; "but there's no telling when Ned will be at home, and I hardly know who I could send for."

"Well, never mind; we'll have some music instead. Do, Mrs. Boynton, let us have some of those last opera gems, I saw you there the other night, and know you must have learnt them by this time."

Thus urged, Kate took a position at the piano, and now lost all recollection of the vexation of the first of the evening. They all loved music, and the evening passed very pleasantly. Kate and John were playing a duet when the door opened, and Ned stood upon the threshold.

"Bravo!" he exclaimed, as the music ceased. "By Jove! if I had known what awaited me here, I don't know but I should have torn myself away sooner."

"And not taken that last ride on the goat," laughed John; "or given that cannon-ball an extra roll across the floor. I suppose you can sit down now, without being forcibly reminded of that hot gridiron?"

"Oh, bosh!" laughed he, as he shook hands with John and his wife, and looking pleasantly over at his own Kate, to see if her impatience had yet worn off. "I hope you have passed a pleasant evening."

"Delightful," answered John. "And of course you have. But I say, Ned, why don't you ask a fellow to join if it's such a grand thing? I've been waiting for an invitation from some one 'in the ring.'"

"I will carry in an application from you any time you wish," responded Ned; "but I shall never urge or even invite you to join."

"Oho! So, like the fox in the first off, you are not advising others to dispense with the tail, eh? I honor you, Ned."

"You misunderstand—"

Please, Ned, that's a good boy," said Kate, coming over to him, and twining her arms around his neck, "don't go to lodge again. You're too good, too noble, to be with such a crowd. You're disappointed, and won't acknowledge it, but won't help to get anybody else into the scrape."

"But it is no such thing," said Ned. "It's one of our principles, and one which a good Mason never forgets, to never urge any one to become a member, so one can only blame himself if he is disappointed. Do you understand? I am satisfied, and more than satisfied, with my experience inside the lodge-room. But let us change the subject. I don't wish to be the means of bringing discord into the midst of the harmony that existed when I crossed the threshold. Let us have some more music."

Soon all was amicable again, and the vexed subject was forgotten for the time, and it was late when John and Nellie Apthorp took their leave.

Edward Boynton and John Apthorp were both bookkeepers in large business houses, and each enjoyed the confidence of the firm he was with. Both houses had all along been considered the most prosperous in the city; but, at one of those commercial panics that occasionally sweep over the country, both houses had been to deeply engaged in speculations, and went down. Both Ned and John had lived pretty well up to their means, they having fastidious tastes, and having an eye to the adornments of art and the pleasures of music and literature. So they both found themselves, in the middle of a severe winter, with about all their means gone, and business still prostrated so that they could find nothing to do. It was especially hard to the poor wives, who had hitherto had all that heart could wish, and now found themselves cramped for even necessaries.

Added to other misfortunes, Ned was taken sick about this time, and confined to his bed. His illness was a fever, brought on by anxiety and care. Several persons, whom Kate recollected but slightly, came to watch with him, and others called to make inquiries. She was grateful, and, mistrusting that they were Masons, felt more kindly towards the order, but still regretted the money Ned had spent upon it, thinking, with their empty flour-barrel and purse, how many nice things it could buy. She said as much, a little bitterly, one evening, to one of the watchers, who looked at her in a way she could not understand, and then made some remark about charitable societies not always practising what they preached.