

## THE DISAPPEARANCE OF JOHN LONGWORTHY.

M. F. EGAN IN AVE MARIA.

## XXXIII.—A Bit of Hyacinthe.

MARY found herself in the hall, with the door closed, and Esther's arms around her neck.

"Oh, my dear," Esther said, "I am so anxious to tell you all! But was there anybody with you at the door—perhaps I shut it too abruptly?"

"It was only Mr. Fitzgerald."

"I am glad I did not see him, then; for I must speak to you. It seems to me that I have not had a good talk with you for a month. Come!

Esther put her arm around Mary's waist and drew her into the parlour. The two sat down on the sofa in the twilight, which always dwelt in that sacred apartment during the daytime. Mary did not resist. She determined to endure what she could and to keep silent. There was a mistake somewhere, or a misunderstanding. It flashed through her mind that Arthur Fitzgerald was merely flirting with both her and her sister; however, she banished the unpleasant thought as if it were a temptation.

"And how did you know about it, dear?" asked Esther, eagerly. "Did you guess that he liked me?"

Mary turned away her face. A strange, unreasonable hope had filled her heart a moment ago; it was gone now. Arthur Fitzgerald had meant nothing; she had misunderstood him. And it was well that she had; for his words and his look could have meant only treachery to her sister.

"It is all so wonderful!" said Esther. "I cannot believe that I am the same girl. He spoke only last night.

Mary listened with her hand in Esther's. The latter went on:

"I have not told anybody but Miles, and I should not have told him only he was just as horrid as he could be. Poor Miles! Do you know, Mary, since he spoke I have begun to think it was, perhaps, cruel to separate him and that Nellie Mulligan. I am afraid you think I am getting sentimental, Mary. Oh, I wouldn't have you think—"

"I am not thinking at all, dear," responded Mary, wearily.

"Why, Mary, you don't seem glad at all! Don't you like him? Do you think he is too old? You know I never did care for boys. Really, Mary, you don't seem a bit happy over it! If I were you, now, I'd throw my arms around you and be the happiest girl in the whole world!"

The tears were coming into Esther's eyes, and she was somewhat incoherent. Her sister did not reply.

"I know you don't like him!" cried Esther, a little hysterically. "If it were Arthur Fitzgerald now—"

"Isn't it Arthur Fitzgerald?"

Esther stared at Mary for a moment, and dropped her hand.

"What an idea, Mary! Of course not! What an idea! Arthur Fitzgerald! How could you think that!"

Mary turned suddenly and kissed Esther on both cheeks.

"Oh, I am so glad, Esther!" It must be Mr. Bastien, then."

"Who else? But you did not know as much as I thought you did. I must tell you the whole story before school-time. Come and have your luncheon."

Mary followed Esthey with a light heart; she scarcely felt the stairs beneath her feet. She listened as if in a dream to Esther's story. It did not seem wonderful to her; for the wonder and delight in her own mind over her discovery were so great that everything else faded by contrast. She wanted to get away from Esther and think. But suddenly it occurred to her that she was selfish thus to concentrate herself on her new-found happiness, and she made an effort to enter into Esther's with all the old forgetfulness. She could not do so, however; and, introspective as usual, she reproached herself with the thought that, after all, there was a greater love possible than that which she had for her only sister.

When Mary went to school that afternoon the aspect of life had changed. A radiance shone in her eyes and her step was elastic. Even Miles, who was seldom absent from her thoughts, was forgotten. The hours passed quickly. One

of the children brought her a bit of white hyacinthe, which she put in a glass of water. Ever afterward the scent of a hyacinthe made her heart leap upward in a hawk-like flight of rapturous gratitude toward Almighty God, who had been so wondrously good to her.

As Mary was coming out of the school a messenger boy met her on the steps. He gave her a little box and a note, and laconically said: "Answer." She went back to her desk, opened the envelope, and found a few lines written on one side of a sheet:

"If you were offended by what I said this morning, forgive me; but remember me sometimes. I send you a little thing that belonged to my mother; my giving it to you means more than I can put into words."

Mary opened the little white box; a tiny rosary of carved white beads lay within it; the crucifix was worn thin. Tears came to her eyes as she took it in her fingers tenderly. How should she answer? With the rosary clasped in her hand, she went out, while the messenger boy waited and whistled unconcernedly; people often forgot him—time was of no moment to him. She stood at the iron gate until the janitor came to shut it, greeting her pleasantly. How should she answer the missive?

She twisted the bit of hyacinthe nervously, and its scent seemed to envelope her. As she mused a man turned the corner; she recognized him—it was Arthur Fitzgerald. He stopped, looked toward the school, and was about to pass on. He caught sight of her and moved toward her; and she, obeying a sudden impulse, went toward him. They met near the corner, and in an instant the hyacinthe had changed hands. The boy still whistled on the curb-stone; they had forgotten him; but doubtless he took care of himself.

Not so very far away little Rose O'Connor lay, placid and beautiful, in her coffin, decked by kind hands. Her mother had come out of jail, attended and watched, to see her dead child; but she had been taken back again after the awful ceremony of leave-taking. The woman was heart-broken; she dropped no tear; she shuddered and shivered beside the coffin, until at last she was carried away. Nellie Mulligan stepped up to speak to her as the prison attendants lifted her into the carriage.

"I have killed my child," she said in a low voice; "I have driven my husband to drink. I know it—I know it!" she added impatiently, as Nellie tried to soothe her. "I know it, I tell you! My other children know it. And now I must suffer for it. And why do I do this. Because I thought only of myself, of dances, of amusements; because I neglected my home. God save you from the like, Nellie Mulligan! What I did is the curse of thousands like me. I have told my two daughters that are living what I told you. Mind what I say!"

Nellie, frightened and impressed, saw her go away. The unhappy woman was never again seen outside the prison walls. She died within a week after Rose's burial. Her husband was released, and John Longworthy found work for him, and installed him and his daughter Maggie in a more suitable home.

Rose was buried with all the honours of The Anchor. No family was too poor to beg, borrow, or to acquire through the keepers of the pawn-shop, at least a half interest in a carriage in which to accompany the body of the child to Calvary Cemetery; and the floral offerings filled the little white hearse which John Longworthy had provided.

During that night The Anchor was strangely silent. No rough words were heard; it seemed as if the soul of the pure little child still hovered there, sprinkling the balm of peace from its wings.

At Lacy's, the next day, there was no gaiety in the luncheon room. Nellie and Lize Brown sat in a corner, with their arms around each other's shoulders, pensive, gentle, and for the moment, incapable of quarrelling.

"Ah, well!" observed Lize at last, "there's always a marriage after a funeral; and I suppose it will be you and Miley next."

"It will not," responded Nellie. "I have found Miley out; he is not worth consideration; and if he goes to the Assembly a hundred times, he'll be the same Miley all the time. The