

Select Tale.

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THE TRUANT HUSBAND.

A DOMESTIC SKETCH.

BY SYLVAHUS COBB, JR.

Emily Guilford sat alone in her snug, cosy sitting-room. She was a pretty woman, and loved well by those who knew and did not envy her. She had been married eight years, and had two children, a boy of seven years and a girl of five. They were now in bed and asleep, for it was nearly eleven o'clock. And yet the wife was alone. Perhaps her husband thought she had got used to this sort of thing, for she had surely lived under it long enough. At just half-past eleven Nathan Guilford entered. He was a handsome dashing looking fellow, well dressed, and bearing in his face the marks of good nature and a kind heart. He was head book-keeper in a heavy jobbing house, with a salary of two thousand dollars per annum.

"You look sober, duck," he said taking a seat close by his wife and kissing her. "What has happened?"

"I am very lonesome, Nathan," the wife replied. "Oh, I wish you would stay with me these long evenings."

"Stay with you? Pooh! And don't you see enough of me as it is?"

"No, no, Nathan. You know I have hardly one hour in the whole week that I can spend in your company."

"Not one hour? Why—you're crazy. Don't I spend every night with you?"

"You spend part of every morning at home, but it is spent in sleep. Why can't you spend your evenings here? I am very lonesome."

"Lonesome? Why don't you have the children to keep your company? They're getting old enough to be considerable company now."

"But you know they go to bed at eight o'clock."

"And why don't my little duck go with them?"

"Don't talk so, Nathan. Come—be reasonable now. If the children are getting to be such fine company, why can't you stay home and enjoy it. They are growing, my dear husband; and they are dear good children. They miss you, too."

"Tut, tut. You don't know what you are talking about, Emily. After poring over those books, and bills, and notes, and invoices, and letters all day, I must have some relaxation."

"So you should, Nathan; and what relaxation so healthy as the companionship of your own wife and children? And do I not need some relaxation, I have much to do, Nathan; and when evening comes I feel the want of sociality. I feel the want of my husband's company."

"But you don't suppose I could give up my club meeting, do you?"

"But that's only twice a week, Nathan."

"I beg your pardon—three times a week."

"Well—and is your club of more importance than this place?"

"No. If it was I should stay there. But look," added the husband, rather bluntly, "what is the wife's proper sphere?"

"Home," answered Emily quickly.

"Aye—you are right there, my dear and show your good judgement."

"Now answer me a question," resumed the fair hostess, with an earnest look and tone. "What makes a home?"

"What?" returned Nathan, with some hesitancy.

"Why—this makes your home."

"But what?"

"Why this house, to be sure."

"And why this house more than any other?"

"Because it's our home?"

"Aye—it is the home of a child where the parents are. And now, tell me, Nathan, what makes home for the true and loving wife?"

The husband did not answer this question at once. Emily's arm was about his neck, and her mild blue eye was resting affectionately upon him. But he knew that he must say something, and he did.

"Why I'll tell you. The wife's home is the husband's home, to be sure. That's plain enough."

"Do you mean that the husband only needs to board there to make a proper home?"

"What do you mean by boarding?"

"I mean just eating two meals at the house, and sleeping in it."

"Pooh! Nonsense! Come let's be off. I'm sleepy."

The wife argued more, but her husband would not listen. He said he must have recreation—he paid out his money to support his family—he found everything they wanted—and he had to work hard for it too. This was unkind. The poor wife felt it, and she said no more.

On the following evening Mrs. Guilford put her children to bed as usual, and then sat down by the fire with her needle work. It was a long tedious time. Her hired girl was a faithful creature, but coarse and illiterate, and no companion for her. She shed some tears—she could not help it. She knew that the habit was increasing upon her husband. He used to be gone only one evening in the week; and then it came to be two evenings; and now it came to be almost every evening, and very late at that. She saw plainly that he had allowed a set of free and easy fellows to gain the ascendancy over his home proclivities, and she had yet the worst to fear. She knew that he often drank wine, and that he played at billiards. She loved him devotedly, and would have sacrificed much for his comfort.

Nathan came home at just midnight, and about all that was said was chiding her for sitting up so late.

Thus matters went on for a week longer. One evening Nathan came home quite early—only ten o'clock—and found his wife gone.

"Ah," he said to himself, "she's gone to bed early to-night. She's taken the hint," I guess.

He went into the closet and got his slippers, and then sat down to read the evening paper, which he found on the table, but it didn't seem natural.

"I wish she'd staid up," he muttered. "It's confounded lonesome."

After a while he threw down the paper and went up to his chamber; but he started back when he saw no wife there. The bed had not been touched. He posted off down into the kitchen, where he found the hired girl nodding over some patchwork.

"Margaret, where's your mistress?"

"She's gone out, sir, and won't be back till late."

