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ELLEN; OR, THE ORCHARD-MAN'S DAUGHTER.

(From the Lamp.)

After a few hours, the little rushlight burned out, and then followed the dark hours which precede the early breaking of the summer morning...

The bright May morning dawned at last, but the dark hours were pleasanter to the weary wather. She must not now sit still and weep and pray; the heavy limbs must move though the heart be petrified.

Having put everything to rights, the poor widow sat down to think how on earth she would make out the children's breakfast. Her husband's illness had been very tedious; his labor had been the chief support of his family...

At this stage of Nelly's musings the first knock came to the door, and she opened it. Nelly Cahil knew how it was, as she afterwards said, 'Nelly Noonan looked for all the world like a resurrection.'

'How is he?' said she, in a whisper. Nelly shook her head, her spasmy lips could not say it.

'I thought there was something wrong when I did not see you stirring as I went past to spread the clothes this morning,' said Nelly; and while she followed Mrs. Noonan into the chamber of the dead, she asked what hour he died at, who was with her, if he went easy—all those questions which are put with interest or indifference, as it may be, on such occasions.

'Oh dear! oh dear!' said Nelly, drying her eyes in the corner of her apron; 'who'd have thought it, May Sunday and all. What a fine time of it you had, and we sporting and pleasuring! And I thought to have come down last night. What luck I had that I didn't! But it was so late when we came back, though we only went to Barney; but you see himself was drunk, and herself was cross, and the children and everything was contrary; but 'tis myself that would have let 'em all pull it asunder if I thought how 'twas going with ye, Nelly dear. Lie down now, and let me get something for ye; yer lost for the want of it.'

'I haven't a ha'porth in the house, Nelly;—and I don't know what I'll do to get the children's breakfast, if you are not able to lead me a sixpence; and they don't know that he's gone from them yet.'

'Wisha, wisha! see that now,' said Nelly. Mrs. Noonan did not see 'that' that was working in Nelly's breast, as she smote it bitterly. She was thinking of the money she had spent on treats, and feasting, and finery for the day before; and she would have given much to be then mistress of one of the shillings she had expended.

'Lie down, anyhow, Mrs. Noonan, dear, and I'll be back in no time, and we'll see what we can do,' said Nelly, as she went towards the door.

Recollecting herself, she ran back, and throwing herself on the corps, she raised the plaintive

Irish wail, but was quickly stopped by Mrs. Noonan. It was one of the favorite customs of her class for which she had little regard. She thought it at best but a well-meant form, but knowing that Norry was a sincere well-wisher, and not a mere professional keener, she would have let her cry on, but that she feared her awaking the children. Norry, on her part, would have been very angry at the interruption at another time, but Mrs. Noonan was in too much real trouble to be offended with her, and she was more vexed with herself when she met the two little girls running from their bed, and crying for their mother. Norry lost no time in seizing one of them in each of her strong arms, and saying she had a feast at home. She wrapped them in her cloak, and carried them off, despite their struggling and crying. Norry had no house of her own to take them to; she only occupied a room in the cottage of the family of whom she had spoken, and whose ill-regulated habits had prevented her being of assistance where she was so much needed the night before. She earned a livelihood by assisting the various washerwomen in the neighborhood, and she never wanted employment, as she was strong, willing, and honest, and she might long since have set up for herself, but that she was thoughtless and extravagant, and it was no unusual circumstance with her to want, as at present, the command of a sixpence. However, she was not long in deciding how to meet the present emergency. She suspected that the purses of her acquaintance had been well nigh drained for yesterday's holiday, and she had no time to lose in applications, where the chance of success was so uncertain;—so having placed the children comfortably in her bed, she took her best gown—the May Sunday display, and carefully concealing it under her cloak, she set off for the pawn-office.

'Little did I think,' said Norry to herself, as she went along, 'the day I promised Mrs. Noonan, as much as took my Bible oath to her, that I'd never be seen going next or near the likes of this place again; little did I think that 'tis to serve herself a turn that I'd break my word;—and how well to do she was that day in the world, and what a neat house she had about her; but there's one comfort she has in her destitution, and that is, that it was no misdoings of her own, only the will of God that leaves her as she is.'

Norry's generous heart would have delighted in making this sacrifice for her friend; but the broken promise twitched her conscience. She tried to think it was in a good cause, but she could not help feeling that if she had only been a little prudent she could have served her neighbor without displeasing God; and she was sufficiently instructed in her religion to know that she must not do evil that good may come of it. It was not the first time that Norry had suffered from her improvidence, and on she went, discontented with herself, and not daring to enjoy the pleasure of succouring her friend with such a drawback on her conscience.

