

The Golden Calf

A true tale of old Drumshanbo

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The good priest Patrick Egan arrived in Drumshanbo Parish after the war. The rural youth – in town for a gabháil of groceries from Tom Joe^os and a parcel of prayers in St Patrick’s — was the first to see him as he silently stepped from the sacristy to the sanctuary. Shiny new black suit, carefully cropped crew cut and intelligently enquiring eyes gazing all around. He ambled amiably over to the homespun garsún. “Did ya get yer ear pulled today?” smiling soothingly downwards. “Ah! Ear Father? Ah, pul - - pulled - n - no Father.” A gentle tug of the lobe and he was cheerily, merrily gone. This mirthful activity was to be Pastor Egan’s trademark in the ensuing years and many a Drumshanbo Parish youth felt his clerical chug of the lug.

Pastor Patrick would promote his caring and priestly roles with piety and prayer. He would also attend to his administrative duties with diligence and intent. His aims were to restore to degrees of modifications and decorations the church and four rural schools under his management. But firstly, a new town school required immediate building and a cautious Secretary of the Department was seeking the Parish contribution before its

commencement. The Parish academics of that year knew the urgency of the enterprise, when they sat their Primary Certificate Examination in a second floor loft with a sizable stack of hay parked behind them. The Famous Rural Foursome would receive appropriate renovations and decorations. “Even a partition for Drumkeelamore, I ask you!” chuckled Fr Egan, as he drove away after his visit there. And St. Patrick’s Church - that haven on the hill, overlooking Allen waters and the roof of Laird’s Fruits and Jams Emporium with its colourful logo BREFFNI BLOSSOM embossed thereon – would be devotedly and expertly cleansed and fruitfully and elegantly restored.

The determined priest, Patrick Egan, announced to his generous parishioners “as Peter said ‘ silver and gold have I none, but what I do have I give thee’ – “my assured energy”. Then he presented the Irish solution to many a monetary problem – a raffle. But the crafty cleric asserted that this would be no ordinary raffle. Not for Father Patrick, the nonsense of prize spreading, where much of hard earned lottery lolly was given to wandering wayfarers. He assured his flock that money collected for Drumshanbo Church and Schools would stay in Drumshanbo. And so, like the apostles, who found a colt tethered by the roadside, he discovered a spring calf donated by a kindly farmer, “the only prize on offer”, he emphasised.

The raffle tickets with prize calf inscribed upon them were distributed before Easter to all the cheerful cherubs in the Parish primary schools. Inevitably the local market soon became saturated and other outlets needed to be found. Ach cá háit? Where?

“Now Read On”

The Rural Youth and his parents were wont to spend some days in Bundoran each summer. This year the unwary urchin discovered on arrival that, while his shiny sand bucket had been packed, its little spade was not. So instead of sand filled frolics, the puny canister was stuffed with Drumshanbo Parish tickets-for-raffle, and he was set fair upon the streets of Bundoran proffering his wares. And so, like Lucy Grey, “he wandered up and down” and “many a hill did he climb” in that maritime town. Deep into that night the exhausted kid saw a lengthy line of golden calves wending their way up the Leitrim Road, where on the bridge stood a giant Patrick Egan holding a ginormous sack into which he was channelling all his “costly cargoes”. Next afternoon, on a blistering hot day he sauntered past the Central Hotel. Its doors and windows were flung fully open. Deep inside in a cool area, he spied a companionable circle of vacationing Reverends discussing, no doubt, matters of earth and heaven. From inside there he knew for certain, sure that El Dorado would descend on Drumshanbo. He strode confidently inwards and presented his pleas. A scary silence followed. Then one cleric, emboldened by his own whimsical ways, called out in a pronounced Northern



St Patrick's N S, Drumshanbo

accent, “well sonny what's the prize anyway?” “The - - the - - prize - ah”, raffle tickets fluttering furiously in his little hand, “the prize Father is ah - - ah - - a calf.” “Merciful hour” he intoned with assumed horror. “I can't take a calf across the Border.” The startled chissler hastily reversed outwards (in the manner of Tony Blair before The Queen, in the film of that name) and soon he was back on the sun scorched streets. He felt so utterly outwitted that he dared not offer the tickets elsewhere.

The draw took place in a suffocation-packed town hall during a concert some days before Christmas. A massive drum akin to a Corrib Oil truck tank was wheeled onto the stage stuffed to its top with ticket stubs. A long arm scythed downwards to its bowels and emerged with a solitary stub. The winner was announced as Mrs Mulvey, Churchtown, Dublin; the drum was wheeled away and the concert continued.

And so ended the Grand Experience. The rustic garsún, as he

clambered up the hilly road homewards, pondered the questions whether Mrs Mulvey would graze her calf on her Dublin lawns or among Alfie Byrne's sheep in Stephen's Green? Or indeed, if she would have to wait a few months into the new year to receive a genuine spring calf? Weighty issues for a mucky kid.

Well, Drumshanbo's new school was built with skill and elegance. The four Rural schools were praiseworthily renovated and fashionably decked out — and yes! Drumkeelanmore got its partition which converted one large room into two comfortable classrooms for its two teachers and their pupils. And St Patrick's was devoutly restored and aesthetically decorated as a fitting centre for sacrifices, sacraments and services and for stray sightseers.

The Rural youth, as he noted all these admirable achievements, reflected that, (he had been listening to Churchill), never had so much been accomplished by so many on the shoulders of a humble Drumshanbo calf.

Mohill man Ronan Gallagher was one of the finalists short-listed for the Allingham Arts Festival Songwriting Contest in Donegal. Ronan performed his song 'I Won't Do That' in front of a panel of three judges at the Live Final in Dicey Reilly's Pub, Ballyshannon, on Friday, November 9th. Well done to all who took part. Ronan is currently putting the finishing touches to his debut album 'Always Broke Never Broken' recorded and produced in Bundoran by fellow Leitrim man Marc Geagan and which will be released early in 2019. Ronan is pictured here with his mother Anna Gallagher, wife of the late Pat Gallagher veterinary surgeon, also from Mohill.

