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THE RIVALS.

By Gerald Griffin.

CHAPTER XI.

Let us, for the present, leave them watching, and return to Richard Lacy, whose distraction at the death of Esther has been already adverted to.

While he sat brooding alone over his disappointment, a timid knock at the door interrupted his reflections.

"Who's there?" he asked, in a passionate tone.

"Nobody, only Nancy Guerin, sir," replied a gentle voice.

"What do you want? Quick, tell me your business, and be gone. Who wants me?"

"Nobody, only Mr. Tobin, sir. He wishes to know would you let him up here."

"What does he mean? What does he want?"

"Nothing, sir, I believe, only—"

The sound of a loud, rattling voice, like that of one highly excited by strong drink, was at this moment heard upon the staircase, and cut short the projected speech of the young servant.

The accent had something in it of more refinement than is usual in the humbler classes, but was yet far too broad to let it be supposed that the speaker actually filled the rank of a gentleman.

"Let me alone for finding him," said he, as he ascended, rather unsteadily, "I leave announcements to my cousins and the family. Tom Tobin's own honest face was the best letter of introduction he ever carried about him. I'll let announcements alone until I can sport a carriage."

Lacy? he continued, putting his hands to his sides, throwing his head back and roaring out at the top of his voice, "Lacy, my boy! my lad! my hero! Lacy, my prince of papists, here's honest Tom Tobin come to see you!"

"What shall I do?" cried Lacy, in an agony of rage and suffering.

"Will I call Owen, sir, to stop him?"

"Call death! call Lucifer! call—Ah, good Tobin, you are welcome," he added, changing his tone, as Tobin's gaunt and ill-dressed figure came in sight.

"Welcome, although you find me in a mournful hour."

He drew him in, and shut the door.

"Sorry for your troubles, mister Lacy, but those are misfortunes that all must look for in the course of nature."

"Sit down: I thank you, Tobin. We must all die."

"It stands to reason we should," returned Tobin, endeavoring to look sober, "the highest and the lowest must go, they must quit, tramp, march! that's the chat! My cousins an' the family have no more a lase o' their lives than honest Tom Tobin himself. There's my comfort. They must all cut their sticks, when the route comes—off, in a pop! Well, so as one has a decent funeral, all is one."

"Tobin—," said Lacy.

"That's the name, the family name, a family I never was ashamed of yet. I wish they could say the same o' me, but that would set 'em. I was always a blackguard; good-for-nothing but idleness and vice, just a fit tool for such a knave as you, but a better descended gentleman never swung upon the gallows."

"Good Tobin, I am busy—"

"They talk of my drinking and swearing and licentiousness. Very well, I admit it. But look at poor Owen. There's a pattern of piety and good conduct! Owen never wronged a human being of a sixpence. He never was heard to utter a profane or a licentious speech. He is as constant in his attendance at chapel as if he was cooing the minister's daughter, and he never was (to say) drunk in his life. There's my pride. I pick pride out o' that. Is there a man in the country can show me such a cousin as that?"

"Tobin—"

"Shabby? Psha, I admit it, I never had any taste for dress in my life—but look at Bill! He mounts the best coat in Grafton street. There's my pride. He come down here last year, and I borrowed his coat to get one made by Speirin, the tailor, on the same cut. He looked at it, folded up the coat, and gave it back into my hands. 'Sir,' says he, 'there isn't two tailors in Ireland that could make such a coat. I'm sorry to lose your custom, but there's no use in my promising what I can't do. There's my pride. I pick pride out o' that.'"

"Deservedly, Tobin. Pray, hear me now."

"East or west, north or south, right, left, where will you find such a family, just putting myself out of the question?"

"Aye, aye, but hear me—"

"And for elegance—look at this. I won't boast, but my cousin Dick is no clod. That I'll say for him."

"You're drunk!" said Lacy, angrily.

"Eh? well, an' what if I am. That's more than Owen would be, I never saw a cousin o' mine drunk before dinner in my life."

