

O'Shaughnessy Outtakes

When Harold Thorpe set out to fictionalize his mother's memoir, he originally envisioned one book. It was ultimately split into the two *O'Shaughnessy Chronicles* novels -- *Giddyap Tin Lizzie* and *Bittersweet Harvest*. In both published novels, the story is told through the eyes of Will O'Shaughnessy. Removed in the editing process was a second point of view, that of Will's daughter, Catherine. Those unpublished outtakes, seen through Catherine's eyes, are offered here for the first time. They are sure to be treasured by O'Shaughnessy Chronicles fans! Over the next few months, in serial format, we'll regularly post more outtakes on Harold's website. We hope you enjoy them all!

A Bad Man at the Circus

(O'Shaughnessy Chronicles Outtakes #1)

October, 1932

I skipped ahead of Sharon and Ruby. It had been only a week since Ruby showed me how, and my steps weren't quite right, but it felt good, and besides, it helped me keep up to my longer-legged sisters. We were halfway down the block when I heard Grandma's call.

"Catherine, come back. I must warn you."

My sisters waited while I dutifully returned to hear Grandma's admonition.

"Now Catherine, listen close. Don't leave your sisters, not for one minute. Sometimes naughty men travel with these shows. Hold tight to Sharon's hand. Do you hear me? Don't leave Sharon's side."

"Okay, Grandma. I promise. I'll stay close."

I knew what an elephant was, but I had never seen one. I remembered pictures of a huge animal and wondered if it could be scary like Grandpa's Holstein bull. I was told to never go inside the pasture when the bull was outside, but today we'd see an elephant, and Ruby said she planned to touch its trunk, so it must be nice. Sharon said she wouldn't touch it, but she wasn't brave like Ruby, even if she was two years older.

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When Grandma Tregonning gave us our quarters, she said, “It’ll cost a dime to get into the show, so you can spend the rest for treats. But don’t go into the sideshows. There are things there that little girls shouldn’t see. Get going now, the main show begins in less than an hour.”

When I caught up to Sharon and Ruby, I grabbed Sharon’s hand, but Sharon pulled away. “I don’t want you clinging on me. Just walk close behind.”

So I skipped along after them, close enough so I didn’t lose sight of Sharon’s dress. When I got to Hinton’s main street, I turned toward town, but Sharon and Ruby headed in the opposite direction. At first I was so intent on my footwork that I didn’t notice, and by the time I turned back, they were more than a block ahead. I ran to catch up. “You left me behind,” I said.

“You’ll have to pay attention,” Ruby said. “We can’t watch you every minute. You don’t want to get lost, do you?”

Ruby grabbed my hand and pulled me along.

“How far is it?” I said.

“It’s outside of town, out where there’s room for tents and animals,” Sharon said. “Out past the old cemetery, where we put flowers on the graves.”

I remembered helping at the graves last spring, but I had no idea where we’d been. I pulled away from Ruby and trotted along close behind. After a couple more blocks, I thought I heard music, but it was a strange kind of music, a lively music like Father’s fiddle music, bouncy music that made me want to skip again.

“Do you hear that?” I said.

“That’s a calliope,” Sharon said. “I read about it in school. All circuses have them.”

“A calipee?” Ruby said. “Never heard of it.”

I looked at Ruby in surprise. I thought she knew everything.

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I sniffed the air as we approached the big tent. It smelled kind of like Grandpa's farm yard, but like Grandma's kitchen when she baked pies, too. I couldn't see any animals, but I saw stands where vendors sold peanuts and root beer.

When I saw a man next to a big shiny bowl, I stopped and gawked when he pumped the pedal and the bowl spun and filled with a fluffy, wool-like substance. He stuck a stick in the mix, twirled it, and the fluff grew into a giant ice cream cone. He smiled down at me.

"Would you like a cotton candy, little girl? Only a nickel."

Sharon turned back and grabbed my hand. "Not now, mister," she said. "Maybe after the show."

"Cotton candy. What's that?" I said.

"I had one at the county fair," Sharon said. "Like sugar on a stick, and it sure tastes good."

"It's too sticky," Ruby said.

We approached the ticket master, handed him our quarters, and he returned a dime and a nickel to each of us. "Take any seat," he said.

We rushed along the straw-strewn path to wooden bleachers that faced a single ring. Sharon pointed toward the curved wooden curb. "That's where they perform."

The front bleachers were full, but when we approached, a man and woman left their seats and climbed the steps.

Ruby rushed to the space. "Let's sit here, up front where we can see good."

Sharon and I weren't discouraged when the woman behind said, "You're going to get wet, little girls."

