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ARLO BATES

TIM CALLIGAN’S GRAVE-MONEY

I

“’T was a fool’s notion to get tipped out of a boat anywhere,” said Tim Calligan to his circle of fellow pensioners at the Dartbank poor-farm, “me that’s been on the water like a bubble from the day me mother weaned me, saints rest her soul, and she as decent a woman as ever was born in County Cork.”

Tim was relating the oft-told tale of his escape from drowning, a story of which they were fond, and which he delighted to tell. The old man had a fertile Celtic fancy, and his narrations were luxuriant with exuberant growth.

“So there was meself drownin’ like a blind kitten in a pond,—and many ’s the litter of ’em I’d sent to the cat’s Purgatory by the way of that very river, saving that the Purgatory of cats there ain’t any, having no souls, by the token that having nine lives they’d belike have nine souls, and being so many they’d crowd good Christian souls in Paradise,—blessings on the holy saints for previnting it.

“No more could I make me head stay out of water,” Tim went on, “than if it was a stone. ‘Good-by, Tim, me boy,’ sez I to meself. ‘Ye’re gone this time,’ sez I, ‘and I’ll miss nothing in not being at yer wake, by the token that there won’t be no wake; and ef there was,’ sez I, still to meself, ‘there could be nothing to drink but water here in this cursed stream.’ And down I went again, like a dasher in a churn. ‘Holy St. Bridget,’ thinks I, ‘how far ’ll it be to the bottom of this ondecent river. Likely it goes clean through to Chiny,’ thinks I, ‘and one of them bloody, onbelaving heathen ’ll be grabbing me presently with his mice-eating hands. But it’s better being pulled out by a heretic heathen than staying in and soaking.’ With that up again I goes, like a shellaly at a fair; and it was like fire flashing in me eyes. Sez I to meself: ‘That ’ll be Widdy Malony’s bit of a house,’ sez I, spaking always in me mind because of the floods of water in me mouth. ‘It’ll be burning to the very ground,’ sez I, ‘and me missing all the fun of it. The blessed saints help the poor woman, turned out of house and home to get bite and sup for her children like a chipmunk, and every one of them taking after Dennis, and I might have married her meself long ago if they was fewer, for I’d want a ready-made family small,’ sez I to meself, plunking up and down in the water like a dumpling in the broth. ‘’T is pitiful to think of her house burning down over her head,’ sez I, ‘and she never to know the man might have made her Mis’ Calligan’s down here drowning in plain sight of the very flames of it, and she nor nobody doing one thing to save him, praise be to the handiworks of God. Faith, and ’t would be better for the both of us if she had more water and meself more fire,’ sez I in me mind. And all the

time ’t was no fire, but just the blessed sun I’d never see again, barring I had n’t got saved, and it shining and flashing in the eyes of me from the widdy’s windows.”

The tale was long, for it included an enumeration of all the sensations and emotions which Tim had really experienced, and all those which, in the course of long years, he had been able to imagine he might have felt. As at the poor-farm time was not an object, however, except of slaughter, the length of the narrative was its greatest recommendation.

“And with that,” Tim at last ended his recital, “I felt the whole top of me head pulled off as I lay soft and easy on the bottom of the flood, and thinking nothing at all, but reflecting how soft the mud of it were and pitying Pat Donovan that he’d never get the quarter I owed him. ‘That ’ll be a Chany-man or the Divil, Tim, me boy,’ sez I to meself; and then I made no more observes to meself at all, owing to the soul having gone out of me body. And all the time it was Bill Trafton catching me by the hair, him having dove for me just shortly after me being dead, and dragging me to the top when I could n’t be moved from the bottom, and was likely to die any minute, saving that it was dead already I was. And he saved me life, by the token that the soul had gone out of me peaceful; but, Holy Mother, how’ll I be telling ye the pain of its coming back! ’T was like the unwilling dragging back of a pig out of a praitie patch to get the soul of me back from the place it had gone to, and they rubbing me to show it the care they’d take of me, and coaxing it for two mortal hours.”

As the tale ended, the bleared eyes of one of the auditors were attracted to a light wagon which had turned into the lane at the foot of the long slope upon which the poor-house stood.

“Somebody ’s comin’,” old Simeon observed deliberately. “Likely it’s the new Overseer.”

“Yes, that’s him,” Tim assented. “That’s Dan Springer.”

“I ’spected he was a-comin’,” Grandsire Welsh commented, with a senile chuckle. “Huldy and Sam’s been a-slickin’ up things.”

“Huldy and Sam,” in more official language Mr. and Mrs. Dooling, were the not unworthy couple who had the poor-farm in charge.