The first person Norry encountered on the road was a certain Mrs. Buckley, who was returning home after a round of visits among the neighbors to light a candle, which she now held flickering under the shelter of her shawl. It was a known fact in the district that Mrs. Buckley was in the daily habit of seeking her acquaintances' homes for this purpose, beginning with the most distant; that the candle often died a sudden death, not purely accidental, on the way, which afforded Mrs. Buckley an excuse for looking in on more than one friend of a morning.

Norry, when she saw her, drew the hood of her cloak closer about her face, notwithstanding the temptation to be the first to give her the news of poor Noonan's death. But it was a face and figure capable of very extraordinary transformations which might hope to elude Mrs. Buckley's sharp eye. She moved from her own path, and stood direct in Norry's.

'What's in the wind, now, Miss Cahil, that you won't give us the time of the day?' said she, bringing Norry to a full stop.

'Oh, it is, that you, Mrs. Buckley?' said Norry. 'He, it is. I have no hood to be playing hide and go seek in, that you shouldn't know me, Norry Cahil. But what's the news that makes you so early on the tramp?'

'Bad news enough, then; poor Charley Noonan is dead since last night.'

'Charley Noonan dead at last!' said Mrs. Buckley. 'He was a good honest soul; but we must all die. Wonder nobody told me; and I was in'—and here she enumerated the various houses she had been to in her morning ramble.

''Twas hard for you to hear it, for no one but God and herself knew it till I went in there a while ago,' said Norry.

'That comes of people being so stiff and stand off in themselves. If Mrs. Noonan warn't, she'd have more inquiring friends; that's all I say.'

'She doesn't want for decent bodies enough to ask after her, Mrs. Buckley. But you see how it was, yesterday was May Sunday, and

people never thought poor Charley would go that day, after holding so long, and they were so taken up with their own merry-making, that they forgot their neighbor's trouble, God help us! 'Did she say anything to you about the wake?'

'Not a word, I believe she has enough to trouble her besides,' said Norry.

'Wonder you didn't find out from her,' said Mrs. Buckley.

'To tell you the truth I never thought of it myself,' said Norry, pushing impatiently from her.

Mrs. Buckley pulled her back by the cloak, and so dexterously that she discovered beneath it, what all alone she was determined to find out, and what poor Norry was so studiously trying to conceal from her.

'I'll know from her then before she is much older,' said Mrs. Buckley with a knowing wink at Norry, as much as to say that it was to make the remark she called her back: but Norry knew by her eye that the gown was seen, and the blood mantled to her cheek as she saw the little woman's look of malicious triumph; she well knew the whole parish would hear the news before evening. The gown was a very handsome one, of showy chintz, and many envious eyes were on it as Norry sported it the day before.'

''Tis a close cupboard that could hide its secrets from Sophy Buckley,' soliloquised worthy Sophy as she blew out the candle, to repeat her visits, and enlighten all those in ignorance of the circumstances that Charles Noonan died the night before, and that she met Norry Cahil going to pledge her fine Sunday gown, that was not yet a week old. By the time Mrs. Buckley had communicated and commented on her news, the morning was pretty far advanced, so she was even obliged to look in on her own home for a short space. Having with some difficulty succeeded in rousing her 'lazy daughters,' and set one of them to make the fire while she despatched the other to town for the breakfast requisites, she repaired to Mrs. Noonan's, and when she had well-nigh overpowered her with expressions of pity and lamentation, and exaggerated encomiums on the departed, she introduced the wake.

'There's one comfort you shall have, Nelly,' cried she, 'let me alone for having a fine gathering of the neighbors to-night, we'll do the thing decent by poor Charley.'

'Oh no, Mrs. Buckley, dear, I won't have a wake at all; thanks to you, though, for your kind meaning,' said Nelly.

'What's that you say, Nelly Noonan?' said Mrs. Buckley, gathering her little keen eyes together, and setting them sharply on Mrs. Noonan's face.

'Only that I won't have a wake, dear. Any kind neighbor that will look in, and pray for poor Charley, will be welcome, and God reward them for it; but I won't have any smoking, or the like, Sophy.'

'You won't, Nelly Noonan; you won't. Now, may I ask one question of you? Was Charley Noonan ever and always a good husband to you?'

'Oh! that he was,' said Nelly.

'Were you ever known to have a black eye, or a sore heart after him?'

'Never, never,' said Nelly, weeping bitterly.

'Well, and is that the turn you are going to serve him now, to disrespect him in the face of the parish?'

'Oh! don't talk to me that way, Mrs. Buckley, dear. Sure the Lord knows I never grudged him anything, let alone now that I am going to see the last of him in this world; but what good would it be to his poor corpse to have talking, and smoking, and drinking going on about it?'