For the next hour the ring master, clowns, animals, and aerialists entertained the crowd. As we walked out Ruby said, "I liked the high wire best," but Sharon shook her head vigorously and admitted, "I shut my eyes."

"I liked the animals," I said. "The elephant was really big, lots bigger than Grandpa's bull." I heard the elephant trumpet and turned back to watch as handlers led the animal around the big tent. "But I liked the horses best. I'd like to be the pretty lady on the horse."

"She was indecent," Sharon said. "Mama'd skin you alive if you went outside undressed."

"Dad would skin you if you tried standing on Fanny's back," Ruby said.

I skipped ahead and then turned and stuck my tongue out at Ruby. "I'll do it someday, just wait and see."

A crowd filled the narrow paths outside the big tent. So many people milled about that I couldn't see my way. Some played the carnival games and others stood in line waiting for food. I smelled freshly popped popcorn, but I couldn't see over the people.

Ruby grabbed my hand, and we followed Sharon, who had a homing instinct for food.

"I'm going to buy a cotton candy," Sharon said as she nudged her way to the end of the longest line.

"Might as well eat sugar," Ruby said. "It's too sweet."

"I want some peanuts," I said. "I want to feed the animals."

"You'll spend Grandma's money on the animals?" Ruby said.

"I'll share." I remembered that Grandma had told us we should share because she didn't have many toys at her house. "Grandma likes us to share."

"Not with animals," Ruby said. "I'm thirsty. I want a root beer."

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Food in hand, we pushed through the crowd to where the animals were tied behind the big tent. I fingered my dime, nickel, and pennies as I pushed them deep into my pocket.

“I have more money than you,” I told Ruby.

“The peanuts cost less,” Ruby said, but she didn’t seem to care.

The elephant leaned into her chain and swung her trunk from side to side as I approached. A sign with a long name on it was stuck in the ground. Sharon corrected me when I mispronounced it.

“Her name’s Francine,” Sharon said.

I stood for a moment, watching my sisters until they stopped to inspect the two camels and the four horses, and then I plopped down just beyond the reach of the huge animal.

I took a peanut, shucked its hull, and stuffed the meats into my mouth.

“One for me.”

Then I lifted my biggest nut from the bag and reached it toward Francine. I wasn’t sure whether I should shuck it or not, but Francine didn’t seem to care. She trumpeted her thanks as she stretched her trunk to take it.

“And one for you.”

I continued to share my treasure with my new friend until the bag was half empty. I told Francine all about Grandma’s pies, and Mother’s food pantry, and my horse, Fanny. I forgot about my sisters until Ruby called, “Come on, Catherine. We’re going to the other side.”

I jumped up, but before I left, I dug a handful of peanuts from my bag and held them out to my friend, who eagerly accepted the offer. “I’m sorry, but I’ve gotta go now. It’s been nice meeting you,” I called back and waved as I turned toward my sisters. Francine trumpeted her thanks as I walked away.

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Ruby turned down the path toward the smaller tents, toward the sideshows.

“Grandma said we shouldn’t go there,” Sharon said. “She said they’re not for children.”

“Oh, come on, Sharon,” Ruby said. “We’ll just look at the pictures.”

Ruby rushed ahead and I tagged along.

“Ruby,” Sharon hollered after us, but when we didn’t turn back, she soon followed.

There were big posters pasted on the small tents that showed a fat woman, a very thin man, a bearded lady, and weird animals, but the poster that caught my eye was the one with a man who had red and blue tattoos all over his naked body, terrible writhing lizards and one-eyed gargoyles. They looked like pictures I’d seen of Hell, so I turned away.

We moved down the row of tents until we got to where a barker called to the crowd. “He prances and dances, cavorts on a string. Throw him a penny and maybe he’ll sing.”

Sharon looked up at a large poster that hung behind the barker, that showed a giant puppet. She read aloud, “See the man-sized puppet. Is he wood or is he flesh?”

“Puppets aren’t big. They can’t sing,” I said. I remembered the Punch and Judy shows where little people batted each other with sticks.

“They don’t sing,” Sharon said. “It’s someone behind the curtain.”

“Let’s go in,” Ruby said.

No!” Sharon said. “Grandma told us to not go in the side shows.” She turned away.

But Ruby handed her nickel to the barker. “Grandma won’t care if we go to a puppet show. Come on, Catherine.”

I reached my nickel toward the man.

“Ruby,” Sharon hollered. “Grandma . . .”

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But Ruby had already pulled me into the tent.

Sharon followed.

We walked toward the small stage that was surrounded by gaudy red, yellow, and green painted panels. A blue curtain ran across the back, and another was pulled to each side at the front.

