

St. Cecilia of the Court

By ISABELLA R. HESS.

The sweetest lives are those to duty wed,
Whose deeds, both great and small,
Are close-knit strands of unbroken thread
Where love ennobles all.
The world may sound no trumpets, ring no bell;
The book of life the shining record tells.

—ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

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CHAPTER V.—(Continued).

Towards noon, however, he folded up his apron, and washed his hands and face in the old tin basin that stood on the shelf. Mickey, coming in at that moment, surveyed the interesting operation curiously, and asked, 'You goin' out, Jim?'

'I was thinking I would, Mickey.' Jim was brushing the dust from his apron with a piece of old calico as he spoke. 'Work is that slack, there's little to keep me at home.'

'And where be ye going?' It was quite the correct thing in Court etiquette to interrogate one who was going to the unusual trouble of washing his face before going out. That usually betokened a funeral, or a church going, at least.

'It's thinking I am,' observed Jim grandly, 'of going up town to get my dinner to-day.'

Mickey surveyed him in unbounded astonishment. 'What would ye be goin' away off for your dinner fer? You ought to be lookin' at Rickey Madigan's window! It's got pies in it, and fried oakes, and balls that are brown all over a layin' on a scalloped plate, and a piece of meat that makes your eyes red to look at it!' Mickey paused out of breath.

'I wasn't thinkin' of Rickey Madigan to-day,' Jim answered guiltily. 'I was only foolin' about the dinner.'

'You wouldn't be foolin' if you'd see Rickey's window this day!' Mickey had seen it! Didn't Jim know how often the boys wandered out of the Court simply to peer into the windows of that new restaurant, only a couple of blocks away! Just a very common, very little, very cheap restaurant it was; but its one window was clean, and in it were always displayed edibles, that to Mickey and his friends, represented the food of the elect. When the vigilant Rickey didn't send them away at once (which occurred when he was serving a chance patron), they would spend an ecstatic quarter-hour, deciding amongst them, what they would eat, if they ever went inside, and if they had money to buy something with. Very often Jim would talk it over with them in the shop, but to-day he was in no mood to discuss the marvels of Rickey Madigan's chef. Instead, he asked a question. 'Have you seen the Saint to-day?'

'Naw.' Mickey was loath to drop the entrancing topic of Rickey Madigan. 'But I see her mother going to work, and she wasn't drunk, neither! Ain't seen Puddin' neither—ain't seen him since he fell down-stairs.'

'I'm thinkin' I won't be going up town to-day,' Jim answered irrelevantly. 'I'll be takin' the shoes to Jimmie Flynn.'

'I'll be takin' 'em fer ye, if ye like.—Visions of a penny rose before Mickey's gaze.

'Sure that's nice of ye now, but I'll be goin' myself!' Jim, feeling too restless to sit still, picked up the shoes, and went back into the Court, to the basement where the Flynns lived. An appetizing odor of cookery met Jim's nostrils, and made him sniff hungrily; he omitted the formality of

knocking, and, entering, found Mrs. Flynn, with skirts tucked up, dishing out to the half-dozen children, great platesful of cabbage.

'Good-day to you, Mrs. Flynn!' Jim made a courtly bow to the portly lady of the house. 'I've brought ye Jimmie's shoes, and it's a dime I'll be askin' for them, seein' 'tis a hard winter for us all.'

'A hard winter is it you're sayin'!' Mrs. Flynn sat wearily down, spoon in hand, on the rickety chair next the stove. 'Sure the likes of you can get along, without chick nor child! Look at me now, six mouths to feed, and nothin' to fill 'em! If it wasn't for the washin' I was lucky enough to get yesterday, it's hungry they'd be to-day! But it's a half-dollar I got, and the lady gave me a cabbage beside, so I've cooked up the lot with a bit of meat I bought, not knowin' where to-morrow's food will come from.'

'It's lucky ye are to have enough to-day,' said Jim, cheerily, 'and if the ten cents is a burden to you, never mind it till ye have it handy.'

Mrs. Flynn looked up gratefully. 'Sure it's the like of you to be sayin' that! If it wasn't for you, Jimmie would be goin' bare-foot this day. If I can't be givin' you the dime, I could be givin' you, and glad at that, a bit of dinner. Would you be takin' it, Jim?'

Jim's well-trained face did not betray how very glad he was to take it, as he answered, 'To be sitting down with the youngsters would be a treat! I'll be takin' your dinner, Mrs. Flynn, and you'll be forgettin' then that you owe me the dime!'

