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SKETCH FROM THE ACTUAL.

From Munster vale they brought her, From the pure and balmy air, An Ormond peasant's daughter, With blue eyes and golden hair; They brought her to the city, And she faded slowly there; Consumption has no pity For blue eyes and golden hair."

It was the eve of Christmas Day, and I was sitting in my lodgings at Liverpool, lonesome and sad enough. Neither the cheerful fire nor the sparkling decanter at my elbow could dispel the gloom that was on me then, for I was thinking of dear friends at the other side of the Channel, a pleasant home hard-by a flower-fringed river, far, far away in the green and fertile Munster. I had but recently left it, to try and push my way to fortune through the multitude of candidates that woo that fickle dame in this great town, and it seemed to me a mighty hardship to have to sit beside a strange fireplace on that glad festival night.

It was the eve of Christmas Day, and the 'Coral-singers' were abroad shivering from the cold; they sang out hymns of joy and welcome—not, indeed, from any internal gladness, but to try and please their more fortunate brethren, and thus extract from them the wherewithal to buy a meal. But those poor creatures had an unrelenting rival in the wind that night; condensed by the proximity of high walls and chimney-stacks, it chanted strange and weird music; now sweeping past with a voice like thunder and rattling the window sashes with its mighty breath, then changing its mood and knocking faintly at them, singing a dreamy dirge the while; and gathering up its strength again, and rushing with an intense volume of sound past every barrier to exhaust its wrath—God only could tell where.— Sometimes, too, it came rumbling down my chimney and fanned the burning logs to furious blaze, and scattered showers of golden sparks in all directions to the discomfort of my slipped feet, which rested on the fender.

It was the eve of Christmas Day, and I kindled my pipe, and leaning back in my easy chair, began to puff volumes of tobacco smoke therefrom. The soothing weed somewhat composed the perturbed state of my mind, while fancy's wing grew lighter under its influence. Pleasant and long-buried memories stirred within the necropolis of my brain. All unbidden, one by one, they stole from out its secret chambers, and disentangled themselves from the sorrow that maturer years had woven round them. The smoke was transformed into a magic speculum. Beyond its sinuous haze imagination limned bright pictures of the old homestead and its joys. I travelled back some dozen years upon the footmarks of Time, and sat again before the hearthstone of my younger days. Our family circle was complete. The living and the dead were there. The churchyard and its many graves did not form any portion of the tableau. Between that Christmas Eve and those long sped days no coffined and shrouded forms of dead sisters intervened. The tears that once fell hot and fast above the clouds that cover them did not come to overshadow the vision then; I saw them all once more fresh, young, and joyful. No vacant chair, no regretful uttering of names—those who once answered them gone forever from amongst us—no! no! Death did not cloud any portion of that waking dream:

"Mysterious Memory! but what silver key, Through years of silence tuneless and unshaken, Can thy sweet touch, forgotten melody, In the dim spirit once again awaken?"

But the spell work was rudely broken, and I recalled to the dull reality by a hurried knocking at my room door—"Come in."

Bessy Blundel, the maid of all work, entered, wearing rather a serious face. Now, a serious face did not become this self-same Bessy. There was that about the tout ensemble of her features which could nowise amalgamate with sentiment. She had a very low forehead, Bessy Blundel had, and small, black eyes, which were forever more playing 'hide and go seek' under their lids, and a nasal organ which a native of China might envy, so palpably celestial was it, and a mouth rather too large to be compatible with feminine loveliness. Add to this that the parotid region of Bessy's face always looked as if anointed with some greasy substance, not of the whitest nature, and you have her portrait.

"Well, Bessy, what's the matter?"

policemen who had been called in by Bessy before she came up for me, were roughly endeavoring to restore her to consciousness.

"She 's a case, an' no mistake," said one. "Lord! how she smells of gin, the wretch," said the other. "Get up," he continued, giving her a shake, "get up you drunkard, get up, I say."

"Goodness me," chimed in the maiden, and she made an abortive effort to conjure a look of pity into her large mouth; "goodness me! my heart bleeds to see a woman as forgets herself in such a way on a night like this. I pity her from the bottom of my soul—I do." And having made this angelic remark, she looked at the younger policeman and sighed. Yes, Bessy Blundel sighed; and the young policeman must have understood the look better than I did, for he lovingly returned it, and smiled very blandly indeed. I stooped over that prostrate woman, and found it was not drink but hunger and exhaustion that had overcome her. She was not dead, though cold as frozen snow. But that was little to be wondered at, for her clothes were very thin and threadbare. And she looked so pale—so pale and haggard, poor thing!—that I felt surprised she did not inspire pity, even in a policeman's heart. We moved her to the kitchen, and after the application of some restoratives, she opened her eyes with seeming pain, and feebly said—"Oh, take me to my daughter; she's dying—dying, I fear, this blessed night, from the cold and hunger."

