

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF JOHN LONGWORTHY.

M. P. ROAN IN AVE MARIA.

"O Nellie," cried Rose, twisting her head uneasily. "I wish you'd give me the umbrella!"

Nellie did not seem to think that there was anything singular in this request. She pulled a neutral-tinted, flabby umbrella from under Rose's couch and raised it, firmly inserting the handle among the stuffing of the head of the lounge.

Esther watched this proceeding with a surprise she could not conceal. Just then she felt the thud of a drop of rain on her bonnet, and in an instant afterward she was obliged to wipe another from her forehead. The drops began to fall at intervals on various parts of Rose's shelter, as the sound of the rain on the roof rose from a pattering to what seemed like a deluge.

"Maggie and I always put up the umbrella when it rains at night," Rose explained very coolly. "She sleeps upon the floor beside me; she lets me have the couch because I have not been well of late."

My sister sent me here to be of use if I could," Esther said, turning to Nellie. "Where is her mother?"

"Garroting, of course," answered Nellie, with exasperation; but she saw Esther did not understand, she added, by way of explanation: "She's out among the neighbors, as she almost always is, talking and doing nothing else. The children are at work, and the old man—"

Here Nellie paused, and out of regard for Rose's feelings, closed her hand and carried it to her lips as if she were drinking.

Esther felt a great pity, an aching pity fill her heart. A quick knock, followed by a quicker footstep, was heard. Nellie called out, "Come in!" and Bastien entered. He paused on the threshold of the room, and the scene might well surprise him. Esther nodded her head slightly; then, moved by a sudden impulse, coming from her feeling of powerlessness and her indignation, she said bitterly, pointing to the fast-dampening umbrella:

"And these are the people you wanted to reform by means of high-class music and aesthetics!"

Bastien's eye fell before the flash in hers. He was not guilty of causing the squalor around him, and yet for a moment he felt as if he were.

XIV.—*The Use of the Poker.*

Esther could not offer Bastien a chair, for the only available one was occupied by the catables she had brought,—the other chair and the table being covered with piles of washed and unwashed clothes.

As Esther looked at Bastien, after she had made her abrupt speech, she felt a touch of compunction. Instead of retorting, as Miles would have done, he made no reply. There was no sarcastic twinkle in his eyes now; he looked around the room, and seemed abashed by its aspect. But the speech which had humbled the representative of arrogant Man aroused the indignation of the eternal Feminine.

"I'd like you to understand, Miss Galligan," Nellie Mulligan said, in an effort to show that Esther's trim coat and collar gave her no superiority, "that we are not savages here, if we do live in a tenement house. It's not long since your own father and mother lived in one."

Esther looked at her calmly.

"And if they lived in one now I should not be ashamed of it or of them; but they and I should be ashamed of such carelessness and heartlessness as are evident in this place. My father and mother might be here still if they had followed the example of most of the people around them."

"Nobody here asked you for broken victuals!" exclaimed Nellie, with a gesture toward the benches on the chair.

"No," said Esther, gently; "but I am glad my sister sent them to this starving child."

"O Nellie," Rose cried out from her couch, "don't scold! Somebody's always scolding here. I wish I had a piece of steak. You might cook it for me!"

Rose had not yet seen Bastien, and she was too anxious to escape the scolding to pay much attention to anything but that fear and her hunger.

Nellie was red with indignation. The thought of her slovenly gown and her curl papers, of the intrusion of Mr. Bastien, of Esther Galligan's apparent superiority, made her willing to grasp at any opportunity for reprisal. And Esther's look, which she interpreted as seconding Rose's request, she took as an additional cause for anger.

"No, thank you, Rose!" she said. "I'm not a cook. My mother never lets me do that sort of thing. When I want to live out and become a hired girl, I'll go into training for it."

She delivered this at Esther with a toss of her head.

Bastien felt very uncomfortable. He had heard that a little child was sick in The Anchor, and, anxious to find out whether Fitzgerald was right in his theories or not, he had made his way thither.

"I'm in the way," he said, hesitatingly. "Can I be of any use?"

"No," replied Esther, still determined to punish the selfishness of the male sex,—"not unless you can broil this steak. I was on my way to the rehearsal when I came in here, and I hope you'll excuse me until I help the young lady to make the poor child more comfortable. But allow me to say, Mr. Bastien, that, if I were you, I'd spend my money in keeping the rain from falling on beds of sickness like this, rather than in paying for Wagner and Liszt's music for the people."

Bastien could only bow and retire. After he had gone, Esther reflected that there was something pleasant about the man, after all. She went to the stove, and, taking off her gloves, prepared to brighten the hopeless-looking fire. Nellie watched her, with exaggerated contempt on her features, and she broke into a sarcastic laugh when Esther asked if she would tell her where the gridiron was.

"There's a frying-pan, ma'am. Nobody ever heard of using such a thing in this country, though I've heard the old saying, 'Lend me the loan of a gridiron.'"

Esther was placid under this. She built her fire artistically, and, after using, to Rose's secret horror, nearly a bucketful of coals, succeeded in making a glowing bed. Having found a plate, which she warmed, to Nellie's manifest amusement, she put the meat on the coals, and in a few minutes had it done to her own satisfaction.

Rose watched this in open-eyed wonder. Her heart sank. Surely Miss Galligan's sister was spoiling good meat! But when she was made to sit up, and the knife and fork were put into her hand and she had begun to eat somewhat timidly, she felt that Miss Galligan's sister knew what she was about. Nevertheless, the coals used in the process lay heavy on the poor child's heart. Perhaps Esther guessed this. She had seen Bastien lay something on the table. She looked for it, and found that it was a ten-dollar bill. She put this into Rose's hand, as she said:

"Now, I'll make you some hot lemonade."

A soft colour had come into the little girl's face. The food had done her good, and Esther forced her to take a few grapes. She looked wistfully at Nellie and the roses.

"O Nellie," she said, "do be friends with Miss Galligan's sister!"

"That's all right," answered Nellie, stiffly; "I'm friendly enough."

A step was heard on the stair,—an uncertain, trembling step. Rose caught the sound, and her eyes took a frightened look.

"Go!—go!" she cried, excitedly. "Oh, go! It's father coming!"

Esther looked at the child in astonishment. "Father coming" and such fear! Nellie got up, hardly less frightened than Rose.

"Oh, I wish mother was here!" moaned Rose. "When he has the fits on she can hold him. Nobody else can. And it makes him so mad to come home and find nothing ready to eat. Take this money, Miss Galligan, or he'll spend it—"

Just as Rose was about to make the transfer of the note to Esther an elderly man entered. Nellie whispered:

"Come, let's go. He's crazy when he is drunk—which is almost always. He'll kill you if you sass him or make him angry. But now that he has seen that money, he'll take it from the child and go off to drink it."

"No, he shall not," answered Esther. "And I will not leave that poor child alone with such a brute."