Ruby pushed through adults to the front row of a small set of bleachers, to seats already filled by a group of men who, at first, ignored her. She stopped in front of them and, hands on her hips, stared into their faces. They didn't seem to notice, but when she continued to stare, one said to his friend, "Looks as if the young ladies need a seat."

He grabbed his friend's arm and stepped to the next level. "Be a gentleman, Zeb. Let the ladies have the front seats."

The men moved up and started to sit when a man already planted there said, "Hey, watch my fedora." He then stumbled as he rose, regained his balance, snatched his hat, and walked his hands along the wooden seat as he staggered three steps over, right behind where I sat down.

I smelled beer and covered my nose as I lowered myself to the plank. Ruby and Sharon squeezed in beside me, pushing me over to where I was the direct target of the drunk's foul breath and random clumsiness. I leaned forward.

Ruby looked back, scowled, and said, "I hate beer smell."

She nudged me, and I was about to agree with her, but then music started to play, and a giant puppet stumbled onto the stage. His arms were attached to thin ropes that were tied to his shoulders, elbows, and hands. They flapped wildly. Similar ropes fixed to his knees seemed to control his spastic movement across the stage.

But when I looked at his face, I covered my eyes. He looked horrible. The left side of his face was little more than a tin can with a painted eye overlay. And the right side had skin

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flaps protruding from a sunken cheek and a depressed jawbone. As advertised, the Puppet Man frolicked to the bubbly piano music.

I concentrated my attention on his legs, which moved out of sync with the music. Sharon could dance much better, but she'd be afraid to do it in front of so many people. I wouldn't do it either. The Puppet Man was brave.

Someone threw a penny, but the Puppet Man didn't notice it bounce across the stage behind him. Another coin flew through the air, hit Puppet Man on the shoulder, and landed at his feet. He stopped, bent over, picked up the copper, and scanned the audience with one hand to his brow. When the music changed, in a voice as tinny as his face, he sang, "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star."

I cringed, but I took a penny from my pocket and held it out. At first the performer didn't see it, but the man behind Sharon who had given his seat to her, called out, "Hey Puppet Man, the little girl has a penny for you."

Puppet Man stopped, turned back, and stumbled toward where I kneeled and held out my penny. As Puppet Man stooped to take the coin from my hand, the drunk behind me hollered, "Are you as ugly under that mask as you are in it?" The drunk tottered as he leaned over me, chortled, and looked about for approval.

Ruby shouted, "You nasty man," and turned her cup over his head, soaking him with root beer.

The drunk swayed, wiped his eyes, and grabbed at Ruby who fought back with her usual ferocity. She was assisted by the men alongside who pulled the drunk back and held him down.

When the unkind words had blasted through the tent, I thought I heard the Puppet Man squeal, and looked up in time to see a tear run down his disfigured face. "Please don't cry, Puppet Man," I said as I pressed the penny into his hand.

He smiled, struggled to his feet, and bowed before he continued his dance and song while he crossed the stage.

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We left the tent and walked through the circus grounds. Carnies called to the crowd, their many voices assaulting my ears as we strolled along the pathways.

“Throw the ball in the basket, win a kewpie doll!”

“Pop a balloon and take a prize home!”

“Ring the bell!”

“I’ll guess your age!”

“Take a goldfish home!”

And there were rides, too. “Let’s ride on the Ferris wheel,” Ruby said. “I’ve never been so high.”

Sharon agreed, but somewhat reluctantly. She wasn’t brave like Ruby.

Ruby pulled me along, but I resisted. “I don’t want to go. I’m afraid.”

“You can sit between us,” Sharon said. “We’ll hold onto you.”

“No!”

“Just leave the ’fraidy cat,” Ruby said.

“We can’t leave her,” Sharon said. “Grandma would skin us.”

“Then she’ll just have to come,” Ruby said. “I’m going to fly in the sky.”

But I was adamant. “I’ll not go.”

The attendant called, “Are you going with us or not, girls?”

“Okay, you can stay,” Sharon said, “but wait right here until we come down. Promise?”

“I’ll wait,” I said. And I did. I watched the giant wheel go around and around, Ruby and Sharon waving from on high, but I got dizzy and turned away.

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For a while I watched people walk up and down the path. I walked a few paces away from the ride and tried to see the animals behind the tent, but didn't go far enough to catch a glimpse. I stood by the entrance to the giant wheel and counted, but got mixed up past five hundred, so I stopped counting and watched people again.