She told us where she lived, and, procuring a cab, I quickly prepared to drive with her to the place. Before we started, one of the policemen drew me aside and said—"Tis plain, sir, that you don't know nothing of the dodges of this here town. Now I'd wager anything that that woman is an impostor, and only wants to draw yees into some place or other, where 'twill be somewhat hard to come safely out of. Take my advice and don't have nothing to do with her."

I felt as if 'twould do me a perpetual good to kick the fellow; but as kicking men who wear the Queen's livery is by no means a safe amusement, I thought the next best thing I could do was to make him no answer, so I gave the cabman his directions, and we drove away.

That night was coldly beautiful. Countless stars were fulfilling their mysterious destiny in the far blue space above us; and the frost that lay upon the streets scintillated in their beaming, and looked like a profusion of diamonds scattered there. For a mile or so our route lay along the line docks. The waters of the noble Mersey ran white with foam, and tossed the many splendid ships moored upon its bosom to and fro.— Their flags streamed out to the breeze, and their rigging was most beautifully defined against the clear concave of the sky. The gleam of a thousand lamps at the Cheshire side illumined upon the river, and the red lights slung to the mast heads of the ferry steamers looked like meteors, as they shot to and from the Prince's Landing Stage. The chill wind penetrated the man—chinks carelessness allowed time to make in the vehicle that carried us on, and every blast made my companion shiver. God help the poor! How little of thought we give their great sorrows, when sitting beside our cheerful fires. On our way this woman told me a brief but sad story.

"Five years ago, I left the old country with my son and daughter. We had a snug little farm in Kilkenny, but because of two bad years we couldn't pay the rent—the landlord, God forgive him, turned us out. My poor husband was just recovering from the fever at the time, and when he saw himself and us without a home in the wide world his heart broke within him; and in one week after we laid him in the grave. The neighbors were very kind, but 'twasn't much help they could give. Howsoever, they made up between them as much as took us over here. It was the harvest time, and my only son James got plenty of work. Mary and me used to knit stockings and sell them, and all our earnings put together, kept us from the hunger at any rate. Our James was as fine an able a young man as you'd meet in a parish; and when the harvest work was getting scarce, he went to sea. His wages were good, and used keep us very comfortable, for he never spent a ha'penny of it foolish. He used to come home to us every two months, or so, and after spending a few days with us, used go away to his ship again. Oh! but he was the good son, and the love for me an' Mary was so strong within him, that he used never go away from us without crying enough."

"And is he dead?" I asked with some concern.

ye a Christmas Day, sure I'll be thinkin' of ye. An' mother," he says, "I'll soon be back to you and Mary again. We won't have a long voyage this time." Mavrone! sure he was never so long away. We didn't see or hear from him ever since. When two months was over, we was preparing for him, an' expected him day after day, but he didn't come. There was no account of the ship, an' every one said she must be wrecked. When all our hopes of ever seeing James again was gone, Mary began to look more thin and pale. I used to try to be a bit cheerful for her sake, telling her that God is good, and that he may yet send back our James. But she used only shake her head, an' then cry as if her heart was breaking. Our little means was soon all gone, and we had nothing to live by, but the trifle knitting used bring us in. Then we had to leave our comfortable lodgings, and come to where we are now—miserable, sinful place; but, bad as it is, we couldn't be the second night there if I didn't pay three halfpence regular every day for it. One day, about three months ago, when I came home after selling a pair of stockings, I found Mary lying on the bed. Her face was as white as a sheet, only where there was two red spots burning, as if they was stamped there with a hot iron; and her eyes looked like her poor father when the madness of fever was on him; and the flure all round the bed, an' the oul'd quilt that covered it, was swimming in blood—my child's blood. "Oh, Mary, alarum!" I says, "what's over you? Tell your mother what has happened you. Where did this blood come from?" "Mother," she says, "I don't think I'll live long. After you going out this morning I felt a queer kind of pain here in my side, and my heart felt just as if something was fastened 'round it an' squeezing it tighter every minute, an' gnawing it bit by bit away. And I could hardly draw my breath from the tightness an' the pain, and I thought something near my heart broke in two, and then I threw up all this blood."

She was seldom out of the bed since; and the pain in her side is getting more troublesome, and she is growing weaker every day. God only knows how I managed to keep the life in her ever since. I go out every morning, not knowing where to get a bit or a sup. But the Blessed Mother always sends something. Only to-day I didn't get one farthing's worth. Every one was too busy preparing for to-morrow to think of the poor; an' I was distracted with hunger an' the thoughts of my dying child when I fauted where you found me."

"Did you never apply to any relief committee for help," I asked.

"I did, sir, two or three times, but they told me go to my own country, and look for it, and the last time I went to them, they said they'd imprison me if I annoyed them any more."

