

Part II Chapter 30 A Lucky Fellow

All Michael could talk about Saturday evening as they rode back to the City after collecting their week's wages was the fact that he finally had his stake.

"Five hundred dollars! Two hundred that I had saved and after a year and 3 months, I've finally earned the other three hundred."

"What are you going to do with it?"

"Talk to my friend Frenchie. He's got good ideas. I haven't seen him for awhile and he's always told me that he could put me into something rich once I got my stake. He's going to let me be an investor!"

Tom knew that Michael always carried his money in a pouch strapped to his waist. "I know the ways of the criminal mind," he had often said. Most of the men spent their earnings when they got them, unless they had wives like Bridget, who made them turn over their money and received only pocket money to spend. Tom liked it that way. .

"Bridget takes care of that for me. She invests our money. I have no idea how much she's saved. She's practical." He knew from that midsummer's eve in Galway when she had told him about how the girls' school was financed that she had an eye for business and was practical, which he wasn't. She had pointed this out to him on more than one occasion.

As the two men turned off Bloomingdale Road onto Seventh Avenue, Michael talked about his dreams. "Maybe I should open a grocery? Grocers do a good business. I've got enough now to rent a place and purchase stock. . . Or maybe a saloon? Frenchie's doing well."

Thomas was content to listen. He wasn't really a planner. He'd been lucky all his life, hadn't he. He had hitched his wagon to stars—Father O'Toole, Michael, Bridget. "I'm glad I've got you, Mike, for I'm not one for planning ahead. I'm just lucky. Wasn't it luck that Father O'Toole chose me to study for the priesthood? And wasn't it luck that you took me to the Galway Fair? And wasn't it luck that brought Bridget to my side for the ceilidh? And that you wanted to go to Amerikay and urged me to follow, and that Bridget went along and you sent us the money? And wasn't it luck that you found us this work, Michael?" And then he thought of his children, who were all healthy. And now twins? "I'm the luckiest fellow alive!"

The brothers pursued their different dreams as they covered the remaining miles before arriving at the Leary's late. Bridget had saved some stew for the men and when they were sitting down to eat, she announced,

“We’re baptizing the twins tomorrow! We’ll go to an early Mass with Tim and ask the priest to baptize the girls before we head back home tomorrow. Tim and Betty’ll be the godparents. It’s all arranged.”

“What’s the rush, Bridget?” Tom was tired from working all day and then riding into the city and wanted to clean up and go to bed and not hear that he had to get up early in the morning and fuss over getting the children all dressed up for the baptism.

“As long as we’re here, dear, so they won’t have to make a special trip down to our parish later. They’re already two weeks old.”

When she called him “dear,” he was whipped, he knew, but he muttered, “I don’t have my top hat.” For his thirtieth birthday Bridget had embroidered a new waist coat and given him a top hat, in which he felt quite the dandy. “Like one of the Bowery Boys,” Michael had teased him.

“You’ll look handsome enough in your cap.”

“Come children, Rosie and Lizzie are going to become Children of God this morning,” Bridget told Lena and William the next morning as she dressed them for eight o’clock Mass. Daniel didn’t need to be persuaded as he was a go along child.

“What’s a child of God?” Will asked. Lena looked at him with contempt. “You’re still a heathen, Will, or you’d know.”

“Will is not a heathen. He’s been baptized too,” Bridget corrected her.

“Before we have breakfast today, we’ll all be children of God. If anything happens to us on the way home, we’ll all go to heaven.”

“What’s going to happen to us today, Mammy?”

“Nothing, because God is going to look after us. We’re his children.”

“And we’re lucky,” he added. Your father is the luckiest man in New York. I was just telling that to Michael yesterday.

“It has nothing to do with luck, Thomas. It’s God and His mother looking after us.”

Thomas noted that in the week that he’d been gone, while recuperating at the Learys, Bridget had grown notably more religious.

Back in the boarding house later that day, after showing the newly baptized twins to Peggy and the other tenants, Bridget sat down and fed these Children of God. Lena was eager to find friends she hadn't seen for two weeks to tell them of her adventures. She put Dan down for a nap with the twins, but Will refused to sleep. He wanted to go out with Lena and ran out after her.

Bridget turned to Tom. "Tom, before you leave again this evening, I want you to let Will know that he's got to listen to his parents. You're never here enough to see what he gets away with. He thinks he's special, and he acts like he's the boss. All that nonsense about him being a chieftain. It's time he learned he's not special, nor the boss. You're his father. You're the head of the family and he needs to know that. You're only here one day a week. He needs to see **you** have the authority. **You** need to be in charge now. Guide him. Lay down the law to him. ."

