

Victory is sweet...



RIVALS

ALAN GOREVAN

Dennis Geary, the man the world knew as “the Biscuit Baron” was still in high spirits when his limo approached the gates of his Dalkey home.

“That was the best goddamned funeral I’ve ever been at,” he said. “Bar none.”

His wife, Miriam, slapped his arm. “Dennis, don’t say that.”

“Jesus Christ, remember when that priest forgot the name of Bob’s son? I just about shit myself laughing.”

Dennis ran a hand through his grey hair and gave Miriam a wolfish grin.

Miriam said. “Do you have to be so... so *crude*? With your *damn this* and *damn that*?”

“I’m American. What do you expect?” He said it as if he hadn’t lived in Dublin for the last twenty years.

Miriam rolled her eyes. “You’re fifty percent American and fifty percent Irish.”

“Whatever. I’m one hundred percent alive, which is more than you can say for Bob.”

Miriam’s mouth dropped open. “Dennis.”

“Sweetheart, you know I’m just speaking my mind.”

“Yes, well...”

She gazed out the window. Not much was visible through the rain. The sky was dark, as if it was late evening rather than the middle of the afternoon.

Dennis patted Miriam’s leg. She was still the right side of forty, but so old-fashioned, you’d have sworn she was born during WW2. Dennis would have left her if he didn’t think the divorce would be such a bitch.

He pulled the Champagne out of its ice bucket and topped up his glass. Miriam hadn’t touched hers, but he added a couple of drops anyway, just so she couldn’t call him stingy.

It had been raining at the graveyard, turning to sleet near the end of the ceremony. Dennis had got a little wet, even with his driver holding an umbrella over him, but he didn’t mind. It was worth it to see Bob getting lowered into the dirt.

The steel-framed PVC gates of the house came into view. Their driver pressed a button and the gates slowly started to open. Normally the tedious wait annoyed Dennis, but not today. He unrolled his copy of the *Irish Tribune* and opened it at the page-nine tribute to Bob.

Page nine.

Dennis grinned.

Seeing Bob’s obituary brought it home to Dennis that he was really gone. It made the fact real. On the other hand, Dennis hadn’t trusted the *Tribune*’s grasp of the reality since that outrageous headline eleven years ago.

BISCUIT BARON DEAD
AT 60.

Dennis bristled at the memory. He still couldn't believe that the bastards had told the world he'd passed away.

Cretins.

They issued a correction the next day.

BISCUIT BARON DAD
AT 60.

Like anyone ever read corrections. And who cared if he got Miriam knocked up when he was in his sixth decade? None of their goddamned business where he put his pecker.

As things turned out, Bob had been put in the ground before Dennis, though Bob was the younger man by more than five years.

Dennis had made sure his lawyers kept after the *Tribune* ever since that headline, stuffing a gag in its mouth any chance they got. He figured the paper would go bankrupt soon, and good riddance.

That nickname, "the biscuit baron", was terrible. He supposed "baron" was okay. It implied a certain elevated class of person. Someone with get-up-and-go. But "biscuit baron" sounded flippant.

For his part, Bob had been dubbed "the turkey tycoon", which Dennis thought was even worse. Of course, Bob had earned it, what with all those poultry

farms scattered around the country.

He'd been a tough old bird himself, right up to the end. But not tough enough to survive a massive heart attack.

Dennis grinned.

The gates were finally open wide enough to allow the limo to go through. The driver eased the car up the gravel driveway, past the beautiful manicured garden towards the main house. The sprawling mansion boasted a fifteen-million-euro view out onto the Irish sea, and Bob's chest swelled with pride that it was his.

Miriam cleared her throat that way she did whenever she was trying to work up the courage to say something.

Dennis took the bait.

"What's wrong, sweetheart?"

"It's just... I thought we were going there to pay our respects. If I'd known you were going along just to gloat, I never would have gone. And I can't believe you wanted to bring Kim."

"What? It was just a funeral. Kids have to learn the facts of life some time. It might have been good for her."

"You were so..." Miriam shook her head. "I know you and Bob had your differences, but that doesn't mean you need to be nasty. It was just business."

“Business is war, sweetheart.”

“And the way Bob’s son stared at you. I felt a little perturbed.”

Dennis nodded, as the car eased to a stop in front of the house.

“Bob Junior. That’s what they call him. Can you believe it? Same name as the old man, but that dingbat priest still managed to forget it.” Dennis laughed and slapped his thigh. “I wonder should I call the factory, get Bert to send everyone home for the rest of the day, so all my employees can celebrate too?”

“I don’t think that would be very nice,” Miriam said.

Dennis was surprised to see tears in her eyes. “What’s wrong, sweetheart?”

The driver got out and walked around to Miriam’s side. He opened the door and waited for her to get out.

“Give us a minute,” Dennis barked. “Shut the damn door.”

The driver did.

Miriam found a tissue in her handbag and dabbed her eyes.

She said, “I’m sorry. I just wish people could be a little kinder to each other. Life isn’t all about money.”

You married a millionaire, Dennis thought. She didn’t do it for the money, he was sure, but

the end result was the same. He said, “I know, sweetheart.”

“I want Kim to grow up knowing the value of kindness.”

“She will. Our girl will grow up right. I promise.”

And he really meant it. Kim was the only person in the world that he really loved, his perfect princess.

Dennis squeezed Miriam’s knee. She was right about the factory. Shutting down production was a bad idea. It would just be a waste of money. Not that money was all Dennis cared about. He wasn’t miserly the way people said. He believed in quality too. His company’s biscuits were made using the finest flour, for example, and the flavouring was almost entirely natural.

Dennis hadn’t skimped on the hitman either.

The guy he hired wasn’t cheap, but he’d done a great job, and that was what mattered. The coroner was satisfied Bob had died of natural causes.

However, Dennis had seen the way Bob Junior looked at him in the graveyard. Hate. Loathing. Suspicion. And something else Dennis hadn’t yet pinned down. He almost thought he’d seen the little bastard leer.

Dennis realised the driver was still standing outside in the rain.

“Let’s go inside,” he said, and reached past Miriam to bang his fist on the window. The driver opened the door at once.

They hurried into the house. It was warm and bright inside.

Sophia, the housekeeper, bowed to them as they entered.

“Where’s Kim?” Dennis asked.

“In her room all day.”

Dennis made his way upstairs and walked down the hall to Kim’s room. He opened her door without knocking.

“Sweetheart?”

The window was open and the curtains were billowing in the wind. Kim’s room looked out onto a leafy section of the garden at the side of the house. A fire-escape led from the window to the ground below. Dennis leaned out the window and looked down, in case Kim might have gone outside for some reason, but there was no sign of her.

Dennis straightened up and closed the window.

He caught sight of a A4 sheet of paper on Kim’s bed. Something was scrawled on it in red marker. Dennis picked the sheet up and read it.

Then he read it a second time, with tears in his eyes.

Soon he was crying out loud, huge sobs shaking his body. He heard Miriam coming rushing but he couldn’t pull himself

together. Couldn’t put on a brave face this time. Instead he read the note again.

She’s gone. Now we’re even, it said.

Thanks for reading!

If you enjoyed this story, check out
more of my writing at
www.alangorevan.com.

Happy reading.