



"Life has its May, and all is mirthful then;
The woods are vocal, and the flowers all odor;
Its very blast has mirth in 't—and the maidens,
The while they don their cloaks to screen their kirtles,
Laugh at the rain that wets them."
—Scott.

The Rebellion of M'lindy Ann.

THE STORY OF TWO EVENTFUL JOURNEYS FROM THE BARROWS' FARM TO THE CITY.

By Julia Truitt Bishop.

I.

When Eli Barrows was fairly set in at his work, he was an adept at hectoring; and it was his pleasure to hector on this occasion.

"Yes," he declared loftily to M'lindy Ann as he hitched up; "I've sold the hill place for three thousand dollars—three thousand—do ye take that in? I've got the whole pile in my satchel in there, an' I'm goin' to ketch the eight o'clock train for the city an' put it in bank. No, you can't go along. It's jest a matter of business, an' I can't tend to it myself, without the expense of two goin'. What do women know about business, any way? I reckon I know how this money's come—by good, hard ticks—an' I've been a good part of my life makin' it, so it stan's to reason I'd know how to take keer of it."

"I've worked pretty hard for it, myself," said Mrs. Barrows, meekly. She was a little woman with iron-gray hair, and her voice was soft and plaintive.

Eli laughed, throwing back his head.

"Well, I call that good!" he said jeeringly. "What does any woman know about work, I'd like to know? Always in the house, havin' an easy time, while men's out in the weather, toilin' for all they're worth. I b'lieve you'd complain if you was in Paradise, M'lindy Ann. You don't know when you're well off—a good home, an' little to do, an' a chance to go to church every other Sunday, besides the political speakin'!"

M'lindy Ann did not reply. She turned resignedly, went into the house and devoted herself to the "little to do" which Eli had mentioned. The broom was going swiftly and steadily when her lord came in and took up the leather satchel from the table.

"I'll be home in the mornin', on that early train," he said condescendingly, for he was always ready to forgive M'lindy Ann for her shortcomings, and took great credit to himself therefor, as being "easy to get along with." "You can wait breakfast—I'll be pretty hungry, I reckon."

"Buy a roun'-trip ticket, Eli," suggested M'lindy Ann mildly. But there could not have been any ulterior motive in her suggestion, for she added under his frowning glance: "They're cheaper in the long run, ye know."

"You talk like you travelled for a livin'," muttered Eli, as he went out to the buggy; and the broom swept steadily on, through one room and into another.

One could live with M'lindy Ann in comparative comfort. She never talked back.

"I wisht ye had some new clothes, Eli," she called after him as he sat in the buggy, his knotty hands with the reins in them resting on the knees of his baggy old trousers.

"If my clothes suits me, there ain't nobody else got anything to do with 'em," he proclaimed testily. "If anybody wants to laugh at my clothes, let

'em laugh. They'd laugh on the other side o' their mouths if they knowed I had three thousan' dollars in that little ol' grip!"

And Eli drove away, well satisfied with himself. Reaching town, he stabled his horse near the station and bought a round-trip ticket. He was going to do that anyhow, of course. M'lindy's suggestion had nothing to do with it. Women were always giving advice where it wasn't really needed.

Eli's trip to the city was not dull nor monotonous in the least. It chanced that the car was somewhat crowded, and a gentleman asked permission to share his seat. He was a well-dressed gentleman, with kid gloves, yet he did not hesitate to speak pleasantly to a homely old farmer like Eli Barrows, commenting on the perfect winter weather, and asking after the last summer's crops with the greatest interest. It turned out that he was a member of the Missouri Legislature, on a little tour for health and pleasure, and Eli cheerfully gave him a great deal of information concerning the country in which he lived.

"You know, I always feel at home among the farmers," said the gentleman from Missouri. "Of course a large number of my constituents are farmers, and whenever I can get away I go down among them for an outing. Such good country fare as they give me! Such fried chicken—such butter and milk—there's nothing at the Waldorf-Astoria can compare with it!"

"I wisht ye'd call in on me as you're goin' back," said Eli, warmed to the heart. "We've got a pretty prosperous place—I'm jes' takin' three thousan' up to the city now, to put it in bank."

The member of the Missouri Legislature looked alarmed.

"Hush! Don't tell that to every one," he whispered. "Have you friends in the city? Do you know where you are going to put up?"

"I don't know yet," said Eli, visibly swelling; "but I reckon I'll strike one o' the big hotels for dinner—somethin' along about forty or fifty cents—I don't mind expenses, this trip. An' there can't no confidence man git the better o' me. I read the papers, I do—an' the first one that comes up an' calls me his long-lost uncle is goin' to git pasted over the head with this here umbrella!"

"But sometimes there are several of them, working together," said the gentleman from Missouri with deep concern.

"Let's see—a friend of mine gave me the address of a place he always goes to—if I haven't lost it—ah, here it is! He says it is a very plain place, but the meals are fine. Suppose we both go there; and I'll keep you in sight after dinner till you get your money banked. Really, Mr. Barrows, after the interesting conversation we have had this morning, I shall not feel safe until you get that money into the bank."

And they reached the city, and Eli Barrows, smiling and grip-laden, went off in a cab with the member of the Missouri Legislature, and was lost in the crowd.

II.

M'lindy Ann had heard the distant rumble of the early morning train as it crossed the valley at the back of the field and sped away to the little town, two miles further on. Breakfast was ready, and she was keeping it warm on the back of the stove.

The entire house was speckless and in its best Sunday clothes; and, strange to relate, so was M'lindy Ann. Her worn black dress was brushed to the last degree, and showed its threadbareness forlornly. Her shabby old bonnet was waiting her pleasure on the bedroom

mental; her rusty black cape hung over a chair, ready for use at a moment's notice.

