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Thady O'Brien's Fortune

Dr. O'Rourke had just returned from a professional call one biting December morning. On alighting from his carriage he caught the eyes of his daughter, as she stood at the front window, riveted on some object at his horse's head, with an expression of countenance in which pity and mirth seemed to be struggling for the ascendancy.

"Hello! you little omadhaun," he cried, "who pays you to hold a horse that wouldn't run if you whipped him?"
"Is it me ye mane, sir? It's the less trouble to hold him, then, if he won't run," said the boy; "an' if your honor should forget to gimme the sixpence, I'm no poorer than I was before!"

"Ho! ho!" said the doctor; "it's a wit we have! Here, Tom," to the groom, who had come upon the scene, "turn the horse into the stable and this little Arab into the kitchen, and administer some hot coffee with rolls, and half a pound of chops."
"Sure, that will not be bad to take," said the urchin, following the groom. "Your honor has the name of the best doctor in the country."

"Dr. O'Rourke, at his comfortable breakfast with his family, soon forgot that such a being as Thady O'Brien existed; but his daughter Lucy, who had youth and charity on her side, descended to the kitchen to see for herself how the shivering little boy looked after a warm breakfast. On her return she said:
"Hello, father, your little patient says he is ready to go now."
"Patient? Oh, the little rogue! I sent into the kitchen for his breakfast! Well, why doesn't he go, then?"

"Because, he says, you would never forgive him if he left without paying his respects. Biddy says he has kept the kitchen in an uproar of laughter."
"Ho! ho! Well, we might as well have a laugh, too. Have him passed up, Lucy."
"Now, then," said the doctor, affecting a stern look as Thady awkwardly bowed into the room; "now, then, young man, what do you wish to see me for?"

"I'm entirely too much like yourself to forget that, your honor. Sure, you don't give up a case till you're regularly discharged."
"Indeed!" said the doctor, laughing heartily. "Pray, what have you been doing all your little life?"
"Oh, sometimes wan thing, an' sometimes another, sir."
"But what were you doing last?"
"Ateing me breakfast at your honor's expense."
Lucy now laughed, but her mother, who had been looking with pity at the lad's unprotected feet, brought forward a pair of one of the children's shoes and bade Thady put them on.

"Oh, millia muther!" shouted Thady, throwing up his hands with well-feigned horror. "Is it me mother's son would do the likes o' that?"
"What is it you would not do, pray?" the doctor sternly asked.
"There's many things I wouldn't do, your honor," looking roguishly round the little circle, "an' wan o' them is to disgrace the shoes of a son of your honor's by puttin' me naked feet into them. Sure they never saw the like."
"What is your name, and where do you live? Have you a place, or do you want one?" asked the doctor, rattling one question after the other, in order, if possible, to confuse the young hopeful.
"Thaddeus O'Brien, Elind Alley," answered Thady, putting his hands behind him and standing erect. "No, sir. Yes, your honor. Five o' them. No, sir. I wish I had. If your honor would only try me."
"Are you really in distress or only shamming?" the doctor inquired after a half dozen of "Ho! ho!" at the lad's rosy wit.
"Maybe I shammed hunger, your honor," said Thady. "Ask Biddy if I ate any breakfast; then go an' ask me mother an' five sisters when it was that they took mate enough off the table to feed six—after they had done."

cash, though ever so trifling, when Thady arrived with his basket of provisions.
"Oh, Thady, dear," said his mother, as she spread out the food on the table before the famished children, "ye must have begged hard to get all this."
"Sorry a bit, then, did I get beggin'?" answered the boy. "I tould them me mother an' five sisters were starving with cold an' famishin' with hunger, an' begged for a penny or two to buy them bread; but the people either pushed me aside an' looked 'You lie!' or tould me so, an' done with it. At last," and here the little fellow stood up proudly, "I tried another way for it."
"You didn't stale, Thady?" cried his mother, looking frightened. "An' ye have shoes an' stockings to your feet, too! That it should ever come to this!"

"Is it me own mother that asks me that?" said Thady, his eyes glistening with tears of pride and sorrow. "No, I didn't stale, mother. I shamed a rich an' good-natured man out o' what he'll never miss—an' look how it helps the childer! Take a-hout yourself, mother. I've had me breakfast—an,' by the same token, the same man is good for tomorrow."
A rude knock at the door interrupted Thady.
"Come, Mrs. O'Brien," said an equally rude man, entering the little room abruptly, "if you can't pay your rent, it is high time that you made way for those who can. Three weeks behind time, terms weekly in advance. It is a hard loss to us, but we shall have to put up with it, I suppose, and let you go Scot free!"
"Let us go! Where are we to go to?"

