“Taken at the Flood.”

A Christmas Eve Episode.

By Winifred M. Patton.

"Are you in there, Larry?"

Larry, who was sitting at the desk in the end of the shop, staring gloomily at nothing, lost his dejected air in an instant, and jumped off the stool with joyful alacrity.

"It's you, Nannie," he said, thrusting his curly head across the counter.

"Sure enough it is," said Nannie. "What news have you got for me, Larry? What did my mother say to you at all? I'm dying to hear the whole story."

Larry's gloom came back on him in a modified form. He had made his way round the counter by this time, and had hidden Nannie's two small hands in a huge grip.

"She said just what I thought she would say—no more and no less," said Larry. "She likes me very well in a general sort of way, but not in the least as a son-in-law. What right has the like of me to lift my eyes to her only daughter, the richest girl in the town and the handsomest in the county? She thinks it the height of presumption—but how could I see you and not fall in love with you, Nannie? I'd rather presume than be such a stupid, blindly foolish thing! And the end of the story is that I've been given notice to quit, and the Widow Casey's grocery business will want a new manager a week or two from now."

"Larry, you big goose; it's not the end of the story, it's only the first chapter," said Nannie, her blue eyes refusing to lose their joy. "Of course my mother is a very important person, and we've got to win her consent—by fair means or otherwise—but I'm the chief person. Larry Sheridan, and I'm on your side, all there is of me."

"But there's so very little of you, Nannie," broke in Larry, his mischievous good-humour once again in the ascendant; "much good you would be in a fight! I've thought of a plan myself that will please your mother beautifully, if you'll only agree to it. Let you and me go ever and ever down the river—go to the bottom and stay there, locked in each other's arms. Think what a fine sensational ending that would be to the story! We'd have at least half a column of poetry in the Argus bawling out our sad fate and the Ballybawn fire and drum band would play a lament at the funeral. Your mother would never ever forgive it."

"But where would the benefit to us come in?" said Nannie. "That's the worst of you, Larry—you haven't an ounce of sense. It's well you have me to look after you. Besides, you would have to be carrying water to the river for a week before there would be enough to drown us comfortably, and what do you suppose my mother would be up to in the meantime? We've got to find a more attractive scheme than that somehow."

"I'm thinking of going to America at the end of the week, Nan," said Larry, almost in a whisper, his face growing suddenly grave again.

"Nannie grew white, and turned a startled gaze on him, her blue eyes darkening with pain and surprise.

"Larry touched her bright hair caressingly. "It's the best to do, shoestring," he said softly. "I've thought it out many a time, and it always comes to that in the end. There has been a good chance waiting for me there this long while back, but I couldn't bear myself away from you. But now that I must leave you, it's there I'll go, and maybe you'll wait for me till I bring you back the money. Will you wait for me, sweetheart?"

"No!" said Nannie passionately. "I will not wait! I won't let you go to America, and wait here eating my heart out, and letting the years come between us. You wouldn't be the same when you came back—you know you wouldn't. You would never again be my own old Larry, you would be a hard-eyed, money-grubbing stranger. That's what America does for people. You are so nice when you go the more it changes you. Oh, if you do go, I'll go too, and then as you get hard and horrible, I'll be the same, and neither of us will think the other has changed a bit. That's what we'll do!"

Her voice broke into a sob at the end, and she hid her face in the convenient shelter of Larry's coat-sleeve.

"Now, Nannie, my heart's treasure, be reasonable," said Larry. "Sure you know there's no chance for a boy in Ireland. America won't hurt me so long as I have your sweet face in my thoughts, and anyway I won't stay long enough to get badly damaged. I'll only wait till I have enough money to satisfy your mother, and then I'll be back for good and all."

"What do we want of money?" said Nannie, lifting her tearful face impatiently. "We're young and strong, both of us, and we can work for all we need here together in Ireland. It's better to be poor and happy in Ireland than rich and miserable anywhere else—now isn't it, Larry?"

"You're always great at the logic, Nannie," said Larry, "so I won't contradict you. But it's better to be comfortable and happy in Ireland than poor and miserable there, isn't it? And it's nicer to have blue silk blouses—oh, Nannie!—than to go ragged and shabby. You see, money comes in very handy sometimes, so we can't despise it altogether."

Nannie smiled unwillingly as she glanced at the blouses, the latest dream in that line which she had purchased to bewilder and delight the inhabitants of Ballybawn. Then she looked up at Larry, and laughed.

"I might lay in a very big stock before the wedding," she said, "and then they would last me till I am old and ugly, and such matters become undesirable. But really and truly, Larry, I won't let you go to America, so
THE IRISH PACKET.

GOD GIVE YOU JOY THESE CHRISTMAS TIMES.

God give you these Christmas times; stewards, listen to your rhymes.

Fleshy snow-clouds are now sailing
In the chill and dear moonlight.
And the wintry wind is waiting
To the ear of lonely Night.
Snow-drifts on the roofs lie heavy,
Ice-drops glister from the eaves;
Boughs in among this yule festival
Now are clad with snow-born leaves.
God give you joy these Christmas times;
Gentles, listen to your rhymes.

Hark! from out the tried steeploe
Changs the jocund peal of bells,
Waves of sound like hillows' ripple
On the night in silent swells.
Soo, with merry pipe and labor,
At your doors we play and sing;
Listen to our grateful labour,
Deign to hear our carolling.
God give you joy these Christmas times;
Gentles, listen to our rhymes.

We have songs of pride and glory
For the ear of lord and knight;
We can sing a true-love story
To the heart of maiden bright;
We have ditties sweetly tender
That will make you pleased tho' sad;
Defly we know how to render
Eyes more bright and hearts more glad.
God give you joy these Christmas times;
Gentles, listen to our rhymes.

Lusty youth and manhood able,
Matrons gentle, maidens dear,
Crippled age and childhood feeble,
All our hearts are gay.
At this festive time, to cheer you,
We have called the sweetest lassies;
Kindly call us to come near you,
Yield us largesse, yield us praise.
God give you joy these Christmas times;
Gentles, listen to our rhymes.

—John Francis Walker.

OUR NEW PRIZE COMPETITION.

The Editor offers the following prizes:
  For the best six stanzas of unaccented, jest or epicram (in prose or verse):
  First Prize—Two Guineas.
  Second Prize—One Guineas.
  Each contribution to have attached to it a coupon from the cover of this issue of The Irish Packet, and to be in by the 12th of January.

A selection of the contributions considered best by the Editor will be published in The Irish Packet; also, in the same number, a voting paper, which each reader is invited to return with the titles of the twelve contributions which he considers best, set down in what he judges to be the order of their merit.

The Prizes as above, will be awarded as the Editor and the Editors may decide, and a further prize of two guineas will be given to the particular reader whose vote most nearly corresponds with the actual result of the voting.

Each reader may send in as many voting papers as he pleases.

All contributions in the competition will become the property of The Irish Packet.

—WINIFRED M. PATTON.

"AN CLARABEAD SOLUS."

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