She was at the door, watching the bend of the road. Her face was colorless, even to the lips. Unconsciously her fingers plucked and twisted the ends of the ribbon bow at her throat into little black spirals. M'lindy Ann was plainly much disturbed.

When a little cloud of dust came crawling around the bend of the road, M'lindy Ann bestirred herself and set the breakfast on the table. Everything was ready when Eli stepped in at the door, and M'lindy Ann looked up, pretending not to notice that he was trembling from head to foot, and that he leaned against the door for support. What she really did notice was the other fact that his clothes were muddy, that his coat was torn, and that his hat had been crushed almost beyond recognition.

M'lindy Ann hastily set a dish down on the table.

"I see how it is," she said. "You've been run over by one o' them street cars, Eli. Which ones o' your bones is broke?"

Eli burst into futile tears, and sank into a chair.

"It's worse'n that, M'lindy Ann!" he sobbed, with his arms on the table among the dishes and his head on his arms. "I've been robbed an' drugged. I've lost the whole pile—an' it's my own tarnation fault! I was too pesky intimate with a stranger—but he said he was a member of the Missouri Legislature, an' how was I to s'pose he was lyin'? An' the game they showed me—I could 'a' beat it with one han' tied behin' me. I seen my way clear to makin' another thousan' or so, to put in the bank along with the other; but they must 'a' put somethin' into the beer—I didn't drink more'n half a teacupful, M'lindy Ann—an' I couldn't move hand or foot when they went into the satchel an' took the whole pile. An' then they come back an' kicked me all aroun', an' tramped on my hat; an' when I woke up I was jes' in time to ketch the train back. I'm ruined, M'lindy Ann! The money I've worked so hard fur all my life—"

"I've worked pretty hard for it myself," said M'lindy Ann, drily.

She had made the same remark the morning before, but now there was a new quality in it. Eli groaned.

"If I had it back ag'in I'd give ye half of it, M'lindy," he said, sadly. "Ye ain't worked as hard as what I have, but maybe you're entitled to half—fur ye've kep' the house mighty nice; but it's all gone! What's the matter, M'lindy Ann? Where ye goin'? What ye all dressed up fur at this time o' the day?"

"As soon as breakfast's over, I'm goin' to start for the city," said M'lindy Ann, who was quietly drinking her coffee. She had laid her bonnet on a chair with the cape; and beside it was a bundle wrapped in paper.

"Goin' to the city?" gasped Eli in deep amazement.

"Yes—I'm goin' to the city to put some money in the bank," said M'lindy Ann, eating serenely, the while she kept a pair of dark eyes fastened on Eli's astounded visage. "I'm goin' to take three thousan' dollars with me—the three thousan' that I saved by takin' it out of your grip when you was goin' off, so bumptious an' so pleased with yourself!"

Eli's jaws dropped apart, and his hands hung limp at his sides. When he recovered himself, a small, iron-gray woman was tying her bonnet strings in a

neat bow under a determined chin, looking him calmly in the eyes the while.

"M'lindy Ann, you've got that money?" he cried in broken speech. "You'd taken it out before I lef' home? The man—the man from Missouri didn't get it?"

Eli Barrows, you went up to the city with a piece of wood in your satchel, wrapped up in newspaper," said M'lindy, hooking the old black cape under her chin. "I hope the man from Missouri felt that it done him good. Take keer of the place, Eli. See that the chickens has fresh water, an' don't forget to wind the clock, an' be shore to put the cat out of the house every night. I'd tell ye to wash the dishes every day, but I know good an' well you won't do it. This day week you can meet me at the train. You might as well drive down to the depot with me now, so's you can bring the team back."

Eli's jaws made connection slowly.

"M'lindy Ann," he said, meekly, "hadn't I better go along with ye? We could git 'Liza Briggs to mind the place; an' now that I know the ropes—"

"You stay right here," said M'lindy Ann, composedly. "I don't want nothin' to do with none o' the ropes you learned while you was in the city!"

An with this parting thrust a very small and very erect woman walked out to the buggy, followed by a tall and abject-looking man.

"Tain't right for a lone woman to go off on the train with all that money," he said as they drove up beside the little red station. "No tellin' what'll become of ye, M'lindy Ann."

"There won't nothin' become of me," said M'lindy Ann composedly. "You have the buggy here to meet the evenin' train one week from to-day—an' you look after the house. There ain't much to do, you know. You tol' me yestidday that my work didn't amount to nothin'."

After which M'lindy Ann, the hectorer and brow-beaten, disappeared into an unknown world.

III.

Perhaps there may have been years that were as long as the week of M'lindy's absence, but Eli had never experienced them. The work put new cracks into his back and unexpected blisters on his hands; and he had no sooner completed a meal and got things "straightened up" than he had to begin on another, and get them unstraightened again.

The same thing was to do over and over and over, not only every day, but three times a day. He looked at the soiled dishes with loathing, and swept in the middle of the floor, shunning the corners faithfully. He milked and churned the first day, but after that he merely milked, considering that butter was too dearly bought. After all, it did seem that M'lindy Ann's work was not the easiest in the world, though it had this saving grace—she was used to it. No doubt when one got used to it everything was very smooth sailing.

At last he sat in the old buggy, and saw M'lindy Ann step from the train and walk toward him with the light step of a girl.

"Well, how's everything?" she asked in a clear voice that he did not know. "The whole house is in a mess, I s'pose? Well, never mind—I'll soon get everything cleaned up!"

And he drove briskly home, waiting for her to begin; but she did not begin until she was seated in the kitchen, with the lamp-light showing a new expression in her eyes.

"Well, M'lindy Ann," said Eli mildly, "how'd ye come on in the city?" He had purposely made the speech