“Wa’n’t you sayin’ t’other day,” asked old Simeon, “thet you particular wantid to see the Overseer?”

“It’s pining for him I am the time,” Tim answered.

The old men sat silent, watching the approach of the visitor, who drove up to the

hitching-post near them, and who leaped from his wagon with a briskness almost startling to the aged chorus.

“Spry,” old Simeon commented. “I’ve seen the time, though, when I was spry too.”

Springer fastened his horse, and came toward them.

“How d’ do, boys?” he said cheerily. “How goes it?”

The contrast between his great hearty voice and the thin quavers in which they answered him was pathetic. He lingered a moment, and then turned to make his way into the house. Tim rose and hobbled rheumatically after him.

“Whist, Mister Springer,” he called; “would ye be after waiting a wee bit till I have a word of speech with yer.”

“Well, what can I do for you?” Springer asked good-naturedly. “Don’t they treat you well?”

The old man took him by the arm and drew him around the corner of the house, away from the curious eyes of his companions.

“Whist!” he said, with a strange and sudden air of excitement. “Wait till I’m after telling yer. Your honor’ll mind I’m after trusting yer; trusting yer, and ye’ll no be betraying an old man. It’s meself,” he added, with a touch of pride at once whimsical and pathetic, “is ninety-three the day.”

“Are you as old as that? Well, I’d keep your secret if you were twice as old,” Springer returned, with clumsy but kindly jocoseness.

Tim raised himself until he stood almost upright.

“It’s the money,” he whispered, “the money I’ve saved for me burying.”

He turned to stretch his thin, bloodless finger toward the bleak cluster of mounds on the hillside where mouldered the dead of the poor-farm.

“I’ll no lie there,” he said, with husky intensity. “I’ve scraped and scraped, and saved and saved, and it’s the wee bit money I’ve got to pay for a spot of consecrated ground over to Tiverton. Ye’ll no put me here when I’m gone! I’ll no rest here! Me folks was respectable in the Old Isle, an’ not unbeknowing the gentry; and there’s never a one put outside consecrated ground. Ye’ll promise me I’ll be put in the graveyard over to Tiverton, and me got the money to pay.”

Springer was as unemotional and unimaginative as a hearty, practical, well-fed man could be, but seeing the tears in the old pauper's bleared eyes, and hearing the passion of his tone, he could not but be moved. He had heard something of this before. His predecessor in office had mentioned Tim, and his twenty years' saving, but so few were the chances a pauper in Dartbank had of picking up even a penny that the hoard even of so long a time could not be large. Now and then some charitable soul had given the old man a trifle. A vague sympathy was felt for the pathetic longing to be assured of a grave in consecrated ground, even among the villagers who regarded the idea itself as rank superstition.

"It's all right, Tim," the Overseer said. "If you go off while I have the say, I'll see to it myself. If you'd be any more comfortable over in Tiverton, we'll plant you there."

"Thank yer honor kindly," Tim answered. "The Calligans has always been decent, God-fearing folks, and it's meself'd be loth to disgrace the name a-crawling up out of this unholy graveyard forby on Judgment Day, and all the world there to see, and I never could do it so sly but the O'Tools and the O'Hooligans 'd spy on me, and they always so mad with envy of the Calligans they'd be after tattling the news all over Heaven, and bringing shame to me whole kith and kin."

The Overseer laughed, and responded that if Tim had laid by the money to pay for the job, he would certainly see that the grave was made in the consecrated earth of Tiverton churchyard. Then with a brisk step he passed on to attend to the sordid affairs of his office within. The most troublesome matter was left until the last.

"As to the Trafton child," he said to Huldy and Sam, "I don't see that anything can be done. I've spoken to the Selectmen about it, and they don't think the town should be called on to pay out twenty-five dollars when here's a place for the child for nothing."

"That's just what I told Louizy," Huldy responded. "I said that's what they'd say; but Louizy 's dretful cut up."

Springer moved uneasily or impatiently in his seat, so that the old wooden chair creaked under the weight of his substantial person.

"I know she is," he said; "if I could afford it, I'd send the child to her folks myself; but I can't, and I don't see but the girl's got to go to 'Lizy Ann Betts. Perhaps she won't be so hard on her."

"Hard on her," sniffed Huldy; "she'll just kill her; that's all."

At the word a wretched-looking woman pushed into the kitchen as if she had been listening at the door. She held out before her a right hand withered and shriveled by fire.

