



THE WILL

Eoin Flynn

This Leary was a bit of an adventurer. That was the way he usually thought of himself anyway. Every so often he would drop everything he had — the job, lodgings, people he knew, and he would move on to a new place. There he would begin all over — finding any kind of a job and setting himself up from nothing again.

People couldn't understand why he wasn't trying to make something of himself as the years were going by. But there was an achievement in what Leary was doing. He could think back to so many places that he had been a part of, that had been home to him. He could remember so many faces, so many people who had known him at one time. But if you tried explaining that to people they wouldn't know what in the name of God you were talking about.

Late one night — too bloody late, Leary arrived at a village. He didn't know anyone here. He didn't know this country at all. There was no hope of belting on some door to get a bed for the night. But he

never got much bothered about things like this. He was as tough as leather. Once, when he was still young back at the beginning of his world tour, he had slept in the branches of a tree.

He started strolling around the edge of this village. It was a fine night anyway. The likeliest solution would be to stray out a bit further and find a barn or a shed. First he was checking if there might be a handy place to doss in the actual village itself. You had a feel of a place after sleeping a night in it. He was actually on his way to somewhere else but he had half a notion he might like to live in a village for a while. The wheel would have gone full circle.

A back road brought him around behind one set of houses. It looked promising here. Nearly all the yards had turf sheds out near the road, well away from their houses. He stopped opposite one of these sheds. Just as he was saying to himself that this was the job a dog started up. Making an attacking growl he came charging down from the house. Anyone else would have run as fast as they were able but Leary didn't stir a hand or a leg. The dog came to within a few feet before he halted his pretend attack. In a hoarse savage voice he barked up at Leary.

'Quit down!' Leary ordered in an annoyed tone. He was a great man with dogs. He knew that the first good thing to do was to let them hear your voice. The dreadful barks continued. 'Shut up, will you,' Leary said in the same manner. There were two more barks and then the dog went silent. It was like he had been given a tablet. Leary moved very slowly closer to him. It was so dark he couldn't see the dog's face but he could hear the sad whine coming from him. He stooped a little and let his closed fist hang in front of the dog. He found a wet touch on the back of his hand. The whine rose up higher.

He relaxed the fist and touched the bone of the dog's head with his fingers. 'Good Shep, good Shep,' he said quietly. The dog sounded like he was crying with shame for having surrendered so easily to the enemy.

Leary forgot about him and went back to giving a look-over to the shed he had been about to choose. Even with all the barking no one up at the house had put on a light. That didn't mean though that they weren't having a look-out from one of those dark windows. He could go on further and try a different place. But mightn't it be the same there or even worse?

He came in right close to the back wall of the shed. As he was feeling around he found that there was a window in it. It was only a small little thing over on one side and low down. He had to go down on his grug to examine it. It was blocked up with two flat bars that went crossways. There was about ten inches of space between them. The fool of a dog kept putting his wet face in the way.

'Go home ou that, will you!' Leary growled giving him a rough push. The dog's sad whine rose up again.

He started taking off his big walking boots. Now there was one thing about Leary very unusual in a man over forty — his suppleness. He was as loose as a young girl. The gap between the two bars in front of him was only just wide enough to allow his head to pass through. Neither was the window very broad — hardly as much as his shoulders. But in spite of all this and the fact that he was a good enough sized man he was sure he would be able to get into the shed by this little hole.

It was pure black inside there. He put his hand in as far as he could stretch. He found there was turf inside there but it didn't seem

to be piling up high enough to block the way in. He tied the boots together and pushed them through the window before him. Then he started wriggling himself in after them head first. As soon as he did the bloody dog began jumping on and around his helpless body and barking like an eejit. He meant it all in a friendly and encouraging way but it was loud.

Bendable as he was it nearly failed him to get in there. For the first bit the pile of turf was at the same level as the window. So that was fine. But then it started sloping up. So all the while he was trying to bring his legs in after him Leary was tearing his face on the sods. He was already sorry he hadn't gone on and tried to find someplace easier. It was pure temper that kept him going.

When he was at last inside it was strange. The pick of light from the window didn't travel in much distance. His own body was surrounded by perfect darkness. The pile of turf seemed to be rising up all the way to the roof. Just as he was collecting his boots he got one bad fright — something moved right in front of him. He had already got up a sod to defend himself with when he realised it was only that curséd dog again. The hoor had managed to slip in behind him and then get round in front of him all without Leary hearing.

'It looks like I'm stuck with you for the night, Shep,' he said giving him another rough push. 'I hope you've no flays.' He wasn't too cross. Sure it was a bit of company. Ignoring the dog he began working his way up the slope of turf. He kept one hand above him so that he would find the roof with that and not with the crown of his head.