If the little Flynns noticed that Jim had the biggest plateful of all, then they never mentioned it; it was a day to be remembered in their lives! They could barely wait to swallow the last spoonful of cabbage, before they rushed out to the pump, to announce grandly to their envious audience that Jim Belway had taken dinner with them that day. It was rarely that Jim went inside one of their homes—to have dined with them, at once raised the Flynns to a higher social stratum.

Jim followed the boys to the pump, and stood there for a few minutes thinking; Then he went across the court to No. 20, and climbed up the two narrow, dirty flights of stairs that led to the Sweeneys' apartments and rapped gently at the door before he opened it.

The Saint was bending over a little bed that stood in the corner of the room, and her face lit up when she saw Jim; she smiled at him rather wearily, and smoothed the tangled hair out of Puddin's eyes, as she said cheerily, 'Look here, Puddin'! It's Jim what's here. He's come up here to see you!'

Puddin' tried to sit up at the name, but lay back again with a low moan. Jim heard it, and went over and sat on the edge of the bed, which threatened to give way under the strain. Even Puddin' smiled when Jim said severely: 'And is it layin' in bed ye are this day, when I'm lookin'

for some one to be doin' an errand for me. Get up now, this minute, and run over to Rickey Madigan's for a pie!'

He tried to answer back gaily, but couldn't. He only slipped his fat little hand into Jim's hard one, and cried; in the dim light, Jim could see the streaks down his cheeks where the tears had rolled, and noticed that their rosy red color had gone. His keen eyes noticed that the pillow on the bed was clean, and that the floor and the stove proved Cecilia's housewifely skill. Her eyes followed Jim's gaze, and she said, 'I always try to keep the place clean, but Puddin's took my time these two days, so I couldn't be cleanin'.'

'And what would you be cleanin' for?' answered Jim, promptly. 'Tis as clean now as a pie-plate when a boy gets through lickin' it. Puddin' himself will be after lickin' one when the liniment fixes him up.'

'The liniment is used up,' explained Cecilia, talking very fast to keep the tears back. 'And it's no good at all that it did him.'

'I'm thinking,' said Jim, slowly, 'that I'll be after getting the doctor to step in to see you. He'll soon be fixin' you all right, Puddin'.'

'Would you be after sending a doctor?' quickly asked the Saint, her voice full of hope. 'I've been thinking all day that it's a doctor ought to be here, but—' and her voice began to shake a bit.

'There's a doctor who gets paid by the city, who has nothing to do but to tend to some of us that can't afford to pay him as well as the city can,' said Jim, quietly, as he turned and left.

All the way down-stairs he could hear Puddin's low moans. The sound rang in his ears as he picked his way across the Court, and for once he had no word for the group at the pump.

The clerk at the drug store noticed him as he entered, and asked pleasantly if the liniment had done its work.

'It did not,' answered Jim, 'and I've come in to ask if you'd be askin' the doctor you spoke of to step in.'

'Sure!' answered the clerk promptly. 'I'll 'phone him now.'

'I'm much obliged to you, sir—do you think he could be comin' this day?'

The clerk didn't know, in fact he shook his head doubtfully; then seeing Jim's disappointment in his face, he good-naturedly telephoned to the doctor, who said that as a personal favor to his friend, the clerk, he'd surely come that very day.

It may have been a foolish thing to do—it certainly was unheard of! But Jim, when he went back to his shop, took his beloved flute from its box on the shelf, and tucked it under his coat, to hide it from the curious eyes of the boys. Then he went again across the Court, and climbed the stairs that led to the Sweeneys' abode. Outside the door, he could hear Cecilia singing in a low, soft voice, 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Hark how the angels sing!' But like a minor chord, he could hear Puddin's moaning voice, and his restless movements.

His voice rang gaily as he entered. 'I heard Cecilia a-singin', and thinks I, 'tis easier singin' to music any time, so I've brought my flute along.'

Jim never played so well as he did that afternoon; Puddin's moans grew fewer, as he lay still to listen, and the Saint, with her tired head pillowed on the foot of the bed, fell fast asleep from sheer weariness. Jim's eyes were closed too, as if he could play better that way; perhaps, with his eyes closed, he could see pleasanter things than a small crowded room, a miserably cracked stove, a few rickety chairs, and a window that seemed to bar, rather than let in, the few rays of light, that in the early twilight of a winter's day, managed to creep into the Court.

He was still playing when Mrs. Sweeney came in, perfectly sober, as Puddin's ill-