

## THE DISAPPEARANCE OF JOHN LONGWORTHY.

M. F. EGAN IN AVE MARIA.

"I believe I shall," Nellie answered, spreading out her brilliant plumage. "And now," she added, quite forgetting her programme, "I want to know what you have got to say against me?"

At this moment Esther entered, humming a tune. It was not until she had passed the threshold that she found there was a third person in the room.

"Oh, come in!" Nellie said. "Don't go out because I am here. I came specially to see you, and to have my position understood. I was just asking your sister why you objected to me. Ain't I good enough for your Miley?"

Esther's heart sank as she accepted Nellie's invitation and took a chair near the piano. There was no doubt in her mind that the young lady before her was, to say the least, quite good enough for Miles.

Mary's eyes were clear but sad. Her hands held nervously a piece of school MS. she had been correcting. She did not attempt to answer Nellie Mulligan; this was an ordeal for which she was not prepared.

Esther looked at her and forgot herself in Mary's evident distress. Oh, why could they not go away somewhere and leave the house to this awful girl? If Miles chose to drive them out, let him do it and make the best of his bargain. The old house was dear, but peace was dearer: and Mary must be spared a long, heart-rending discussion with this insolent creature.

Nellie Mulligan, with rising colour, repeated her question. "Yes," Mary said, in her soft, low voice.

"Then why don't you accept the situation, and advise him to marry me as soon as he can? I am sure he is more willing than I am," added Nellie, with a giggle.

"Let us end this scene at once," Esther said. "You and Miles may marry as soon as you like, but when you enter this house we shall leave it."

"I'm sure I'm agreeable!" cried Nellie, her voice losing its softness and becoming shrill. "I'm not anxious for your company—why, there is Miles himself!"

Miles lounged into the room, with his pipe in his mouth. At sight of Nellie he uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"Protect me, Miley!" she cried out. "Oh, protect me!" And then she put her handkerchief to her eyes.

Miles scowled at his sisters.

"I don't want any nonsense, girls," he said. "Nellie Mulligan is a lady, and don't you forget it!"

Nellie clung to his arm, as a frightened bird might cling—if frightened birds were in the habit of clinging. Miles took his pipe from his mouth and scowled again.

"I want you to know that this young lady is my intended wife."

"I have said, Miles, that the house is at your service; but when you marry this young lady and enter it as your dwelling, we, your sisters, will go elsewhere."

Esther spoke with a touch of scorn in her voice; Mary made no sign of dissent.

Miles looked from one to the other in astonishment.

"Why, you know you can't leave, he said. "If you go away what on earth shall I live on till things come right? And with a wife to support, too! If Nellie marries me she can't go on working at Lacy's; it wouldn't look well; my political enemies would catch on to it and make things hot for me."

Nellie dropped the handkerchief from her eyes, which were not at all tearful. She felt that it was her turn to speak.

"You are not thinking that I'll live on the earnings of your sisters, Miley?" she asked. "Are you?"

"What else? I'll make up to them when I strike luck." Miles put his pipe back into his mouth. "Come, be friends, act like sisters," he added, with a laugh.

Nellie pushed him away from her.

"You're a mean-spirited coward, Miles Galligan," she said, "to think of such a thing! And if I had known it I'd never have treated you like a gentleman."

Miles turned fiercely toward Nellie, but lowered his eyes; for she had raised her hand in a manner that showed resolution.

"To ask a girl to come to his house as if she were a beggar! While I can earn my own living I'll not be dependent on anybody. I wouldn't have you if you were Tammany Hall itself!"

Nellie went toward the door; she turned, however, as she reached it.

"I hope, ladies," she said "that you don't consider your brother too good for me now."

The sisters did not answer. The bitterness of her words lay in the fact that they could not resent them.

As Nellie was going out, with her head high in the air, a messenger boy ran up the steps. She heard him say:

"Mr. Bastien asks the young ladies to come to The Anchor at once. A little girl named O'Connor is dying."

## XXVIII.—Bastien's Prayer.

Nellie Mulligan forgot Miles and her rage against him in an instant,—she forgot herself, in fact, and hastened homeward as quickly as she could go.

Mary did not delay long; she followed soon after with Esther, leaving Miles, without a thought of the state of mind in which he must be. He went back to his den for a while, and grumbled at the utter selfishness of all concerned. Then he made up his mind to punish his sisters with all his power. He found this easy; an hour later he sat in a corner of the tavern near by, mingling his tears with the fumes of hot Scotch whiskey. When in affliction Miles always drank alone; between each prostration he reflected on the pathos of his position, and on the pain his sisters would feel when he reeled into the house at a late hour, and they saw the result of their work.

Mary and Esther hurried toward The Anchor. Mary had paused only to give a few instructions to the little servant about Miles' dinner. Esther, who had hitherto looked on the O'Connors as merely obstacles to Mary's peace of mind, was now intensely interested in them. As they hastened along Esther might easily have spoken of her adventure of the morning, but the scene with Miles had entirely driven it out of her head; and, besides, she felt strangely anxious to see Bastien again. Perhaps she could explain her apparent rudeness to him, and then there would be no need of speaking to Mary about it.

Mary seemed worried.

"I am afraid," she said, "we have helped to spoil that girl's happiness for life. I am sure she loved Miles—I am sure she loves him still,—but after her outburst a while ago there is hardly any hope of their ever meeting again."

Esther almost paused in her rapid pace.

"And isn't that what we wanted?" she asked, in astonishment. "The girl has a great deal more character than Miles, and she is well rid of him."

"Blood is thicker than water," Mary answered, somewhat feebly. "And I can't help thinking that Miles might look back and feel that we have helped to blight his life. Perhaps it would have been better to have encouraged them to marry and have done the best we could for them. Do you remember Maud Muller, and how she looked back and thought and thought—"

Esther did stop this time to take her sister by the shoulder and give her an indignant shake in the middle of the sidewalk.

"Maud Muller was a fool, and, really, Mary, if you go on this way, I shall begin to think—don't you see that Miles is impossible? Sacrifices for his selfishness only confirm him in it. Suppose Nellie Mulligan had been willing to marry him after the wretched, shameful speech he made, what would our lives be with such a couple of our hands? And how could we conscientiously undertake such a responsibility? It is much better as it is. I have washed my hands of Miles!"

"O Esther, remember what a lovely baby he was! And—"

"I don't remember anything about it; I have heard dear mother say so, but I always thought it was merely an hallucination,—there now!"

Mary sighed. It was hard to let the idealized Miles of her infancy go out of her life. He had been her sole object of sacrifice for so many years. A pang darted through her heart