"You are rude."

"Ha, that's more than you could say of Dick. That's a finished gentleman."

"Hear me."

"I pick no pride out o' myself. I know what I am."

"Madam," cried Lacy, stamping in a fit of rage.

"Aye, aye, go on, go on! I don't mind what you can say of me."

"Beggars that you were when I first met you, do you not owe me all that you possess?"

"Ecce signum!" returned Tobin, holding out his arms, and turning his person round, so as to expose his mean dress.

"Did I not find you a tall, hungry rogue living from town to town upon the sale of policies of assurance?"

"A good trade, too, aye!"

"And with assurance enough, yourself, to stock a whole inn?"

"H, ha, ha! that's a witty pun."

"And hear me, fool! and fear me. Can I not make you, now, the beggar, the spendthrift prodigal you were, again, at my pleasure? I have the power; do not arouse the will, or as that light shines on us, I will send you back once more to raise blood-money upon that crazy heap of bones that carries you, and think it high feeding to sit in the chimney corner, at the sign of the Shamrock, and cook a raw potatoe in the turf ashes."

"My cousins and the family—"

"Plague take your cousins! will you—"

"Softly, good friend Lacy, tread tenderly on that ground, if you please. If you want any body to abuse, I'm your man. Here I am—Abuse me, scold me, beat me, kick me, if you please, but let my cousins alone. A passing kick or a thump I'll wink at as soon as another, but there's reason in all things. I'll not stand any reflections on the family."

"You rascal, I will turn you out of the house."

"You're not the size, yet."

"I know why you do this. You think me in your power; but you're a fool."

"Do you defy me, then? cried Tobin, looking earnestly on him."

"You're a fool!" said Lacy, avoiding his eye.

"Do you defy me?"

"What brought you here to-day?"

"Defy me, if you dare!"

"What do you want?"

"Tis well you changed that word," said Tobin, relaxing his tone with a contemptuous smile, "you were partly beginning to forget yourself. But all is one, I came here for money."

"I cannot give it, Tobin. You have drawn my wealth, as a leech draws blood, already. I have none to give you now."

"I don't want to get your gold for nothing," returned the other, "I have got a piece of paper here, that is worth a few sovereigns at all events."

Lacy's eyes sparkled.

"What's that?" he said eagerly, "information about the Hares?"

"No, nor the foxes either. If I know anything of your heart, there is a word upon this paper that will make it bound a little. Who do you think is alive?"

"Esther Wilderming!" cried Lacy, springing to his feet, while his features glowed and his eyes shone wildly, with the sudden expectation. Before Tobin answered, however, the folly of this idea became visible to his judgment, and he sunk down into his chair in a fit of exhaustion as sudden as the excitement. "Ah!" he said; it is not possible?"

"Guess again!" said Tobin, coolly.

"My wit is out," returned Lacy with a ghastly look. "Pray, have some mercy on me—Whom do you mean?"

"Young Riordan, that joined the American patriots some years ago."

"Riordan?"

"Francis Riordan."

Lacy shrank, in his seat, like a snail into its shell, and remained for a short time in an attitude so contracted that his naturally diminutive stature was reduced to one half. A long deep silence ensued.

"I am still more wretched than I thought," he muttered at length, while his dark eyes flashed sullen fire upon the informer. "Esther is dead, and Riordan lives and triumphs! The spring tide of my fortunes is upon the fall. My spirits will begin to sink at last."

"But what if Riordan should return, and place himself within your power?"

Lacy's eyes gleamed gladness at the suggestion, but he did not long continue to look pleased.

"No, no," he murmured, "he is far too wise to set his foot again on Irish soil. He cannot think me so forgetful."

"He has done it, for all that."

"Done what?"

"He is here in Ireland; here in the county Wicklow."

The agitation which Lacy manifested at this intelligence was excessive. His countenance

changed color, and his frame trembled with anxiety. The hurried eagerness, which was visible in all his manner resembled, but in a far more intense degree, that of a fowler who sees his victim just hovering about the springe which he has laid for its destruction.

