

Their First Quarrel

Mr and Mrs Whittleton had now returned from their honeymoon—that cloudless period of concentrated bliss—and Mr Whittleton, with his wife's permission, had just lighted a cigar, and was leaning back in a beatific state of enjoyment. The evening paper lay unheeded in a vacant chair, and the slipper stage not yet having settled down upon him, Mr Whittleton's feet, enclosed in new patent-leathers, reposed as comfortably as possible on a rest provided by his thoughtful bride.

"My dear," said Whittleton, as the smoke curled peacefully upward, "we have not yet had our first quarrel."

"And I hope we never shall," replied Mrs Whittleton.

Whittleton's answering smile betrayed a slight touch of superior wisdom united with its expansiveness.

"So do I," he observed, "but, unfortunately, I am afraid it will happen. I say I am afraid of it, and yet it is possible we can prevent it."

"What makes you think it will happen?"

"It generally does. Two natures, trying to adjust themselves to each other, must inevitably clash to a certain extent. Let us try to circumvent this."

Whittleton leaned forward, and took his wife's hand. "Dearest," he said earnestly, "I have been thinking over this matter, and I'm determined to forestall any trouble, if possible. Let's look ahead, and make up our minds what to do to prevent it."

Mrs Whittleton regarded her husband with a look of mild surprise.

"I don't quite know what you mean, dear," she said. "We love each other, I'm sure. Everything is all right."

"I know everything is all right; but it may not be. I'm likely any night to come home from business, tired out and cross. You may not understand my mood. Something may have gone wrong to irritate me. Such things happen."

"But why don't you wait till the time comes?"

"That's just it. I want to prevent it now. In case I should say something you don't quite understand, bear with

me; control yourself; don't answer back."

"But if you were really cross, dear, you wouldn't expect me to submit to your mood, would you?"

"Why not? I shall do the same by you."

Mrs Whittleton looked a trifle annoyed. "It seems to me," she said, "that you are anxious about nothing."

"I'm not anxious," replied Whittleton; "I'm simply exercising ordinary prudence. I want our married life to be a success."

"Well, there's no reason why it shouldn't be, so far as I am concerned."

"Did I say there was?"

"You implied it. You implied that I should be cross—that the time would come when I couldn't control myself."

"Nothing of the sort! I merely asked you to make an effort, to meet me halfway."

"Exactly. You insinuated that it would be necessary to do this. It was horrid of you."

"Horrid! What do you mean?"

"What I say!"

Whittleton assumed an air of patience. "Now, my dear, is the time for you to do just what I warned you about," he said. "Don't you see what I mean? Why, we are almost quarrelling now!"

"Who began it?"

"I certainly didn't."

"You did. You have deliberately sat down here, and tried to pick a quarrel with me."

"How can you say such a thing?"

"Because it's true. You are a mean, contemptible, cross, hateful old thing, and I don't love you any more. I wish I hadn't married you! There!"

Whittleton rose. "Very well, my dear," he said. "I'm sorry. But, remember, it's not my fault. At present I'll leave you to yourself."

And, as his wife flounced out of the room, he said to himself, as he glanced at his watch:

"I hated to do it, but I simply had to get down to the club to-night and tell the boys all about the joys of newly-married life." Tom Masson, in "The Smart Set."



HEAD OF A GIRL (National Gallery.)



FIDELITY (Wallace Collection.)



GIRL WITH FOLDED HANDS (Edinburgh Collection.)



SORROW (Wallace Collection.)

Four Beautiful Pictures by Greuze.