“Oh, Mr. Springer,” she broke out, tears running down her cheeks, “don’t send my Nellie to be bound to that woman! She’s all I’ve got in the world; and she never wanted till I was burned. Send her to my folks in Connecticut and they’ll treat her as their own.”

She sank down suddenly as if her strength failed, and sat stiff and despairing, with eyes of wild entreaty.

“It’s hard, I know,” Springer answered awkwardly, “but Nellie’ll be near you, and she would n’t be in Connecticut. ’Lizy Ann Betts ain’t a bad-hearted woman. She’ll do well by the child, I hope.”

“She’ll do well?” the mother cried shrilly, raising herself with sudden vehemence. “Did she do well by the last girl was bound to her from this farm? Did n’t she kill her?”

“There, there, Louizy,” interposed Huldy, “it ain’t no sort of use to make a fuss. What the S’lectmen say they say, and—”

She was interrupted by a cry without, and in an instant the door was flung open by old Simeon, who with wildly waving arms and weirdly working face cried out:—

“F’ th’ Lord’s sake! Come quicker ’n scat! Old Tim’s in a fit!”

II

The account old Simeon and Grandsire Welsh gave of Tim’s seizure was that he had been sitting outside the kitchen window, where they all were listening with interest to the conversation within, when suddenly he had thrown up his arms, crying out that he could not do it, and had fallen in a fit. No one at the poor-farm could know that Tim had reached the crisis of a severe mental struggle which had been going on for days. He had for days listened to the bitter words of Mrs. Trafton, and had sympathized with her grief over her child; and all the time he listened he had been secretly conscious that the little hoard he had gathered for his burying would save Nellie from the Betts woman, a shrew notorious all over the county for her cruelty. He remembered that Bill Trafton had saved him from drowning; that Mrs. Betts had the credit of having caused the death of her last bound child; and against this he set the terror of rising at the Resurrection from the unblessed precincts of the Dartbank Potter’s Field. The mental conflict had been too much for him, and the appeal of Mrs. Trafton to the Overseer had broken old Tim down.

Tim was got to bed, and in time recovered his senses, although he was very weak. Mrs. Trafton volunteered to watch with him that night, and so it came about that at midnight she sat in the bare chamber where old Tim lay. As the hours wore on Tim

seemed much brighter, and asked her to talk to him to while away the time. The only subject in her mind was her child.

“If Nellie was with my folks,” she said, “I’d try to stand being away from her; but it’s just killing me to have that Betts woman starve her and beat her the way she’s done with the others. She’d kill Nellie.”

Tim moved uneasily in bed.

“But ye’d be after seein’ the child here,” he muttered feebly.

“I’d see her no more’n if she was with my folks,” returned Louizy bitterly; “but I’d know how she was suffering.”

The sick man did not answer. He turned his face to the wall and lay silent. After a time his regular breathing showed that he slept, while the watcher brooded in hopeless grief. At length Tim grew restless and began to mutter in his sleep.

“The poor creature’s having a bad dream,” Louizy said to herself, as his words grew more vehement and wild. “I wonder if I’d better wake him.”

She was still debating the matter in her mind when Tim gave a sudden cry and sat up in bed, trembling in every limb. His face was ghastly.

“Oh, I will, I will!” he cried out. “I will, so help me Holy Mary!”

“Tim, Tim, what’s the matter?” asked the nurse.

The old man clutched her hands desperately for a moment, and then seemed to recover a little his reason. He sank down again and closed his eyes. For a time he lay there silent. Then he said with strange solemnity:—

“’T is a vision meself has had this night, Louizy.”

She thought his mind still wandering, but in a moment he went on with more calmness: “I’ll tell it to ye all, Louizy. Give me a sup till I get strength. I’m no more strong than a blind kitten that’s just born.”

She gave him nourishment and stimulant, and Tim feebly and with many pauses told his dream. The force of a natural dramatic narrator still shaped his speech, and as he became excited, he spoke with more and more strength, until he was sitting up in bed, and speaking with a voice more clear than he had used for many a day.

“But it was a fearsome dream’s had holt on me the night. ’T is meself’s been

palarvering with the blessed St. Peter face to face and tongue to tongue; and if I'd ought to be some used to it through having been dead once already by drowning, this time I was broke up by being dead in good earnest, by the same token that when St. Peter set his two piercing black eyes on me, I could tell by the look of 'em that it was straight through me whole body he was seeing.

