

PRO AND CON.

(Continued.)

Ethel and I looked at each other and gasped. The thing became clear after a moment or two. When we went back to the station, we had entered it by one door and left it by another. Seeing a train on the track, we took it for granted it was ours. And it wasn't. That was all there was about it.

"Where can we get off?" I asked at last.

"At X"—a place which I knew did not contain a decent hotel.

"And when can we leave X?"

"Not until to-morrow."

It was decidedly not a cheerful prospect, but what must be. And to think that it was all due to Ethel's lorgnette!

The hotel which X considered its best could not truthfully be described as a bower of bliss. My heart sank at the first sight of the air of grimness and dirt which hung about it. I glanced at Ethel, but her face was serene and cheerful, if slightly weary. The room to which we were shown was up one flight of stairs. The window-panes were obscured by dirt; the paper shades hung in shreds and tatters; the carpet was stained and worn. The bed—but why dwell upon the harrowing picture? I waited for an outburst from Ethel—and it came.

"What a nice large room!" she cried, looking about her with an air of innocent surprise and delight. "Actually three windows! Why, Mark, it is quite charming. I should like to spend a week here."

I said nothing. My feelings were beyond words. And the worst of it was that she really seemed to mean what she said. Had she been merely making the best of it, I could, and felt that I would, have forgiven her, but she was not.

We went down to the dining-room. There I felt that Ethel's eyes must be opened; but not so. She looked without remark upon the soiled and tumbled tablecloth, the battered and dingy furnishings of the table, the frowzy and unkempt waitresses. It was incredible. That Ethel, the daintiest of women, should be able to endure such surroundings without complaint was certainly admirable; but that she should more than endure, that she should enjoy them, as she appeared to, was positively appalling. Silently, and, I fear, sulkily, I made a frugal meal of boiled eggs and baked potatoes, and obeyed the laws of hygiene by leaving the table nearly as hungry as when I sat down. Suddenly and still silently I left the table, while Ethel tripped beside me, beaming with delight, and still praising everything. I suppose I was glad that she could enjoy it. I hope I was. At all events, I neither said nor did anything to mar her bliss. But not even my sympathy could force me to stay beyond the first train in the morning. Unfortunately, said train left at six, and Ethel protested against being so ruthlessly dragged away.

"Why not stay a day or two, Mark?" she asked. "We could rest so nicely, and it would be quite a new experience."

"Quite so," I replied, grimly, and vouchsafed no further reply.

With half-laughing grumbles and protestations against my inhuman conduct, Ethel allowed herself to be carried off by the morning train. When she had settled herself comfortably in her seat and we were fairly off she looked at me.

"So you did not find it pleasant there, Mark?" she said.

"I did not," I replied, briefly, and with dignity.

"Would you like to know the secret

which enabled me to enjoy it? She asked, looking at me demurely.

"I certainly should, and—"

Some blind instinct of prudence led me to refrain from adding, "and to share it;" but Ethel understood, and her eyes twinkled.

"And you are ready to acknowledge that it is a good thing?" she asked.

"That depends," I answered, feeling more and more certain that I was falling into a trap.

"Poor boy! You could not share it if you would," said Ethel. "Yet it is all very simple. The disorder and untidiness which distresses you did not exist for me, simply because I never once used my lorgnette while I was in the hotel. Now do you acknowledge that near-sightedness is sometimes a benefit?"

"Not at all," I replied stoutly. "If I am to be poisoned I prefer to know it."

"I don't precisely see what good it does you to know it if you can't help it, and the knowledge only adds another pang," said Ethel laughing. "However, have it your own way now. I'll prove my point yet."

VI.

We were safely at home again, and our trip was a thing of the past. Not even the lorgnette was left as a souvenir of it, for that bone of dissension had again mysteriously vanished on our way home. Ethel laughingly accused me of having confiscated it, but I did not suppose that she meant it seriously. Neither of us even dimly foresaw what that fruit was to bear.