'No good that I know, if it isn't not to laugh at old customs. We all know it has been done from generation to generation, by every Christian who has the heart for them that's gone from 'em.'

'But they were his dying words to me not to do it,' said Mrs. Noonan.

'Yes, what signifies what a dying man says, that's always wake in himself. I'll be bound if you were in his place, 'tis little regard he'd set by it, only to give you a beautiful wake. You ought not to be above the good word of the neighbors; what'll they be saying, but that you are an ungrateful wife, or that Charley didn't deserve it as you; and that's not fair to him anyhow.'

Mrs. Noonan paused. Sophy Buckley's sophistry was gaining on her own better sense, and she could not bear that any blame should attach even by suspicion to her poor husband.

'But how will I manage, I have not a sixpence in the world,' said she, aloud.

'Never mind that; I'll tell you how we'll manage. I own to mercy I haven't a penny left after providing the breakfast, if I had the money myself, you should have it; and welcome; but you are not so hard up, that you couldn't borrow it for an occasion like the present.'

'I cannot borrow it, I'm in debt before, and it would be the same as cheating of me now to do it, for everything is gone; and the little that's in the house is fore sold, everything except my poor fellow's clothes there.'

'Well, and sure them will be elegant. You can't do anything better with 'em, than let him have the last turn out of 'em.'

'Oh! they'll not do more than buy a decent coffin for him,' said Mrs. Noonan, sorrowfully.

'Well, never mind; I'll tell you what I'll do; I'll take whatever tea, and sugar, and whiskey, and snuff, and tobacco you'll want at Daley's in Mick Manning's name. He's a good mark, and I promise you I won't be refused; and if you don't like telling him yourself, I will before he's asked for payment. You can pay him at your convenience, and if you don't pay him at all, I'm sure he'll make no bones of it, though his heart isn't as big as the ball of my eye; but he has such a respect for you, by all accounts.'

Nelly's pale, haggard face was slowly crimsoning while Mrs. Buckley spoke, but she heard her out ere she replied—'I'll never do the likes, ma'm; I'd much sooner lock up the poor corpse, and never light a candle near it, than do the likes. Thank God, I never was a rogue, and I won't begin this day, I hope, and bring the blush into my poor Charley's face in heaven, where he is, I hope, this day. And what for should I make so free with Richard Manning's name?'

'You needn't take me up so captious; I don't want to make a rogue of you, Mrs. Noonan.—What queer constructions you put on things; but see, if you don't like doing what I said, you can sell them clothes, as I said before.'

'I told you they were for the coffin, Mrs. Buckley.'

'Well, then, if I was you, I'd just get a parish coffin; I own to goodness I would; better people than you or I either have done it before this; there's no disgrace doing it when people can't help it, you know.'

'But I can help it, and I wonder at you to put such an affront on me, Mrs. Buckley. I think it would be a much greater disgrace for me to go to the parish for a coffin for the father of my children than not to have a wake. No, I'll have no wake; I see no good in it, nor I didn't all along—no good at all, only, may be, putting people in the way of offending God; and more than that, I am sure it was never God that put it into people's heads to have such wakes at all, at all.'

'It wasn't the first queer notion that came out of your head, at all events, Nelly Noonan; but I don't think it ever came to your turn to disrespect a Noonan, any how.'

'There's no use in saying any more about it; but there'll be no public wake in this house, Mrs. Buckley,' said Mrs. Noonan, firmly.

'I'm satisfied, madam. Good morning to you.'

And, so saying Mrs. Buckley departed, slamming the door after her very hard.

We left Norry Cahil on her way to the pawn-office, which she reached just in time to be met coming out of it by one whom of all others she wished least to be seen by. Her secret was this. The person in question was a steady, industrious tradesman, who had a great eye to Norry for a wife; but living in the vicinity of a pawn-office, to which at one time she was in the habit of paying frequent visits, he thought justly that it could not be all right with Norry, or she would not be so constant a visitor at such a place. He made inquiries, and found she had no encumbrance, no one to support but herself, and that she never wanted employment. A grave, fearful suspicion came into his mind, that she drank. This was a vice, however, which could not be cloaked, and a little close observation brought him the pleased conviction that he had wronged her so far, but there must be some imprudence or extravagance, and so James Cremen, though he admired Norry, forebore to make her an offer until he saw some change for the better. It was only lately that Norry had learned by some means of his partiality for her, and also that he had been heard to say that she was growing a sensible girl, for that he never saw her now frequenting the pawn-office. To elude the chance of meeting him, Norry had made a considerable circuit to a distant office, and it may be imagined her confusion and mortification on emerging from it, to meet him at its very threshold. After a cool salutation, he passed quickly on his way, leaving Norry almost rooted to the spot.