By this time we had reached the entrance to street, and when I dismissed the cab, my companion led the way to her lodging. Verily, that street did look the abode of sin and wretchedness. The corner house—as in almost every street of Liverpool—was a 'gin palace,' and the light that flashed from it revealed a row of filthy and dilapidated houses on either side. Most of the street excepting the immediate neighborhood of the 'gin-palace,' was fearfully dark. That was the drunkard's El Dorado. There he was nightly decoyed to spend his earnings, while his wife and children suffered from want at home.— The bar was crowded with brawling men, while painted prostitutes, in loose attire, hovered round the door; ringing curses and blasphemy in the ears of the passer by. Further down, and a group of little shoe-blacks were playing 'pitch-and-toss.' A lamp burning in the windows of a barber's shop gave them sufficient light. The earnestness with which they thus gambled the few pennies they had earned during the day was fearful to contemplate. In infant voices they consigned each other to the devil, and muttered a curse with every coin they pitched to the 'bob.' Some of their companions, who had got no pence to gamble, amused themselves by standing on their heads, and performed sundry difficult movements with their muddy feet turned towards the stars, to the great delight of the man of suds who stood at his door complacently looking on. Through the dark and narrow courts, and around the corners mysterious men skulking. They avoided the light for reasons best known to themselves. One could not help feeling uncomfortable passing through such a place—

"For over all there hung a cloud of fear, A sense of mystery the spirit daunted, Which said, as plain as whisp'ers in the ear, The place is haunted."

Aye! so it was. Haunted by want, and crime and woe. Haunted by the poor lost wanderer of the pave, and by the desperate burglar.— Haunted too, it may be, by the ghosts of slaughtered women and children; for, the annals of Liverpool crime tell of murders committed in that street.

At length my guide stopped before a house from which the rats have long since fled, if—as

they tell us—those animals vanish from a place that is likely to fall. It was a four-story house, and a faint light issued from almost every window of it, for in each room some wretched family dwelt. Bundles of old rags were substituted in many places for glass. From the cellar of this house came women's voices in shrill and angry tones.

We procured a light, and then mounted to the third story by a frail staircase. Here the woman opened a door, and shading the candle, moved across the room we entered towards a miserable bed.

"Softly, sir, if you please," she said, looking round; "the poor thing is sleeping. She gets so little sleep, it would be a pity to disturb her."

But the sleep of the sick is ever light and restless, and the mother's whispered caution woke the daughter.

"Mother," she dreamily said, "I was uneasy, you was so long away. I feared something happened to you."

"No, achora," the mother replied, "thank God I am safe back to you again; and this gentleman has come to see you, and I have some nice things that'll make you strong."

I approached the bed, and the poor girl looked towards me with a quiet and melancholy look, and merely said, "God reward him, he is very kind."

Death's sombre angel was not far off. One could fancy one saw its sable wings canopying that lowly bed, whereon the dying girl lay. One could fancy one heard the rustle of those wings in that silent, cheerless room, as if preparing to carry the soul to judgment.

After a small draught of wine she seemed to gather a little more strength. "Mother come nearer to me," she said, "till I tell you the beautiful dream I had while you was away."

The mother crouched over the bed, and I drew nearer to catch her words.

"I thought we were back in green Ireland again, James and father, and the whole of us, living in the little farm quiet and happy, as we used to before the bad times came, and I thought that 'twas the month of May, and that me and James were children again, going about the fields looking for flowers to dress the picture of God's Mother that used to hang in the little back room, and I thought the sun was shining and the birds singing so bright and sweet that me and James sat down along side of the stream, that flowed, you remember, at the three acre lawn, to sun ourselves and listen to the song. Soon we heard the bleating of a lamb, and we looked round, and saw a little one, white as the driven snow, and I thought that it came up and laid down by us, and put its head into my lap. We made a necklace then, I thought of some of the flowers we were after plucking, and put it on the lamb.— Then, I thought, we brought it home, and shut it up in the little room where the picture of the Virgin hung. After supper, I thought, me and James brought some warm milk to feed it, but instead of the lamb, we found a beautiful cross, with the image of our Lord nailed on it. Some way, or other, the whole of my dreams then changed at once, mother, and I thought I was standing alone in a broken boat that kept moving—moving away from the land, out to the broad rough sea. Days and nights seemed to go by, and I was still in that old boat tossing on the waves, and I thought there was terrible looking things swimming around about me, that nearly frightened my life away. Oh, mother, the longing for the old home, and a seat among ye by the kitchen hearth, came over me then as strong and natural as if I was awake. The black despair was coming fast around my heart, and I laid down in the bottom of the old boat to die. There I lay, I thought, looking up at the cold far stars, but without any hope. At last, I thought the boat struck against something, and I sat up and looked, and there before me, I saw a rock in the middle of the sea, and all the top of it was covered with four-leaf shamrocks, an old man stood among them, and I thought he reached me his hand and took me out of the boat. 'Ah Mary,' he said to me, 'I thought, Mary, the lamb is waiting for you. He sent me to take you where you'll see your father and where you will be sad no more. And I thought I asked him who he was, and that he said, 'I am Saint Patrick, Mary.' With that I awoke. Oh, mother," she continued, "wasn't it a beautiful dream?"