"Good Tobin!" he said, "good, trusty fellow, how do you know this? Mock me not now with any false report; say it not rashly, if you love my peace! If this be false," he stamped with fury on the floor, "I'll hang you like a dog!"

"Softly, softly, sir," said Tobin, "that's a game that two could play at. But there's no occasion for us to sit down to it, at present, while there's better sport in hand for both. Do you know his writing?"

"Whose? Riordan's? Aye, as I should know his face. My desk is full of his accursed and insulting letters. I could not be deceived; what's this?"

Tobin handed him a paper which he endeavored to read, but his agitation would not suffer him to hold it steady. He held it with both hands—sat down—stood up—and at length was compelled to place it on the table and support his temples on his hands while he read.

It was a pencilled note which contained the following words:—

"Esther—I am here, again in Ireland, the same in heart as when I left it, four years since; if your's has not been changed, say when and where we are to meet."

"FRANCIS RIORDAN."

Lacy went to his desk, took out several letters and compared the handwriting with that which he had just read.

"Tis clear!" he exclaimed, at length; "there is no doubt of this—how did you get it?"

"My cousin Owen—"

"Psha!—hang—"

"Hold, sir, soft words, I say again. My cousin Owen was at Damer's on the night of the wake, and he got it from one of the servants, who had found it in Mrs. Keleher's apartment. You know she was Riordan's nurse?"

"She was—aye—well?"

"Well—that is all."

"And you know nothing of the time nor place in which it was written. Tell me the whole, at once. Rack me not with delay. Remember how he rose against me once; remember how he crossed me, and indulge my vengeance with a speedy answer. Bring me upon him; swiftly, secretly, get him into my gripe, and you shall be my brother from that hour, and share the half of what I own."

"Give me a handsome airnest first, and I'll see what I can do."

"Here are five pounds; speak, now, where is he?"

"Pooh, pooh!" said Tobin, "you talk to me as if I were a magician or a conjurer. I cannot now tell you where he is; but I will make it out."

"Do, and I'll make you rich."

"Say no more, say no more. Just ride over to the police station and have the men ready in an hour's time, may be I'd find employment for them."

"Enough!" said Lacy, hastily, "I will go at once and make all ready in the yard. Or go you down, and get the horses ready. Ah, Tobin, I believe my heart is broken; but let me be gratified in the punishment of that man, and I will die in peace. I have lived these many years for those two passions—my hate, and love. In one, I am for ever disappointed; but let me be successful in the first, and I am happy. I have not lived in vain if Riordan perishes—perishes in the contempt and shame which I have prepared for him. Away, and do as I have said."

Tobin left the room.

"That villain!" said Lacy, changing his manner, and shaking his clenched hand after the informer, "that villain dares to threaten. It is well the fool will let his secret out. He has taught me caution, and I'll teach him silence! My brain is so confused by all these accidents, that I can scarcely know what I am about.—First, Riordan—and then this innocent fool!—Quit of these two, my limbs are all unfettered once again, and free for action. Well, Tobin, are you ready?"

"All is right," answered Tobin, re-entering the room. "I have told them to make the horses ready."

"Here, then, at once, put these pistols in the holster."

"But won't you hear the information about the Hares?"

"Psha! let them pass. When we are laying a trap for a lion, we must not arrange to watch for conies."

CHAPTER XII.

Let us return to the deserted cottage, in which we left the unhappy young soldier watching by the body of his love.

