



The Priest's Supper

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Irish

Advanced
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It is said by those who ought to understand such things, that the good people, or the fairies, are some of the angels who were turned out of heaven, and who landed on their feet in this world, while the rest of their companions, who had more sin to sink them, went down further to a worse place. Be this as it may, there was a merry troop of the fairies, dancing and playing all manner of wild pranks on a bright moonlight evening towards the end of September. The scene of their merriment was not far distant from Inchegeela, in the west of the county Cork – a poor village, although it had a barrack for soldiers; but great mountains and barren rocks, like those round about it, are enough to strike poverty into any place however, as the fairies can have every thing they want for wishing, poverty does not trouble them much, and all their care is to seek out unfrequented nooks and places where it is not likely any one will come to spoil their sport.

On a nice green sod by the river's side were the little fellows dancing in a ring as gaily as may be, with their red caps wagging about at every bound in the moonshine; and so light were these bounds, that the lobes of dew, although they trembled under their feet, were not disturbed by their capering. Thus did they carry on their gambols, spinning round and round, and twirling and bobbing, and diving and going through all manner of figures, until one of them chirped out,

“Cease, cease, with your drumming,

Here's an end to our mumming,

By my smell

I can tell

A priest this way is coming!"

And away every one of the fairies scampered off as hard as they could, concealing themselves under the green leaves of the lusmore, where, if their little red caps should happen to peep out, they would only look like its crimson bells; and more hid themselves in the hollow of stones, or at the shady side ol' brambles, and others under the bank of the river, and in holes and crannies of one kind or another.

The fairy speaker was not mistaken; for along the road, which was within view of the river, came Father Horrigan on his pony, thinking to himself that as it was so late he would make an end of his journey at the first cabin he came to. According to this determination, he stopped at the dwelling of Dermod Leary, lifted the latch, and entered with " My blessing on all here."

I need not say that Father Horrigan was a welcome guest wherever he went, for no man was more pious or better beloved in the country. Now it was a great trouble to Dermod that he had nothing to offer his reverence for supper as a relish to the potatoes which " the old woman," for so Dermod called his wife, though she was not much past twenty, had down boiling in the pot over the fire; he thought of the net which he had set in the river, but as it had been there only a short time, the chances were against his finding a fish in it. " No matter," thought Dermod, "there can be no harm in stepping down to try, and may be as I want the fish for the priest's supper that one will be there before me."

Down to the river side went Dermod, and he found in the net as fine a salmon as ever jumped in the bright waters of "the spreading Lee;" but as he was going to take it out, the net was pulled from him, he could not tell how or by whom, and away got the salmon, and went swimming along with the current as gaily as if nothing had happened.

Dermod looked sorrowfully at the wake which the fish had left upon the water, shining like a line of silver in the moonlight, and then, with an angry motion of his right hand, and a stamp of his foot, gave vent to his feelings by muttering, "May bitter bad luck attend you night and day for a blackguard schemer of a salmon, wherever you go! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, if there 's any shame in you, to give me the slip after this fashion And I'm clear in my own mind you'll come to no good, for some kind of evil thing or other helped you – did I not feel it pull the net against me as strong as the devil himself?"

That's not true for you," said one of the little fairies, who had scampered off at the approach of the priest,

coming up to Dermod Leary, with a whole throng of companions at his heels; “there was only a dozen and a half of us pulling against you.”

Dermod gazed on the tiny speaker with wonder, who continued, “Make yourself noways uneasy about the priest’s supper; for if you will go back and ask him one question from us, there will be as fine a supper as ever was put on a table spread out before him in less than no time.”

” I’ll have nothing at all to do with you,” replied Dermod, in a tone of determination; and after a pause he added, “I’m much obliged to you for your offer, sir, but I know better than to sell myself to you or the like of you for a supper; and more than that, I know Father Horrigan has more regard for my soul than to wish me to pledge it for ever, out of regard to any thing you could put before him – so there’s an end of the matter.”

The little speaker, with a pertinacity not to be repulsed by Dermod’s manner, continued, ” Will you ask the priest one civil question for us?”

Dermod considered for some time, and he was right in doing so, but he thought that no one could come to harm out of asking a civil question. “I see no objection to do that same, gentlemen,” said Dermod; ” but I will have nothing in life to do with your supper,. – mind that.”

Then,” said the little speaking fairy, whilst the rest came crowding after him from all parts, “go and ask Father Horrigan to tell us whether our souls will be saved at the last day, like the souls of good Christians; and if you wish us well, bring back word what lie says without delay.”

Away went Dermod to his cabin, where he found the potatoes thrown out on the table, and his good woman handing the biggest of them all, a beautiful laughing red apple, smoking like a hard-ridden horse on a frosty night, over to Father Horrigan.

Please your reverence,” said Dermod, after some hesitation, ” may I make bold to ask your honour one question?”

“What may that be?” said Father Horrigan.

“Why, then, begging your reverence’s pardon for my freedom, it is, If the souls of the good people are to be saved at the last day?”

“Who bid you ask me that question, Leary?” said the priest, fixing his eyes upon him very sternly, which

Dermod could not stand before at all.

“I’ll tell no lies about the matter, and nothing in life but the truth,” said Dermod. “It was the good people themselves who sent me to ask the question, and there they are in thousands down on the bank of the river waiting for me to go back with the answer.

“Go back by all means,” said the priest, “and tell them, if they want to know, to come here to me themselves, and I’ll answer that or any other question they are pleased to ask with the greatest pleasure in life.”

Dermod accordingly returned to the fairies, who came swarming round about him to hear what the priest had said in reply; and Dermod spoke out among them like a bold man as he was: but when they heard that they must go to the priest, away they fled, some here and more there; and some this way and more that, whisking by poor Dermod so fast and in such numbers, that he was quite bewildered.

When he came to himself; which was not for a long time, back he went to his cabin and ate his dry potatoes along with Father Horrigan, who made quite light of the thing; but Dermod could not help thinking it a mighty hard case that his reverence, whose words had the power to banish the fairies at such a rate, should have no sort of relish to his supper, and that the fine salmon he had in the net should have been got away from him in such a manner.

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