

## THE DISAPPEARANCE OF JOHN LONGWORTHY.

M. F. EGAN IN AVE MARIA.

XXXIV.—*Iphigenia*.

DURING the interval, as the buds of April swelled into the leaves of May, and the time went on to those three or four days in the spring when the gates of the lost Paradise seem to open and all its glow and glory to fill the earth, Mary had many moments of unhappiness. Miles came and went, sullen and unsocial. He did not hesitate to declare to his sisters that he considered their conduct utterly base. He sneered on all occasions at the "absurdities" of John Longworthy and the "dudishness" of Arthur Fitzgerald. He insinuated that if he were driven to ruin, his sisters, on whom he most relied, would be responsible for it.

Esther, absorbed in her own plans, paid no attention to all this. She escaped as soon as the rather gloomy meals were over. A disagreeable person in a family knows his advantages. He may be avoided at other times, but nobody can prevent his putting gall into the coffee, or adulterating the sugar with acid that is more biting than anything the chemists know of. And Miles understood well how to use his privileges.

While Esther and John Longworthy floated out into the country, day after day, borne on the rosy clouds of the peach blossoms or the white mist of the cherry trees, Mary went through her daily drudgery, almost happy when she did not think of Miles. Arthur was ecstatic. The spring was to him a veritable glimpse of Paradise, and Mary was the Eve fresh from the hand of her Creator. But when he was with her there was often a touch of melancholy in their intercourse. Mary had moments of silence, and sad silence, that depressed him. He could not understand this. To him a walk with her through the twilight streets, where even crowded tenement and dark brown stone could not stifle the breathings of spring, was a delight that he could not express in words. He loved the silence that sometimes fell between them, but not the silence that left Mary with a sad look in her eyes and almost a frown on her brow. He knew then that she was thinking of Miles.

As April waned, and the little buttons on the trees became feathered tufts, Mary grew more and more preoccupied. Esther, who had given up her music lessons, was in a flutter of happiness. She looked after the *trousseau* with a natural aptness for that sort of thing, and with the additional pleasure of spending money without the usual restraint. The ward-ropes were not very elaborate—they did not come up to Nellie Mulligan's ideas at all. And that astute young lady, who had made the acquaintance of Esther's dressmaker, knew all about them.

A change took place in Miles, and Mary noticed it with a new feeling of terror; and she felt that any change in him must be for the worse. He became laboriously polite, and ceased to jeer at his prospective brothers-in-law. What did he mean? Was he going away? And then, as he appeared in various new suits of clothes, and an onyx-seal ring, Mary asked herself if he had taken to gambling. By constant dwelling on this suspicion it developed almost into a certainty. She followed him with anxious eyes, much to his pleasure: for, next to getting into the Assembly, there was only one thing he desired ardently—and that was to punish Mary. He knew now that he was making her unhappy.

She dreamed of him night after night. She saw him a little flaxen-haired boy; and then all changed, as he lay dying on the doorstep, speechless, reproaching her with his eyes. And night after night, in her dreams, she saw him die, hopeless, unrepentant, in his sins. She awoke with a shriek one night, when the horror of all this seemed to choke her. She would not tell Esther what she had suffered, but that night she concluded to set Arthur free; she said to herself that she could not make him happy while Miles lived as he did. Mary was sincere in all this—morbidly so, over-scrupulously so, but, then, it was her nature to be over-scrupulous, and her unfortunate brother had been for so long a time her first and last thought.

In the meantime John Longworthy had a private talk with Miles. He knew the Miles species, and he made a sharp bargain with him. Miles was to be supplied with all the money he needed for his campaign on certain conditions; one of these was that he was not to annoy his sisters. All Miles wanted was the money, and he knew how to spend it where it would do him the most good. He was a popular man: he was the sort of man who becomes popular in miscellaneous crowds, where it is necessary to reach the great average; his very abstinence from the amenities of life in the bosom of his own family left him more vitality for their exercise in other quarters. And the grand picnic he gave in the late summer, at which every man, woman, and child in The Anchor and for miles around assisted, was the stroke of grace. He was elected, and the whole district hailed him as the Honorable Miles Galligan. After this he seldom saw his sisters; although later, when he had married, his wife often visited them, and told them tales of his meekness under her rule, which made Esther laugh and which caused Mary to pity him, and to sigh over the past.

It happened that on one calm afternoon Mary and Arthur had gone down to the seaside. Her cheeks had become so pale of late that Arthur had a vague fear that she was not happy. The sea came in softly, with no high dashes or loud roar only a series of foam-edged ripples. Men were at work on Brighton Beach, repairing the wreck of the winter. A passing steamer was outlined against the blue sky, which was without a cloud. A red umbrella on the gray sand, not very far distant, made a brilliant point of colour in the sunlight. Mary had her bunch of white hyacinths in her bosom; but when the thought of last night's dream crossed her mind their rich scent seemed a presage of doom.

Mary was sitting on the piazza of the Brighton Beach Hotel. Arthur was near her, leaning against the pillar, with a happy and confident look in his eyes.

"And may there be no moaning at the bar  
When I put out to sea!"

he quoted idly; for the silence was full of words, and for a brief space he was really happy. He had a clear conscience and he was in love—two things that do not constitute happiness for other races, but which are more than sufficient for the Irish.

"Arthur," Mary said, with an effort, rising and putting her hand in his. "I cannot make you happy,—I am sure of it."

"Oh, yes you can," answered Arthur, confidently, turning toward her with a smile—"I am sure you can."

"But I am not happy myself. Oh, how can I leave that boy? How can I desert him even for you? I promised mother—"

"What boy?" asked Arthur, in bewilderment, looking around him.

"Miles—Miles, of course," she replied. "I cannot leave him even for you. Oh, forgive me, Arthur, but I am entirely wretched—wretched! He can never take care of himself."

Arthur's smile faded. He looked at her anxiously. Her pallor gave his heart a keen pang. How could such a sweet creature think so much of that hulking and selfish brute! But, after all, he was her brother.

"I hope," she went on, "that you will not think I do not—like you more than anybody else in the world. You know better!"

Arthur pressed her hand slightly and smiled again.

"And I hope you will not think I'm hysterical or nervous or silly or unkind—but, O Arthur, I can't leave him to go to his ruin!—I can't—I can't!"

"We will not talk of it now," he answered, smiling again. "This school-teaching has upset you. When we've had a little journey, and you have been free from drudgery a little while, life will look different, and Miles will not appear so helpless."

"I wish I could think so," she said, and a tear dropped on his hand. "Oh, I wish I could think so; but I know better! Arthur, as long as Miles lives as he lives now I cannot leave him. I know you think him selfish, but you only see him as he is now, you don't know how good he is at heart—"

"No, I don't," interrupted Arthur, involuntarily; and