About midnight, the effect of his exertions, and long want of rest and food, began to be apparent in his frame. His sense of misery, the

keenness of which had, until now, kept off the assaults of sleep, grew vague and dull, and a lulling torpor sunk upon his brain. The wind, which rose as the night advanced, moaned sullenly around the lonely building and a sudden falling in of the burning fire made him start from his broken slumbers, with a sensation of alarm. Sometimes, the disordered condition of his nerves, without any external excitement, would produce a similar effect, and he would suddenly find himself sitting erect upon the floor, with a horrid sensation, shooting like a galvanic shock from his brain, along his spine, and oppressing, for a moment, the action of his heart and lungs. His visions, when he dreamed, were likewise of a startling description. Now he met Lacy, hand to hand in combat, and was vexed to the soul to find that, while all his enemy's blows told fiercely on his person, his own fell weak and harmless, as if on some unresisting and impassible substance. And now, he occupied that dizzy resting place in the cliff from which the poor Cathleen was hurled into the lake; and Esther, pale in her shroud, stood trembling on the brink beside his couch. He rose to meet her; her form seemed to fade as he advanced, and her face looked terrible, he knew not wherefore. He attempted to touch her hand, but she receded from him, he followed to the brink of the cliff, she still seemed to float backward in the thin air, and the pale dead face and lurid eye assumed a slight appearance of derision. He tried to follow her; his footing failed him, and he fell headlong down the rocks, from ledge to ledge, and just awoke in time to save himself from some irrecoverable confusion.

He found David Lenigan standing over, and endeavoring to recal him to consciousness by gently pressing his arm.

"Master Frank," said the honest fellow, "that's a quare pace for you to be lying, sir—Get up, and stretch over on the straw, awhile, an' I'll keep awake here by the fire-side, until you have a little sleep taken."

Francis sat up, and stared upon his attendant.

"I will do so, I believe, Davy," said he, "for I am tired almost to death."

They exchanged places, and Francis so disposed himself that he could, to the last moment of consciousness, retain a view of the form and features of the dead. The fire had sunk down, and a gloomier red was cast upon the white and marly cheek of the maiden. Before many minutes had elapsed, Francis observed that his attendant's head had dropped upon his breast, and that his promise of vigilance was already broken. He strove, therefore, to prevent the access of slumber in his own person, and continued leaning on his elbow, and keeping his eyes fixed upon Esther.

It happened that the attitude of her head, and the mere position of the features, reminded him forcibly of the look she had worn at their parting. Whatever of resentment had been awakened, by her desertion of him in his exile, was secretly now dissolved in the recollections which this accidental circumstance revived. He thought, if Esther could be now restored to him, he would not even think of questioning her upon the subject. His heart melted, as he remembered their early affection, he felt her sigh again at his cheek, the music of her voice upon his ear, and he sunk, all softened, down upon his couch, burying his face in his hands, and moistening them with his tears.

A low sound, like that of a deep short sigh, uttered in the house, fell suddenly upon his ear, and made him start from his incipient slumber, with a wild and tumultuous feeling of alarm.—He stared confusedly all around him, but could discern nothing. He looked at the corpse, but it still lay pale and motionless in the same position in which he had, with his own hands, placed it. He gazed upon Davy, who was still fast asleep and snoring loudly. The sound, he thought, might have been merely an intonation of Lenigan's harmonious solo; but this conjecture was rejected almost as soon as formed. There was something peculiar in the sound; an effect thrilling and startling, such as is said to belong properly to things of supernatural origin. He called to his attendant several times, but found much difficulty in awaking him.

"Davy," he said, "did you hear anything?"

"What would I hear, master?"

"I thought there was a sound, just now, as if from somebody in pain."

"Oyeh!" exclaimed Davy, half starting up and staring around him, with jaw dropped and eye dilated on the sudden.

Francis remained listening attentively for a few moments. "I believe I was mistaken," he said at last, "it was the wind, splitting itself upon the corner stone, or howling down the glen."

He slept again, and Davy, returning to the fire-place, with many a knowing glance at the darkened corners of the room, likewise resumed his attitude of repose. In a very short time, Francis was once more suddenly awakened from slumber by a confused noise, and the pressure

of a strong hand upon his shoulder. Looking up, he beheld his adherent thrown forward on one knee, with one hand gathering his dress about his throat, and a face full of terror, turned back over his shoulder.