"Where's she gone?"

"Don't know sir."

"But who went with her?"

"She went all alone sir."

"And didn't she say what time she'd be at home?"

"No, sir, only she bade me look out for the children, 'cause she'd be out late."

Mr. Guilford returned to the sitting room, and having poked the fire, and put on more coal, he sat down and tried to read again. But it was no go. Every once in a while his gaze wandered away to that rocking chair, but those mild bright eyes were not there to meet it, and he found no sweet smile to welcome his glance. It was very lonesome. At half past twelve he arose, and made up his mind to go to bed, when he heard the front door open, and shortly after his wife returned.

"What?—you at home?" she uttered, as she threw off her hat and shawl.

"Me at home? Yes—I believe I am. And now I'd like to know where you've been."

"Why, I've been to our club meeting."

"Eh?—club—club-meeting? Ha, ha, ha—that's a good one. But honest, now, where have you been?"

"I tell you—to our club meeting. Can't you understand plain English?"

"Well this is a go. A female club. But what is it?"

"I tell you. A number of us have formed a club and we meet to read and converse; and sometimes we are to have music."

"Read and converse?" uttered Guilford, trying to laugh. "No tattling, I suppose."

"None to speak of, out of the club. But won't it be nice," she added, placing her small white hand upon her husband's arm. "Only think—we shall have such pleasant evenings, and not be lonesome a bit. I shan't scold you any more for staying away. I don't blame you, neither; I had no idea it was so pleasant."

Nathan was in no mood to say more, for he was not in a very good humor.

"She thinks she's going to pay me off—but two can play at that game!"

On the following morning but very little was said at the breakfast table, and as soon as he had eaten Nathan started out. In the evening he stepped into a billiard saloon.

"Ah, old fellow, how are you?" cried a fast man named Wetmore—a young blood with more money than sense, and more fun at gaming than money.

"Right as a book," was Guilford's answer, returning the fellow's friendly and hearty grasp.

"By the big boot in Chatham street, old boy, but you've got a duced fine piece of furniture for a wife!" rattled on the blood.

"Eh—ah—you—you've seen her then?"

"Yes—saw her last night. She came around with Kate, and stepped in to warm her precious little feet. Egad, Kate, you must bring her around some evening."

"Aye—who is she?" cried a second blood, who

had just tossed off a glass of brandy, as three or four others gathered around. "Your wife, Guilford? Bring her out, old boy."

Nathan Guilford felt sick at heart, and as soon as possible he got away from the room. His wife's name in such mouths! That being, who was to him as the very innermost half of his soul, in company with one who holds no title to the name of wife but the mere will of the man upon whose bounty she lived? It was agonizing. He stood upon the sidewalk some minutes, and finally resolved to go home.

It was just nine o'clock as he entered the sitting room, but it was empty of all but the stove and the furniture. He called to Margaret, and learned that his wife had gone out; but the girl did not know when she would be back. At first Nathan was angry. He went back to the warm, snug room, and sat down.

"By heavens, this won't do!" he uttered, as he took his seat.

He picked up the paper, and read some, but he remembered nothing of what he read. By and by the thought came to him of how pleasant it would be to have Emily by his side to chat with him about the various items of news as he read them over to her. He remembered that he used to do so once. But that was some time ago. Anon, he wondered how he should feel if his little wife should be taken from him. But he wouldn't think of that. He fancied he could see the sweet face smiling upon him, and he thought how he could press her to his bosom if she were by his side. Eleven o'clock came, and anger again took possession of his feelings. At half-past eleven his wife came in.

"Ah—at home again before me. How's this?"

"How is it? I'd like to ask you, how is it? I have been at home since nine o'clock."

"Have you?" returned the wife, coolly, at the same time drawing up her chair, and placing her feet on the fender.

"Yes," returned Nathan, whose anger was up again with her last cool remark, "and I think you had better be at home too."

"But I couldn't be at home, hubby, to-night, for our club had a business meeting for the purpose of making a permanent organization."

"It had, eh?"

"Yes, and I tell you we'll get along first rate. Such lively members! Oh, the hours slip away almost like minutes, and each minute a second!"

"That's all very well, but I think you'd look much better at home."

"Oh—now—Nathan! You couldn't deprive me of such comfort! Only think—after being shut up here all day over my work, to keep me from having some recreation! You wouldn't I know. You've no idea what a relief it is."

"But your children?"

"Oh—don't be uneasy on that score, hubby, Margaret is faithful as can be. And then you know one of these days Charley will be old enough to go out with you, and Ellen can go with me. They'd enjoy it."

"Yes, and fine company for children?"

"Why, what do you mean, Nathan? Isn't your company good enough for your son? and is not mine good enough for Ellen?"

Guilford bit his lip. He found himself very lame.

"But do you know the company you are getting into?" he asked nervously.