"And the first thing I knew in my dream I was going all sole alone on a frightsome road all sprinkled over with ashes and bones, and I that crawly in my back I could feel the backbone of me wiggling up and down like a caterpillar, so my heart was choking in my throat with the fear of it. And I went on and I went on; and all the time it was in the head of me there was that coming behind was more fearsome than all the bones and skelingtons forninst. And I went on and I went on, seeming to be pushed along like, and not able to help meself; and all the time something was creeping, and creeping, and creeping behind, till all the blood in my body was that chilled the teeth of me chattered. And I went on and I went on till I could n't stand it one mortal minute more; but I had to turn if the life went out of me for it. And there behind was a mite of a girl, a wee bit thing, thin and starved looking, and seeming that weak it was pitiful to see. 'Poor thing,' sez I to my own ghost, 'it's pitying her the day is Tim Calligan, if I be him,' sez I, 'and not some other body, for having no body perhaps I ain't anybody at all, but just a spook in this place that ain't nowhere.' And all the time I was that scared of the wee bit child, being as it were where it could n't be, and me dead before it and it dead behind me, and always following and following; so without thinking deeply what was to be done, I starts up and runs as hard as my legs that was turned into ghost shanks would let me. And I run through them ashes, stumbling on bones and seeing shadows that would get in the way and I had to run through 'em, and the weight of the horror of it words would n't tell.

"And when I run, the wee bit child run; and it scared me worse than ever when the further I run away from it the closer it was to me, till at last it had a grab on the tail of my coat; and it clung on, and I that mad with fear I had no more sense than a hen with its head cut off and goes throwing itself round about for anger at the thought of being killed, and not knowing it is dead already. And oh, Louizy, the scaresomeness of the places I run through a-trying to get rid of that wee bit thing! It's downright awful to think of the things that can happen to a dead man while he's alive all the time and forgetful of it through dreaming!

"So when I'd been going on till mortal man could n't stand it no longer, let alone a ghost, there I was just forninst the gate of Heaven, not in the least knowing how I come there or would I get in; and blessed St. Peter himself on a white stone outside the gate sitting and smiling and looking friendly so the terror went out of me like a shadow in the sun. And I scraped my foot, and I went up close to him, standing that way would I hide the child ahind of me; for sez I to meself: 'What'll I say to his Reverence and he axes me about the girl?' And St. Peter he sez to me, mighty polite and condescending: 'Good-morning,' sez he. 'The top of the morning to your

Reverence, and thank ye kindly,' sez I. 'And what'll be your name?' sez he. 'Tim Calligan, your honor,' sez I, answering as pert as ever I could; for there was that in his manner of speaking that made me feel shivery, as if me heart'd been out all night in a snowstorm. 'It's a decent, respectable body I am, your Reverence,' sez I, 'though I say it as should n't, having nobody else at hand that would put in a word for me.' 'And was ye buried in holy ground?' sez he. 'I was that,' sez I; 'and many's the weary year I've been scraping to do that,' sez I. 'And what'll that be behind ye?' sez he. And I looked this way and that way, trying to make as if I did n't know; and at last I pretended to spy the child, and to be that surprised he could n't suspect I ever clapped eyes on the wee bit thing before. 'That, your Reverence,' sez I, 'has the look of a scrap of a girl. Is it one your Reverence is bringing up?' sez I, being that desperate I was as bold as a brass kettle. 'And what'll she be doing here?' sez his Reverence, paying no heed to the impertinence of the question. 'Sure, how'll I know that?' sez I. 'Will she be coming with you?' sez he. 'Don't she belong hereabouts?' sez I, trying hard to brazen it out, and feeling my heart go plump down out of my mouth into my boots, more by token that I was barefoot the time. 'Will she be coming with you?' sez he again. 'Sorra a bit,' sez I; 'I just could n't get away from her,' sez I. 'And what for'll you be trying to get away from her, and her no bigger than a bee's knee?' sez he, looking at me so hard that I could n't hold up my face forninst him. 'Well, your Reverence,' sez I, looking down at the stones, and seeing the weeds trying to grow between them in the very face of Heaven itself, 'it's inconvenient traveling with a child anywhere, let alone the ondecent places I've been through this night; and the girl was n't mine, and I might get blamed for keeping her out late, with her folks getting scared about her, not knowing where she was, and not understanding she was where your Holiness would be after caring for her.' And with that St. Peter put out his hand, looking that sharp his eyes went through me like needles; and he pulled the wee bit child from behind me, and he sez to her: 'What is the name of yer?' 'Nellie,' sez she, her voice so thin you could n't hear it, only knowing what she said from the moving of her lips like shadows on the wall. 'And how came you here?' sez he. 'I was beat and starved to death,' sez she, shivering till 't was a mercy she did n't go to pieces like a puff of smoke. And with that St. Peter looked at me once more, and the cold sweat run down my backbone like rain down a conductor in a thunder-storm. 'Your Reverence,' sez I, trembling, 'I did n't beat and starve the girl.' 'That may be,' sez he, 'but there'll be some reason why she's hanging on to your coat-tail like a burr on a dog,' sez he. 'What for are you following Tim Calligan,' sez he to the girl, 'and he dead and resting in holy ground?' And with that she put you her little front finger, that was as thin as a sparrow's claw that's starved to death in winter, and she pointed to me, and sez she: 'He would n't give the money to send me to my folks,' sez she; 'and my own father saved the life of him when he was dead and drownded before I was born,' sez she. 'What for would n't you give the money, Tim?' sez St. Peter, sitting there on that white stone like a judge trying the life of a man. 'Your Reverence,' sez I, falling down on the stones at the feet of him, 'twenty years was I struggling, and saving, and scraping to get the bit money for a grave in holy ground! If I'd give it to the child, I'd be down this blessed minute I'm having the honor of conversing with your Holiness—and it's proud I am of your