The mountain of turf finished off in a plateau that was just a couple of feet down from the roof of the shed. Here he had some little

bit of light. He could see some of the down slope of turf before him. There was a big wide opening to the shed leading out into the yard. There wasn't much to see that way. But through a gap between the roof and the top of the wall he could see a little of the house above. In spite of all the barking everything was staying nice and dark up there.

Well, here where he was would have to do for the night. It wasn't too comfortable but it wasn't the worst either. He settled himself so that without too much turning of the head he could glance up towards the house and then down towards the entrance of the shed. He fixed one of the boots under his head as a pillow. The dog settled in right against his side as if they'd spent a lifetime together.

'I hope you've no flays,' Leary muttered as he was going to sleep.

Barely an hour later he was awake again. And he knew that something had woken him up. He saw that a window of the house was lighting and the yard was bright as well. Well, shit. Now he heard a sound — someone was out in the yard. Someone had come out of the house. There was a small clanking sound moving down towards him. A man with a bucket came into view at the opening of the shed. What kind of eejit wanted to start a fire in the middle of the night? As he turned in towards the slope of turf the man came out of the light and became all but invisible. There was a sound of turf hitting the bucket.

'You think so but I don't think so,' the man announced as if in the middle of a conversation. It was the voice of an old man. Leary gave a smile to himself. It probably wouldn't be any tragedy if he was caught here. But safer again not to put the matter to the test. He made sure that not even his breathing was making a sound.

The dog had moved away from his spot. Now he was standing at the front edge of the plateau. If there had been any light you'd have

said he was looking down. Surely now he would go down to his boss and Leary would at least be rid of him. Whatever moving around the dog had he made some bit of a sound. The turf-filling stopped and there was a listening pause. Well, shit again.

‘Bantry?’ said the man finally. Leary was still lying on his back. From that position he gave the dog a nudge trying to get him to go down. But Bantry wasn’t budging. Very very gently Leary rolled over and propped himself half-up beside the dog. ‘Bantry?’ the man asked again. Leary lay one hand on the dog’s shoulder blades and pressed down. ‘Is there someone up there?’ You could hear the fear in the old man’s voice. The bastard of a dog would not go down! Leary was leaning down on the dog’s back with as much weight as he could bring to bear. Bantry was panting with effort but he was holding his ground.

Suddenly Leary was struck close to his eye. A huge spark lit up inside his head. That old bastard had thrown up a sod and hit him! Leary’s temper went from him completely and carried every scrap of his sense along with it. He came rolling down the slope of turf in an angry ball and collided with the man’s back (the old fella had probably turned away to run). Leary threw his arms around him and held him gripped. The old man made no whimper of a sound but immediately began struggling with a ferociousness that surprised Leary. Bantry was beside them barking with delight. It was still almost complete darkness where they were. He could feel that this old man was far smaller than himself but God wasn’t he wiry! In the middle of it all he nearly laughed — how in the name of God had he found his way to this ridiculous situation? Wrestling in pitch darkness with some leathery old demon.

After a considerable struggle Leary managed to get the old man

down on the ground and to sit on his belly. The noise the dog was making kept going on and on all around him. It was really hard keeping this old man down without hurting him. He just would not give up. He kept getting one or the other of his arms out from under the knee that was trying to pin it. He was the whole time pulling and kicking and biting and scratching. Leary would have liked to tell him lie quiet or he'd clock him. But he didn't want to leave his voice be heard.

What the hell was he supposed to do now? Almost literally he had a tiger by the tail. He couldn't stay this way long more. Soon it would be getting bright enough for him to be seen. Neither could he simply jump up and run away fast. He was only in his socks — the boots were back up at the top of the mound. For a finish he got the half-idea that he would turn the geezer over face down and try and tie him up with his own shoe laces or his belt or something.

But as he was taking his weight off him know would he flip him over the old man got an arm loose again and struck Leary with his hard little fist into the eye — the same place where he had been hit with the sod of turf. Hissing a curse Leary flinched back. In an instant the old man was tearing at him again with his two claws of hands. In this second round the old man was fighting even more furiously than he had been doing in the first. The strangest thing was that he never tried to shout out. Through it all he didn't bring out one single word. This time Leary couldn't get the upper hand of him at all at all. He did not have a choice — he was going to have to hit this old man. O, if that bloody dog would only shut up.

Keeping the old man gripped by the collar Leary drew back one hand and made a big fist. But before he could let fly the old man threw

his full weight against him. Leary was knocked completely off balance and he fell back on his back. The old man had come with him and he was now lying on top of him! His two hands were at Leary's throat and he was squeezing with a deadly grip. Leary was astonished — this man was going to beat him! He had trouble getting his hands to the man's forearms. When he did finally he found they were too weak to do anything. They fell away again. The old man held squeezing and squeezing.

The old man got to his feet. He stood for a while gasping. The dog had finally stopped barking. The man bent down and, taking hold of Leary's ankles, he dragged the body out where there was more light. The dog came over and sniffed Leary's head.

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