"It was so, and sure enough your dream is out alarum! God did send us some relief, praise be to his holy name. We'll have enough for to-morrow, and who knows what may come after?"

The girl's features assumed that quiet and melancholy look again which the memory of her dream had chased away for a little while, and with a sad shake of the head, she answered— "Mother, dear mother, it would be cruel to hide the truth from you. I know I'm dying.— I feel the life and strength leaving me fast, and I know that was the meaning of my dream. I'm

not sorry for going. But when I think of you mother, I almost wish I could live a little longer until James comes back, for something tells me he will come. I used to hope that I'd see poor Ireland before I die; a sight of the old woods there, and the bright green hills would be so pleasant; and I used to hope that I'd be buried in the grave yard at home near my father, and amongst the neighbors. 'Twould be a comfort to think of being laid where prayers are often said, and where the trees and the grass make the graves look like gardens; but the poor can't have their way.' After a pause she resumed with something like impatience in her tone—"Oh I don't think God ever willed we should be hunted from our home the way we was; we did nothing wrong, and it wasn't our fault sure if the times came bad. Oh, it is a sad, sad thing that a body couldn't live and die where God sent them."

Poor girl! five years' absence did not alienate her thoughts from the old woods and the green hills of Erin. Their memory haunted her pillow yet, and wove with the spell of sleep reminiscences of her early days, and her departing spirit was troubled because she could not die at home.

"Achora machree shlig! you'll kill your poor mother if you talk of dying," said the woman weeping. "You won't die, asthore. You won't leave me, Mary, for I couldn't live at all without you. When your father died, 'twas a heavy stroke, but I got over it, for you and James was spared me. Then James didn't come back to us. I thought my heart would break; but you was by me still, and your love brought comfort. It's all I have now in the wide world. Oh you will not die, mavourneen. Shure it would be cruel to leave me among the strangers alone, all alone."

The daughter raised her hand from the wretched counterpane that covered her, and with which she had been feebly toying, and placed it across her eyes. Then two large tears stole bright and slowly from beneath those wan fingers and rested on her worn cheek. Both were silent now, and it was distressing to see them—the one swaying her body to and fro in mute and tearless sorrow—her hands tightly clasping her knee, and that vague kind of expression in her eye that pains one to look at—the other silently dropping tears upon the threshold of the grave, wishing for her mother's sake to linger yet a little while in the world where her treatment had been so cruel.

Approaching footsteps roused the mother and daughter from their sorrowful pause. The one hastily rose to open the door, whilst the other eagerly fixed her eyes upon it. Visitors to their poor lodging were so few that they wondered who it might be; or, perhaps, the conviction, that the lost one had at last returned, flashed upon them at the same moment. It was, indeed, James. Mary's prophecy that he would yet come back, was fulfilled. Perhaps we are treating as altogether a superstition that beautiful belief, which imputes prescience to the dying—which embodies the idea that those on the verge of the tomb can see some of the mysteries beyond. Who can tell?

The first wild meeting over between the mother and son, the latter turned to the bed, and stooping over the girl, kissed her, while he sobbed out, "Oh, sister Mary, what has happened to you?"

"James, dearest James, it's all God's will, and now that I have seen you once more and that I know you will take care of mother, I don't feel it's a bit lonesome to die."

"But you mustn't die, Mary. You'll live to be happy with us yet, I have enough to make us all so; and we'll go home to Ireland."

The girl turned her head aside as if to conceal her emotion. Aye, she would dearly like to see again the old familiar places where she and James used to play, but the opportunity came too late. The tears fell freely from the brother and sister, and were mingled and lost in the crushed straw that formed the dying girl's pallet. Did I say those tears were lost? Yes, lost to human gaze, but surely not to God's.— Perhaps, at that moment the girl's guardian spirit was gathering them up, to have them carried with the soul it attended on earth, before God's footstool, in order that they may be registered in the judgment book, amongst the hideous wrongs already written there: and swell the cry for retribution on those who have so cruelly trampled on the Irish race and nation.

"Yes," put in the mother, "we thought you was lost from us for ever, James, what happened that you was so long away from us?"

In answer to these questions, he briefly told them how his ship had been wrecked on the coast of Australia, how all the crew except himself and two others were lost: how he went with those two to the gold-diggings, where fortune rewarded their labors. How, when the gold was divided, his share came to £300—and how, with this to him, vast sum, he hastened home to enjoy