''Tis a just deed,' said she, to herself. 'Oh dear! oh dear! what will he think, and to see me so merry yesterday, and to find me here this morning. What will he say, but that I have not given up going there at all only that I wanted to throw chaff in his eyes. What will I do at all? Mrs. Noonan, I earned you dearly this morning, so I did; but if I might have been led by you, and have tuk care of my money, it would never have happened. 'Tis only myself is to blame, and no one in life.'

In such fashion Norry muttered to herself as she went with a quick step, and a heavy heart to make her purchases; and in all her trouble, the feast for the little orphans was not forgotten.—As she neared home, she again encountered Mrs. Buckley.

'Well, the widow is not going to have a wake. What do you think of that, Norry Cahil? Don't you say, lie upon her ingratitude? Ah! 'twas he that never brought a blush to her cheek, or a salt tear to her eye; and 'tis she must have the coward heart, and to cheat him of his wake the night,' said Mrs. Buckley, trying to squeeze a tear from the corner of her eye.

Norry, quick to sympathize with any expression of kind feeling, looked blank for a moment, but quickly replied—'Perhaps she has not the way of doing it, Mrs. Buckley.'

'Sha, ashore, where there's a will there's a way; Norry; but that woman surpasses me entirely. See has not a heart the big of a head of a pin; and for all, she carries herself so wonderfully clever.'

'She must have the heart for all that, then; and to stick to the poor man as she did while he lived. She, what a spectre she is the day, it would melt the heart of a stone to look at her this morning when I went in,' said Norry.

'Iss, to all appearance, she was well enough while he lived, but the moment the breath is gone out of him, how does she behave?'

'I've known poor creatures, and I respect them for it, that would put a plate at their door if they had no other way of getting a decent wake for their friend.'

'Oh, but Mrs. Noonan is too decent to do the likes. I'm certain sure she'd be up to the respectability of giving him a fine wake if she had the means; but I have reason to know she has not, and that 'twill go hard with her even to get the coffin,' said Norry.

'But, if you please, she would not do it if she had the means. I have it from her own lips, that would not. What do you think of that?'

Norry bleared her eyes, and was dumb. 'Nothing kills me,' continued Mrs. Buckley, 'but the airs she takes upon her, setting her face agin owd customs, that no one but a haythen would circumvent. See what a blessing a wake brought on Sally Jones. Would she ever have got Dick Mannix, of the Orchard below, for her daughter, only for his being at the beautiful wake she had for her husband.'

'Who is making free with my name?' said Dick Mannix, coming up at the moment unperceived.

Mrs. Buckley made a face at Norry. 'No one,' said she, 'only talking of poor Charley Noonan were we.'

'So he's gone, poor fellow, the Lord have mercy on his soul. He was a good husband and father, and an honest man,' said Dick Mannix.

'And the widow is not going to wake him, if you please,' said Mrs. Buckley.

'And she's right; my heavy curse upon wakes,' said Richard Mannix, walking on.

Norry could not but laugh at Mrs. Buckley's look at discomfiture.

'Mr. Mannix don't look as if he thought he had as much luck at the wake as Sally Jones, anyhow. They say he took too much there that night, or he never would have asked her daughter,' said Norry.

'Don't believe their nasty insinuations,' said Mrs. Buckley. 'Barbara Jones was good enough for him any day, and she never would have tuk him neither only she was a bit stragant, and they were reduced.'

'You'd get few to join him; but he had the worst of the bargain,' said Norry, hurrying off.

'You'll soon be a chip of the same block as the widow, I'm thinking,' said Mrs. Buckley;—'and if 'twas for her you sent your brabra of a gown so soon on a visit, you're a fool for your pains; that's all I say.'

Norry came back—'If I took the advice Mrs. Noonan often gave me, I needn't have done it, Mrs. Buckley,' said she.

'Oh, I'm sure she has plenty of that always to spare,' said Sophy.

'She had advice and assistance too to give me when I wanted it, and when those who had a better right gave me neither, only the worse word in their mouth, Mrs. Buckley,' said Norry.

Mrs. Buckley winced a little; it was a home thrust. And Norry sped on her mission without awaiting a reply. However, Mrs. Buckley had the satisfaction of the last word, for she shrieked after Norry—

'She'll sup sorrow for it, so she will; and it shall go far and near of her, so it shall.'

And Mrs. Buckley was as good as her word. To her home she now turned, foaming and fretting, and in much haste, for she met several persons returning with empty baskets after taking breakfasts to their different destinations, and she had no reason to hope that her husband had been sent his in her absence. In she went, kicking the poor dog before her that lay sunning him-