Tom thought about that. Hadn't he felt special too, because he had been born with a caul and had been lucky as he was saying yesterday.. What was wrong with feeling special? He was about to ask Bridget, when he heard Bridget say,

"You have let him charm you and I have too, but just spend some time with him and watch how he tries to control you. When he does something you don't approve of—anything--correct him. He hears me say "No," to him all the time, and he ignores me. Don't let him beguile you as he usually does. Go out with him today, do something together. Take him for a ride on the horse car. He'll love that. " The horse cars that drove up and down Centre Street had long fascinated Will. Whenever he heard the bell, he stopped whatever he was doing to run out to watch the horses stop on signal when the bell rang.

"Won't that make him feel even more special?" Fathers never took their sons out without the whole family.

"Tell him it's for his birthday—you weren't here for that." Tom had hoped to meet Michael at the saloon later in the afternoon for a drink and a bit of relaxation before they started back for the work camp, but he agreed to take Will for a ride on the horse car. .

As it was a sunny Sunday afternoon in spring, there were many riders already on the car when it came, and more shoved on and paid the shilling. Will was enthralled. He couldn't see over the many people, so he wiggled his way till he was beside a window, across the car from Tom. The cars were so overloaded that they moved slowly. The horses could barely get them moving once they stopped to pick up even more riders. At the corner of Elizabeth and the Bowery, the carriage was bulging; people were even sitting in the windows and hanging out the doors. The horses couldn't make the turn on Elizabeth onto the Bowery,

there are so many people, so they slowed down to a stop between the two turns. The horses were straining at their harnesses.

“Somebody’s got to get off!” the driver called, “or we’re not going to move.” Some of the men offered to jump out and push the vehicle, and a melee ensued as young men jumped out of the windows and doors and rushed back to help the horses make the turn, then once they got it going, they dashed to jump back on and the driver didn’t dare stop and passed several stops.

Somehow Thomas had lost sight of Will in the surge. By the next stop he realized that Will was not on the car, so he jumped off himself. Will must have been shoved by the young men racing to help and not been noticed. Tom retraced his steps to the turn, hoping to find him still there, but his luck had run out.

“He’ll follow the tracks,” he reassured himself, thinking how lucky they were to be on the Harlem and New York RR tracks which ran right past Canal and down Centre. Will wouldn’t know the street names, but he knew the neighborhood and the tracks. “He’ll be home before I am.”

When Tom came home without Will, Bridget was horrified. “I told you to take him out and teach him a lesson, not to lose him!”

“I wouldn’t have taken him if you hadn’t told me to. Fathers aren’t supposed to take charge of children by themselves.”

“I can see why.”

Bridget tried to remember what he liked most to do—he probably wouldn’t be afraid, she thought, for he was friendly with everyone. He might have asked for a carriage ride. He liked activity—maybe he went to the docks? There were a lot of stray children running around loose if he went south into Five Points. Maybe Lena would know? They asked her, but she didn’t know. He always seemed to hang around her, but she kindly offered to go look for him with her father.

“You stay here. He’s already lost one child.”

“But I walked to school by myself from the Leary’s.”

“With a twelve-year old.”

Others offered to help. Mr. Newman would go down toward the docks as Bridget suggested. A boy might want to see the big ships, mightn’t he?

Tom would retrace his steps north along the tracks, hoping that Will's interest in the horse car would keep him following them. But first he must head down to tell Michael what had happened and that he would not be meeting him there.

"I've got something to tell you," he began when Tom appeared.

"Not now, Mike. I've lost Will." Michael was disappointed that his news would have to wait, and offered to help look and at Tom's suggestion, he set off to the east.

"Remember we have to return to work or be let go," he warned. The foreman had told them that there were plenty of men looking for jobs these days and they were just lucky they had them, and if anyone didn't come back in time for work on Monday morning after their Sundays off (many men went on benders) he'd fire them.



When Will had jumped, or been pushed, off the horse car, he found himself near a street which his mother had always avoided walking on when they went on their shopping trips. It was a wide street with it was right at the junction with the Bowery. The Bowery's southern end was an area where his mother had always told him they shouldn't walk when they went shopping. He remembered seeing lots of boys playing there, unsupervised. As he was only allowed to play in front of their Boarding House or in front of the adjoining houses, he had always wondered about a place where boys could play by themselves without mothers scolding them, so

he set off to find them.