"Well, that's your own lookout, you know. We can't harbor you rent free any longer, at any rate. What, Thady, comfortable shoes and stockings, eh? You've improved on yesterday. You must be fitted out, I suppose, whether your mother's debts are paid or not."
"Troth, sir," said Thady, a little angrily, "they worn't bought, they're a free gift, an' made by a man who don't grudge you your shoes, nor the heart o' the man who stands in 'em."
"Hoity-toity, little Thady bantam! I meant no harm, I'm sure," said the man, provoked, but ashamed to betray it. "You might as well have begged money to keep a house over your head as shoes for your feet, while your hand was in."

"Beggars can't be choosers," said Thady, with provoking calmness. "If they could, we shouldn't be your tenants."
"I'll choose for ye," said the man, now thoroughly enraged. "Don't let me find you here to-morrow. If I do, the whole troop of you will be bundled off to the poorhouse—except you, sir, and you shall be sent to a reformatory."
"Maybe ye think ye carry the keys of all them places in your pocket," said Thady as he shut the door after him.

A gentleman of some five-and-twenty, handsome and cheerful, entered a few moments later.
"Hey-day, good people! All in the dumps. Who's sick?" he said.
"No wan, sir," said Thady.
"Na? But you all will be if you don't keep warmer. Come, Mr. O'Brien, tell us all about it."
Thady told him.
"Och, two, three, four shillings, is it?" said the newcomer. "Well, I can't afford to give you that. But I'll tell you what, my little man, I'll lend you five—four for the rent and one for capital to start you afresh on."

Thady and his mother overwhelmed him with thanks, which he did not stop to hear, but was off before the widow could reach him, or she would certainly have thrown herself at his feet and clasped his knees.
"Come, father," said Lucy O'Rourke the next morning, "do lay down that prosy pamphlet and come to breakfast. You are too old a man to be so completely swallowed up by the shop. You care more for a gallop than for your breakfast, and would rather read a tedious old medical periodical than see your fam!"
It is too bad, confess now, isn't it?"
The good doctor smiled with arch meaning as he laid aside his magazine and took his seat at the table. "You are right, Lucy," he said. "Physicians are such nuisances that I can never think of admitting another into the family; and as to that number of the 'Medical Review,' it is a stupid affair, sure enough. It is nearly half filled with a paper contributed by some young quack Cromie, or Crosbie, or some such name."

Lucy blushed and laughed, and laughed and blushed again. Her weapons were now fairly turned against herself.
"Will a duck swim, your honor? Will a fly come back to the traacle?"
"Be sure, then, and bring home the basket," said Mrs. O'Rourke.
"I'll do that, me lady, an' I'll do another thing, too," said Thady, making his best bow as he backed out of the room, wishing them all 'the top o' the morning.'
Thady O'Brien, on the whole, left a good impression on the doctor's family. The doctor was captivated by his ready wit; the wife and daughter pitied his evident though uncomplaining destitution. The key to the little living enigma, in a word, beyond which no city reader will need any explanation: Thady was, or rather had been, a "newsboy"; as such he had acquired development for the natural aptitude of his tongue—as he had learned the readiness of reply and keenness of repartee which astonished the doctor's household. Thady's father had died but a short time previously, after a long illness, which had eaten up the small earnings of the little family and sent their moveables, one by one, to the pawnbroker's. Contemptible as these poor chattels seemed, every sixpence is a treasure to the suffering poor, and the widow O'Brien was looking in vain for some article convertible into

believe what you predict, and I'll make you a promise on the credit of your own faith. You shall marry this young Dr. Cromie, or Crosbie, or whatever his name is, whenever Thady has a house to let you."
Before she could reply Biddy announced a caller. It was one of the doctor's tenants, and he directed that he should be shown up. He was a lessee of several large houses in a poor part of the city, which the doctor hardly saw once in a year, and could not point out without a guide. His lease was about expiring, and he called to obtain a renewal, but wished it on diminished terms, as he said there was a prospect that certain contemplated improvements in the city would ruin the property.
"Ho! ho!" said the doctor; "a hard improvement, that. They pay me little more than the taxes now, and if they are improved at this rate I shall be made a beggar with them. I must look into this a little, sir."
At this moment Thady made his appearance at the door. Lucy went to him and entered into conversation with him. He looked like another boy this morning. Hope and pleasure shone in his face, and his whole appearance was tidy and cheerful.

The doctor's lessee soon took his leave, having first conversed in an undertone a moment or two, with a frequent look towards Thady. The doctor's countenance showed that the lad had gained little in this interview.
"Now," said the doctor, as Lucy led the lad to him, "your name is Thaddeus, I believe?"
Thady bowed.
"I am very sorry to learn," the doctor went on, "that you are a very bad and a very impudent boy—though I might have guessed the last."

Lucy and Mrs. O'Rourke looked astonished, and poor Thady, gathering a hope of sympathy from their faces, said, as he hung his head and burst into tears, "Sure, sir, that will be news to me mother, wherever you heard it."
"Come, come, sir," said the doctor, "no more play with us—we've had enough. I don't want to condemn you unheard, and if you are deserving I would do you good. Now answer me straight, what have you ever done to maintain yourself?"
"I sold the papers, sir."
"I see. Yes—that explains something. Why don't you sell them now?"