I had been sitting up unusually late that evening, partly because I was not quite at ease in my mind, and partly because I had become absorbed in an article in a review. I was sitting in a large easy chair, and before me upon the wall hung a mirror in which was reflected the only doorway in the room, which opened into the main hall directly behind my back. At my left was a stand on which burned a student lamp. The back of the chair in which I sat was so high that no one entering from the hall could see me.

Either the article was not interesting or I was more tired than I had supposed.

Whatever may have been the cause, it is certain that I fell asleep. Of course it is impossible for me to say how long my sleep lasted, but I became conscious at last of a slight rustling in the room. I suppose I must have moved or spoken, for my next sensation was that of intense cold, which coldness seemed to radiate from a spot on the right temple. Raising my eyes to the glass, I saw, what I had known well enough before, that the cold object pressed against my temple was the muzzle of a pistol in the hands of a man, who, as well as I could see in the shadow cast by the lamp shade, wore a crape mask over his face. Thought moves swiftly in such cases, unless one's mind is entirely paralyzed. Two thoughts flashed through my mind so quickly that I could not tell which came first. One was the fact that I had in the house a large sum of money belonging to my employers, which I had received too late to pay into the bank that afternoon. The other, it is hardly necessary to say, was Ethel. To give up the money was out of the question, but to lose my brains appeared equally so.

I could have sworn that the pistol had been at my head for half an hour, instead of a few seconds, when a second glance at the mirror caused me to start and smother an exclamation. For, framed in that doorway which was reflected in the mirror, I plainly saw Ethel, clothed in a long gray wrapper, and shod with shoes of silence. My blood froze in my veins as I watched her, daring neither to move nor to speak. In another instant my heart gave a sudden leap and then stood still, as I saw Ethel, my brave Ethel, spring suddenly forward, with her soundless tread and soft unrustling garment, and seize the hand which held the revolver, with a shrill cry of:

"Give it to me this minute! I've caught you fairly at last!"

Do not ask me what happened next, for I never could tell. The pistol went off, fortunately shivering the lamp instead of my head. The room was in darkness, but the crash of broken glass and a rush of cold air told how the robber had escaped. And Ethel, my brave Ethel, was in hysterics upon the floor.

As soon as I could find and light a fresh lamp, I picked her up and carried her to the sofa.

"Ethel, you plucky little woman!" I cried. "How came you to think of doing what you did? My dear little girl, look up and tell me how you came to be there, and what put the right thing to do into your mind."

"Oh dear!" gasped my brave little wife. "I wouldn't have done it for the world if I had only known. I woke up and missed you, and came down to look for you. When I got to the door I saw—oh, I thought I saw you bending over the table with my dear lost lorgnette in your hand. And I thought I'd get it, and give you a fright at the same time. So I ran at you and caught it, and—oh dear! the horrid thing went off, and it wasn't the lorgnette, and it wasn't you. If I had known it was a pistol and a robber, I'd never have touched it in the world!"

"Blessings on your near-sightedness, Ethel, my dear," I said, laughing. "I give in; I give in completely. Never, I implore you, never let me see you in spectacles again."

"Indeed, then, I'll do nothing of the kind," said Ethel, drying her eyes, and recovering sufficiently to pout. "Do you suppose I'm going through the world taking hold of pistols and never knowing it? You must try as much as you please to persuade me that near-sightedness is a good thing, but I know better now."

And never from that day to this have I seen Ethel without her spectacles.

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"Geewhilkilins!" he exclaimed, "that costs more'n hitchin'."

"Mebbe it does," she said, "but my feelin's have got to be paid for."

"I'll give you seven," he said at a venture.

The girl turned up her nose and argued, but he held on.

Then another family conference was held.

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Any of these signs is proof positive of Kidney Disease. Will you be cured, or will you die? Dodd's Kidney Pills are the only means on earth that will cure you. They never fail.

(To be Continued.)

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