"I know that it is very pleasant."

"But do you know Kate Wetmore?"

"Oh, yes. Isn't she a charming creature!"

"A what?"

"A charming creature."

"She's a—miserable creature."

"Why, Nathan? How can you talk so? How can you go to Mr. Wetmore's house, and spend whole evenings there with him and his wife, and one or two others, and then talk so? How can you sit and chat with her and hold her hands in yours, and laugh and joke, and then call her such hard names? Why both of them set ever so much by you, and that's the reason why I love them?"

Here was a fix! Nathan Guilford was caught in a snug place. But his wife went on:

"Oh! we shall have such pleasant times when we get all organized; and I am sure you won't make any more objections, you won't deprive me of real comfort?"

"And are those meetings of more comfort than your own home?" the nervous man asked, earnestly.

"Oh no, not more real comfort. That is if it was wholly a home—but then you know we must have some recreation."

"But listen, Emily. Kate Wetmore is a bad woman. She is not his real wife. They were never—"

He did not finish the sentence, for his own wife had given a sudden start, and then turned so pale that he was frightened.

"Not his wife!" she gasped. "And I have—Oh! Nathan, what have I done! I thought she was honest—I thought she—I—I—knew you were there, and—and—then Mr. Wetmore is a libertine."

"Yes," uttered the startled husband, supporting his wife in his arms.

"Oh! what have I done! I thought they were good—only free and easy. I went there to see her because I knew her husband—a her—yes—I thought 'twas her husband—I knew he was one of your club, and I went there to get her to join me in my plan. And she did. Then we went to Mrs. Skidmore's and—"

"Skidmore!" whispered Nathan, quivering.

"Yes. Is she—"

"Worse than the other! A mere street—but never mind. Did you go into Skidmore's house?"

"We met there," returned Emily, pale and trembling with alarm.

"Oh, my soul!" groaned the husband, "what a pit you have escaped. In all the city you could not have found two worse women. Even the police know them."

"Mercy!" gasped poor Emily, holding on upon her husband's neck, "I wouldn't have gone only I knew you were there, and I thought they were good and honest. But forgive me this once. I won't try it again. I'll stay at home, for home, even without the thing I love best on earth is better than such danger. I thought they were the wives of men who stayed away late with you, and I meant to have them help me punish you. But forgive me, Nathan!—forgive me, and I will never do so again. I have learned a lesson that I shall never forget. Only say that you forgive me."

For some moments the man gazed into his wife's pale, tear-wet face, and then, while he clasped her fondly to his bosom, he cried:

"On one condition, Emily—on one condition, I'll forgive and forget all."

"Oh, what is it. I'll promise."

"It is, that you will forgive me. Don't say much now—only say that I am forgiven."

The wife looked up, and in spasmodic tones she whispered:

"You know that I forgive you, oh! from the bottom of my heart. And you won't chide me; you won't reflect upon this?"

"Ah, precious one, how could I!" exclaimed Nathan, exchanging his expression for one of extreme affection. "You forget how deeply I am involved; but believe me, my wife, when I tell you that all my faults have been what you now know. God knows that your husband is still true and pure."

The fond wife clung more tightly to her companion's neck, and for a while their words were of the past. But enough for this scene. It was sacred in all its spirit, and happy in its results.

On the following evening Mr. Guilford came home to tea, and the time was passed in reading and conversation. It was three months after this that Nathan and his wife sat together in their comfortable apartment. The children had just gone to bed, and the husband and wife were engaged in a game of chess. By and by the former gazed up into his companion's face, and while a rich moisture gathered in his eyes, he said:

"Ah, Emily, what a miserable man he must be who has no home; and how little does that man know of true happiness who having a good home, seeks for recreation elsewhere."

The wife's answer was a sweet kiss; and when, a moment afterwards, she picked up her king to move it out of check, a bright tear fell upon it.

Miscellaneous.

SPECULATIONS ON A FOSSIL FEMALE DRESS.—The remarks of a valued friend of ours on the fair sex are sometimes sufficiently amusing to make us forgive the sarcastic style in which they are conveyed. One of his latest speculations is in regard to the possible finding, by a succeeding race of mankind of a female dress of the present day; in which case he says, a Cuvierian examination of the various articles would probably bring out the following results:—The being to whom this attire belonged must have been constituted in a very peculiar manner, and probably with some strange natural defects which it required art to remedy. Allowing some space for the principal exterior robe to sweep clear of the ground, the length would be about seven feet. The diameter of the creature in the centre was in a singular disproportion to this longitude, being only seven inches and a half. Still more disproportionate appear to have been the anterior extremities, which were not above a foot and a half in length, and what is remarkable, while narrow at top, they seem to have expanded below to an enormous size. Probably they resembled paddles, rather than arms and hands. The