"My father, sir, took sick, an' was very bad, an' wan day with another, sir. I spent me little money, an' other boys got me customers, str, an' me heart was gone, an' me mother an' sisters were starvin', an' the rent wasn't paid, sir—an' the Lord save you and yours from tastin' the bitter cup!"
"But how could a boy suffering all this be so full of fun and nonsense as you were yesterday, and as you would have been to-day if everything had gone as you expected?" the doctor asked, in a kinder tone.
"Och, sir, there's many ways in the world, an' them as travels wan don't know the stones in another! Two or three days, sir, I shivered bare-footed in the cowl, an' tould the people what I've tould you just now, sir, an' I couldn't get a sixpence; so I thought o' tryin' another tack, an' your kind face, sir, made me try it on ye—an' that's the whole truth, sir. I'm no blackguard, if I look wan."

"Very well put in—very well told, Thady. But I've something more to say yet. The house you live in is mine, and your landlord is my tenant."
"Then I hope," said Thady, "he's a better tenant than landlord."
"Och, he tells me that yesterday you lied to him—that you hadn't a shilling in the world."
"Lied to him! Sure, it was the blessed truth, sir!"
"But he says he threatened you with the poorhouse and the reformatory, and that this morning your mother found money to pay the rent in full. Now, you must have had this money at the time or you must have stolen it since, for he says you are very poor."

"Ah, look at him, your honor! I think o' the backbite! He knows I am poor, he says, an' he threatens me with the reformatory for not paying me mother's rent. An' maybe he didn't tell ye, sir, that he tould me that I might have begged money as well as shoes, an' abused me for the very kindness which your lady had for me. An' then he says I stole the money, an' still he puts it in his pocket 'bout a tear."
"Thady, you have made the case bad for your accuser, but you haven't helped yourself yet. Tell me honestly, where did this money come from?"
"Och, it was loaned to me, sir. Maybe,

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Lucy was in tears, and her mother in silent amazement at the little fellow's eloquence.
"Here Thady—stop!" shouted the doctor as the boy moved away. "Your name is O'Brien and the doctor's is Crosbie, eh?"
"Och, yes, sir."
"Och, yes, sir," continued the doctor, "is the 'Medical Review,' in which your father's case is prominently set forth."

"I can read, sir," said Thady proudly. "Don't play with the bones o' the dead, if ye please, sir."
"Och, no, Thady," said the doctor, kindly. "I know Dr. Crosbie, and there are those in this house who know him better than I." Thady shrewdly looked toward Lucy, and she blushed crimson. "We will inquire about you, Thady. What rent do you pay?"
"A shilling a week, sir."
"Twenty-two shillings a year. And how many rooms have you?"
"Wan, sir."
"Och, how many tenants are there in the whole house?"
"Ten, besides the grocery on the ground floor, sir."
"Hum! hum!" said the doctor. "So the fellow gets more for that one house than he pays me for five—and he wants me to reduce his rent at that. Miserably must the poor be crushed by such harpies!"

"True for ye, sir," said Thady. "If your honor would only take the house into your own hands."
"I can't do that, boy," said the doctor, musing. "Thady," said he, after a pause, "how old are you?"
"Sixteen come Twelfth Day, sir."
"Hum! hum! Well, I'll ask Dr. Crosbie about you, and if he gives you half as good a character as you have given him I'll give you charge of the house you live in. You shall have it at the same price he pays—on condition that you don't charge the others more than enough to get your own part rent free and a fair price for the trouble in collecting. And I'll not renew his lease for any of them, either. If you show yourself honest and capable, here's an opening for a living for you."
Thady's heart was too full for words now. He blushed, hung his head, stood still and then wept his thanks.

"Call here to-morrow," said the doctor, willing to relieve his grateful embarrassment.
"Thady," said Lucy, calling him back, "I want a word with you. Have you a couple of pleasant rooms in your house to let me?"
"Och, miss—me lady?" said the boy, astonished.
"Och, yes, sir," said Dr. O'Rourke.
"Och, yes, sir," said Lucy, "you certainly have not forgotten your promise you made this morning that when Thady has a house to let I may be married."

"Ho! ho!" said the doctor. "Well, when one has a mind to take, the sooner it is off his hand the better. Mary as soon as your mother can get you ready, for I see you are both of a mind. But don't you go and tell Dr. Crosbie what depends on his endorsement of Thady here."
"Sure, sir, Dr. Crosbie would not tell a lie to—to—to free Ireland," said Thady earnestly.
"Get out of the house, you little rogue!" said the doctor. "You've done in two hours what my wife and daughter have been trying in vain to do for two years."—M. F. Sheehan in the Mount Angel Magazine.