

Thady was soon fitted out with shoes, warm socks, and a basket of broken food.

'Now,' said the doctor, 'will you be sure and come back to-morrow morning?'

'Will a duck swim, your honor? Will a fly come back to the treacle?'

'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 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 told 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 told 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-houl't yourself, mother. I've had me breakfast—an', by the same token, the same man is good for to-morrow.'

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 shall 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 years, 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.

'No? But you all will be if you don't keep warmer. Come, Mrs. O'Brien, tell us all about it.'

Thady told him.

'One, 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 gallipot than for your breakfast, and would rather read a tedious old medical periodical than see your family. 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 named Cromie, or Crosbie, or some such name.'

Lucy blushed and laughed, and laughed and blushed again. Her weapons were now fairly turned against herself.

'Well, my dear, did you miss any spoons yesterday?' Dr. O'Rourke inquired of his wife a moment later, and being answered in the negative, the old gentleman continued: 'Then, unless little Thady considers your basket worth more than anything he could get here to-day, he will come back this morning.'

'To be sure he will come,' said Mrs. O'Rourke.

'To be sure he will, father,' said Lucy.

'Well—perhaps,' said the doctor, pretending to have his doubts.

Biddy here announced that the young gentleman was already below stairs.

'Give him some breakfast, Biddy,' said the doctor, 'and then send him up. Now you see,' he added, turning to his daughter, 'that little Thady is deep. He throws a sprat to catch a hake. He will keep on till he gets far enough into your confidence to steal something worth while.'

'For shame, father!' said Lucy. 'How can you be so uncharitable? He knows that honesty is the best policy.'

'Very good! Very good!' said the doctor. 'And I'll tell you what, my pretty prophetic—I know you 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 toward Thady. The doctor's countenance showed that the lad had gained little in this interview.

'Now,' said the doctor, as Lucy led the lad toward 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.'