condescending so far!—lying in unconsecrated ground all cheek by jowl with heretics, and like as not getting my bones mixed with theirs at the blessed resurrection. Sorra a bit did I know the suffering of this poor wee bit thing.' 'And did her father save your life?' sez he. 'He did that,' sez I, 'and a good, decent, God-fearing man he were,' sez I, 'barring he were a heretic, your Reverence, owing to his not being asked, it's likely, would he be born a good Catholic,—and I hope your Reverence ain't been too hard on Bill Trafton if he's come this way,' sez I. 'Tim,' sez St. Peter, looking at me with a look like one of the long isuckles on the north side of the barn in January,—'Tim, 't is no use trying the palarver on me,' sez he. 'Ye know ye let this child get bound to that Betts woman, and now she'll be bate to death, and who's to bear the blame if not ye that might have stopped it? Do ye think, Tim Calligan,' sez he, raising his voice so the blessed angels come a-looking over the holy walls of Heaven to see what would be the matter,—by the same token that the little gold hoops floating round their heads kept clashing together and sounding like sleigh-bells, their heads was that close together on top of the wall, and all their eyes looking at me that sorrowful like it nigh broke my heart,—'do ye think,' sez he, 'you're sleeping in holy ground when the price of the grave your worthless old carcass is in was the life of this wee bit child?' And all the angels shook their heads, and looked at me that reproachful the heart in me got so big it would have killed me with its swelling only saving that I was dead already, not to say being dead twice; and I fell to sobbing and praying to St. Peter for mercy,—and the first thing I knew I woke up in bed, praise be to the handiworks of God! made alive again, this being the third time, counting the time I was first born."

Tim's tale was long, and it was interrupted by frequent intervals of rest made necessary by his weakness. When he ended, the pale forecast of dawn shone into the squalid room. Louizy was crying softly, in the suppressed fashion of folk unaccustomed to give full vent even to grief. Tim lay quiet for a long time. At last he aroused himself to feel beneath the mattress, and to bring to light a dirty bag of denim. This he pressed into the hand of his nurse.

"It'll take you both," he murmured feebly. "Blessings go with ye, and the saints be good to the soul of Tim Calligan, coming up at the Day of Judgment like a scared woodchuck out of unblessed ground!"

III

Tim failed rapidly. The excitement of his dream and the moral struggle through which he had passed had worn upon his enfeebled powers. On the second day after his seizure the priest came from Tiverton to administer the last rites. When this was over, Tim lay quiet, hardly seeming alive. Thus he was when Springer, who drove over late in the afternoon, came in to see him.

"Tim," Springer said, "Mrs. Dooling has told me what you have done. The ground you lie in will make little difference to a man that would do a thing so white as that."

“Thank you kindly,” Tim answered, in the shadow of a voice. “Father O’Connor’s promised to bless my grave. It’s not the same as being at Tiverton where the ground would be soaked with the blessing all round, but leastways St. Peter ’ll not be after flinging it in my face that the blood of the child’s on me.”

The Overseer regarded him with such tenderness as did not often shine within the doors of the poor-farm.

“Tim,” he said, leaning forward as if he were half ashamed of his good impulse, “don’t worry any more. I’ll pay for your grave at Tiverton, and see that you are put in it.”

The old pauper turned upon him a glance of positive rapture. He clasped his thin, withered hands, trembling like rushes in the winds of autumn.

“Holy and Blessed Virgin,” he prayed, almost with a sob, “be good to him for giving a poor old dying creature the wish of his heart! Blessed St. Peter—”

But the rush of joy was too great. With a face of ecstasy the old man died.