Find them he did. A group of boys kneeling in a semi-circle, with a black boy calling out "Ace-Deuce!" "Snake-eyes!" "Easy Four!" The boys had names such as he'd never heard, not "Freddie," or "Willie," or "Patch" but "Fingers," "Rags," Some boys on the Bowery see him hanging around—"Who are you?" He wasn't going to tell them his name, was he. "I'm a Chieftain." "Ha! A Chieftain! Who told you you were a Chieftain?" "Everyone calls me that. That's my name." "Ha! How old are you?" He wanted to say seven—he was as tall as some of the boys. "Six!" In fact he was barely five. "Do you live around here?" "Over there," he pointed vaguely to the west. He knew this was the part of town where his mother never took him.

They boys ignored him and went back to their game, asking the black boy, "Howdye learn all this?"

“From the Frogs,” he said.

When Will no longer interested them, they shoved him aside, so he moved outside their circle but stood fixated for a while, then wandered further down the street. A group of young men were lounging on the sidewalk smoking and laughing. When he wandered up, they noticed him and laughed at him as he looked in the door.



“Have you any young lady in mind, lad? I can recommend one if you’re new here.”

He shook his head.

“Oh, you’ve been here before?”

He nodded, not knowing what they were talking about but not wanting to be made fun of.

A lady in a pretty dress approached them.

“Here’s one who’ll show you a good time, lad,” they told him.

She noticed Will and offered her hand. “Are you lost?”

He shook his head. She smelled nice and her hand was soft as she took his.

“I think you are. Come with me and I’ll take you to a friend of mine who can find your ma and pa.”

The boys laughed as Will let her lead him off, through the door, through the saloon where men were standing along a counter drinking, and out into a garden with tables where people were seated, eating and drinking. She led him over to one table and sat down next to one of the men.

“Here, Johnny, look who I found. Isn’t this the little boy you lost?”

“Oh, yeah. I’ve been looking for him. Where have you been, Sonny? Didn’t I warn you about going off by yourself?”

Will began to cry. “I want my Mama!” He wailed “Shhhh, Sonny. What’s the matter? Here, you’re just hungry.”

As Will usually did once he got started crying, his wails increased to a terrible roar.

The man cut off a piece of meat and tried to shove it in Will's mouth.

"Mama!!!" Will screamed and shouted and wailed. Others at nearby tables laughed at the sight of another father trying to control his son.

The lady tickled him and said, "Better behave, Dearie. Daddy doesn't want trouble with his boys."

Will began to bite the man's hand and then to hit him. The man grabbed him by the arm and lifted him up and slammed him across his knee and began smacking his bottom, as if he were an outraged father. "That's what you get for being a bad boy. What will I do with you?"

Will struggled to get free, punched his abuser in the arm, stomped on his shiny shoe, causing the man to grimace. Will then ran as fast as he could back, through the saloon, streaked through the door and fled across the street where he could hide behind a passing carriage and not be seen by the boys on the sidewalk who might report where he'd gone. He followed along until he was sure no one wasn't following him. He looked up at the carriage driver who had noticed him running alongside, panting, and looking back. When the carriage stopped at the corner, the man asked him if he was lost, he began crying and nodding.

"Where do you live?"

Will pointed in the same direction as before, vaguely westward.

"Well, come along. Sit up here beside me as I take these gentlemen down to City Hall Park, and if you see anything familiar along the way, show me."

Will let himself be lifted up and seated next to the driver. As his feet didn't reach the floor, he held onto the driver's coat for security. His fears soon left him and he may have passed several familiar streets, but he didn't care. He was enjoying the ride. Maybe he would be a coachman.

When the coach approached the park, they passed the familiar car tracks, which began beside City Hall Park.

"Here!" He shouted. The driver asked if this was where he lived. Will nodded and asked to be let down.

"But this is a park. Are you homeless, lad?" The driver helped him down.

Will shook his head and dashed off without even thanking the driver. If he followed the tracks he could find his block, so he began running north and he

was out of breath and covered with dirt and sweat by the time he saw that he was approaching his street.

From where Bridget was standing on the steps of the Boarding House she could see him coming up the street and ran toward him, grabbing and hugging him.

She had taken him indoors, given him a bath and some clean clothes by the time Tom came bounding up the stairs, having been told by the neighbors that his son had been found.

“Where have you been, Will,” his father began angrily. “Your mother has been distraught about you. You have been very wicked in frightening her like that.”

Will began crying again and turned to his mother for comfort.

“Don’t fuss at him, Tom. Aren’t we just glad he’s been found safe?” She cuddled him to her and kissed him.

On the way back to the work camp that night, Tom complained to his brother, “She told me to take him out and correct him for something to lay down the law, but when he did something that I really felt deserved punishment, she took up his side against me.”

“He’s a lucky fellow, just like you.”