And when I saw Sharon's pale blue, flowered-print dress move down the path away from me, I knew that I'd daydreamed, forgotten my sisters, and almost missed their departure. I ran along behind until I saw the tethered animals ahead. When I got to the horses, I slowed and called, "Sharon, can I watch the horses?"

But Sharon didn't answer.

I called again. "Sharon, can I stay with the horses?"

The distance between us increased, but Sharon never turned back.

"Sharon!"

Why didn't she stop? I ran after my sister. I caught up and grabbed her dress.

"Sharon, I called you."

When she turned around and pulled away, I knew it was a mistake. There was a stranger in Sharon's dress.

I ran back toward the animals, and then, confused, I paused. Two paths led around the tent, and I wasn't sure which one to take.

I stood at the junction and looked down the paths to see if my sisters might be coming, but I saw no one I knew. Tears trickled down my cheeks, but I didn't utter a sound. Daddy told me to be a brave knight whenever I scrubbed my knee and it hurt, and I wanted to be brave, so I stifled my tears. Then I heard a voice call from behind a small tent.

"Little girl. Are you hurt?" A man's head stuck out from the canvas.

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“I can't find Ruby.”

“Are you lost?”

“I can't see my sisters.”

“I've got a puppy. Would you like to see my puppy? You can pet him while you wait for your sisters.”

I knew that I shouldn't go with strangers. I remembered Grandma Tregonning's warning: “Stay close to Sharon and Ruby.”

But I couldn't find them.

I stood where I could see lots of people walking the two paths, but I didn't see Ruby or Sharon. “I won't leave here, not 'till they come.”

“He's the prettiest little puppy you've ever seen,” the voice called. “Why, I think your sisters are petting him right now.” His head disappeared for a moment but popped back out, and he showed a rope to me. “Oh, he's such a cute puppy.” He tugged on the rope as if he were pulling his dog. “Your sisters are bigger than you, aren't they?”

“Sharon and Ruby?” I said, and started in the man's direction.

He disappeared into the tent, and I heard him say, “Back here, little girl. Pet the puppy. Back here with Sharon and Ruby.”

When I reached the canvas, a hand grabbed my arm and tugged me toward the opening. I resisted and stumbled, but the man grinned and pulled harder. And when I saw there was no puppy and didn't see my sisters, I screamed, “You're hurting my fingers!” The man covered my mouth with one hand and pulled me inside the tent with the other. Then, as he took hold of my dress, a hand reached into the tent, grabbed him by the hair, and yanked both him and me back into the sunlight.

I gasped. It was Puppet Man. The stranger released me and tried to scramble away, but Puppet Man held tight. He twisted the stranger's arm behind his back and yanked it up,

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hard. The man screamed, but Puppet Man didn't let loose his grip. Instead, he turned to me and said, "A bad man, little girl," and twisted harder. I began to cry. I didn't want to be brave. I wanted Ruby and Sharon.

When he saw me crying, Puppet Man released the stranger and dropped to his knee in front of me. He took my hand. "It's okay, little girl. Please don't cry. I remember, you gave me a penny."

I tried to smile. "And I told you not to cry."

Puppet Man smoothed my hurt fingers and I felt safe. I sniffled as he took a folded hanky from his pocket and dabbed at my tears.

"What's your name, little girl?"

"It's Catherine, and I'm staying with my grandmother, Grandma Tregonning."

He dropped my hand. "Tregonning?"

A call trumpeted down the path. "Jesse, get away from that girl."

Puppet Man jumped up. "Mr. Heinzelman."

I thought Puppet Man looked scared.

Heinzelman rushed up, Sharon and Ruby right behind. He grabbed Puppet Man's shoulder. "What did you do to that girl?"

Ruby grabbed me. "Why did you run away? We told you to wait."

Sharon shook me. "We saw you leave, but we were at the top of the big wheel, and when we screamed you didn't stop. And the man wouldn't let us off until the ride was over."

She shook me harder. "I'll never take you any place again."

Puppet Man jerked away from Heinzelman and ran. When I saw the fear in his face and his panicked departure, I knew it was all my fault. I wanted to defend him, but I couldn't

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say the words. I cried, cried like I'd never cried before. I didn't care what Daddy said. I didn't want to be a brave knight. Not this time.

It still scares me when I think about it. I never attended a circus again. But I'd been warned. Grandma told me that naughty men worked for the circus. But, in those days, I didn't even know what a naughty man was.

Heavens, the only naughty man I could think of was Uncle Frank, because he frowned most of the time. He was no fun at all, but I didn't see him much. Dad was fun. He joked and laughed a lot. I guess I never knew how that day at the circus scared me. But I shied away from men for a long time afterward. Maybe too long.