"What is the matter, now?" exclaimed Francis.

"The groan, achree—the groan!"

"What of it?"

"What of it, but to hear it, I did; as plain as I hear you now. Oh, that I may be grey, master Frank, but we're kilt-an' spoilt, alive, the two of us this blessed night. Listen to that."

"To what?"

"I don't know; nothin', I believe. Oh, that I may be grey, master, but I'll rise out of you and your doin's. 'Tisn't this world alone, but the other along with it, you brought down upon us this night. Oh, wirra, what'll I do at all, or what'll ever become of us?"

"Be silent," said Francis, "or tell me what you heard?"

"A groan, I tell you; a cry, just as a person would be gettin' aise from a hurt, and would be moanin' lyin' down. That I may be grey, but I thought it is herself was come afther us, an' I'm not misdoubtin' of it yet either."

"Psha!"

"Oh, aye, that's the way, always, when I put in a word, an' sure what hurt if I hadn't to share in what comes of it? but there's the way, always. I follow on everywhere, like a blind beggar man, an' my word won't be taken for anything, although I must tumble into the ditch, along with the laidher, when he goes."

"When you have done speaking," said Francis, "will you suffer me to rise? Come hither, Davy, and let us both watch by the fire during the next two hours. It will then be dawn, and we will bury Esther together."

"I wish to my heart she was fairly under the ground again," returned Davy. "Oyeh, d'ye hear the rain? Well," he added, after a pause of several minutes, "she'll be in better luck this mornin' than when she was when she was buried the turn before."

"Why?" Francis asked, almost involuntarily.

"Is it an' it powerin' rain? Sure the world knows, sir, that it is a finer thing to be buried of a showery day than of a dry one."

"Why?"

"Why?" echoed Davy, puzzled at being called on to give a reason for what he had hitherto never heard called in question. "Wisha, then, I don't know, sir, only as they say, that

Happy is the bride that the sun shines on, Happy is the corpse that the rain rains upon.

"The ould women would tell you a story, as long as to-day, an' to-morrow, about that very thing, if you'd listen to 'em; but you're in no humor now, sir, I b'lieve, to hear stories."

"Indeed, my good fellow, I am not," returned Francis, in a mournful voice. "It was always my ambition rather to be the subject of a story in my own person, than to sit me down a simple auditor, and it would seem as if fortune had taken me at my word, and rendered mine a tragic one."

They relapsed once more into silence, and Francis continued to recall the many circumstances of his life which justified the speech he had pronounced, until his recollections became altogether oppressive. He then suddenly turned round, and bade Davy to go on with his story. The latter, who felt something of security in the appearance of social communion, complied with great readiness, and related the following adventure, which, though not as imaginative in detail as the Divina Comedia, may yet be interesting, as an effect of the same spirit of trembling enquiry, which filled the breast of Dante with its inspiration.

"Why then I will, sir, tell you that," said David, crossing his feet at full length and lowering his head upon his breast. "A couple, sir, that was there of a time, an' they hadn't only the one son, an' plenty of every thing about 'em. Well, himself was a very good man, he never sent a beggar away empty-handed from his house, he gave clothes to the naked, and food to the hungry, an' drink to the dry, an' every whole ha'porth, all to one thing alone, an' that was that he never allowed any poor person to sleep a night inside his doore, be they ever so tired, because his wife was a terrible woman, an' he was in dread of her tongue. As for her, the only thing she ever gave to any one in her life was an ould tatter'd skreed of a flannel petticoat she gave to one poor woman, an' the sheep's trotters that she used to have thrown out in the doore to 'em when they'd be crowdin' about it after dinner."

"Well, it so happened, as things will happen, that the man died; an' if he did, the day he was buried, the rain keep powerin' down equal to a flood, until they had him laid in the grave. An' it isn't long after until the woman died likewise, an' a finer day never came o' the sky than what she had goin' to the church-yard. Well, the