

# ...Under Pallor

(Cleveland)

“Sed libera nos a malo.

“Sed libera nos a malo.

“Sed libera nos a malo.”

“The thing about Latin is it ain’t like English. They put funny words together, so you pretty much just have to sound it out. Good thing I don’t have to learn what it means, only how to say it. “Et cum spiritu tuo.” That means “And with your spirit.” I know that one. I know “Domine non sum dignus.” Lord, I am not worthy. But some of ‘em is just a lot of big funny words that you reduce down to sounds and say the sounds. “Spera in Deo.” Couldn’t tell you what it means. Don’t have to. All I have to do is say it. Same with “Sed libera nos a malo.” Usually I can say it pretty easy. But I got to practice now because the funeral’s tomorrow, they’re havin’ it at the cathedral, and there’s goin’ to be a lot of people there. So I got to say it perfect.

I been doin’ it for a few years now, and I do it about good as any of the guys.

That’s why they asked me. That and they knew I liked him.

“Spera in Deo.”

“Spera in Deo.”

“Spera in Deo.”

Most days sayin’ the Latin wouldn’t be any big problem. But you can probably suppose what I’m worried about. We’re gonna walk out onto the altar tomorrow morning, me and the bishop and Father Nash and other altar boys and Dr. Scullen – they asked him to do the eulogy – and there’ll be a big crowd. There’ll be all the chandeliers hangin’ down from the ceiling, and there’ll be the organ music. My knees I’m not to sure about right now, and my stomach the same. And in front of us, just where everybody can see it, that’s where the casket will be. I don’t want to act like a sap, mess up my lines and ruin it for everybody.

The last couple of days has been a big mess. Mitch told the Dago I spent a lot of it holed up in my room cryin’. I don’t know where Mitch gets stuff like that. Sure, I was a little upset – who wouldn’t be? Chappie was a great player. I seen him since I was a kid. I played his position. But I ain’t no crybaby. Besides that, Chappie was my friend. Sort of. I met him, anyways, and that ought to be close enough for Mitch to shut up about this cryin’ business.

OK, maybe I was a little upset, just for a while. What of it? I know Mitch couldn't serve the funeral even if they asked him. Oh, he could do one if it was just somebody. But if it was somebody he knew? If it was somebody who played shortstop? If it was an Indian? If it was Chappie? Well, he wouldn't have the stomach. I know that. Me? I can do it. It's just a matter of practicin' and keepin' your head. (I think I read where Chappie said those was the keys to playin' shortstop...practice and keep your head.) So that's what I'm gonna do. Mrs. Chapman, she'll be in the first row, she's had it pretty tough and I don't want to make it any worse. And I don't want to be the one who lets Chappie down. He'll be listenin', and he'll expect me to do it right. That's why I'm spendin' so much time workin' on it.

"Sed libera nos a malo."

"Sed libera nos a malo." I better do it a few more times.

"Sed libera nos a malo."

I wish I could practice keepin' my knees and stomach from bein' nervous.

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Usually you can't smell the grass on the ball field because it's mostly weeds. But it must have been getting long because somebody'd come by and mowed it Monday mornin'. By the time the game started the whole field, even around the bare spots, smelled sweet just like fresh-cut grass. It was near dinner time and I knew I'd have to go soon but I didn't want to because the grass smelled so good.

Schultz run over to the field with the news. He'd heard it from somebody who'd heard it from downtown, probably at the Press because they had a wire down there and that's where most of the news started in the afternoon. I'm out at shortstop and McGuire's hitting when Schultz runs up and grabs the bat from him. We all figured the score just came in from New York so we stopped quick to hear. But that wasn't it at all.

"Chappie got beaned," Schultz says.

I didn't think nothin' of it at first. Guys get beaned in baseball. I got beaned myself back in May and it give me a lump for three days and scared the daylight outta my mom. Didn't think nothin' of it at first.

"How'd the game turn out?" I said.

"You don't understand," Schultz said to me. "Chappie got beaned. They say it's bad."

“What do you mean ‘bad’?”

“Bad, like me might not play again,” Schultz said.

“All year?” we all kind of said together.

“They say maybe never,” Schultz said. “They say he might not even make it.”

Most of us just kinda brushed that talk off. I been watchin’ baseball as long as I can remember, six or seven years now, and I never seen a guy get hit and actually die from it. I had an aunt who died once – she got the cancer – and a grandpa. But Chappie? That was silly talk.

“Chappie ain’t gonna die,” I scoffed at Schultz. Then I tried to think of some reasons why Schultz didn’t know what he was talkin’ about, but only one came to mind, and even if it sounded like braggin’ I needed to say it because I needed to hear it. “Why, I just seen Chappie myself the other day,” I told them with all the assurance of a kid whose knees was shakin.’ “He was fine and he said they was goin’ to New York and beat the Yanks.”

“Well,” said Schultz, “all I knows is he got beaned and they say he’s hurt bad.”

“Schultz was my next door neighbor and best friend on the block, but right then the only thing I could think of to do if he was gonna keep talkin’ that way was to haul off and whack him. “You better take that back about Chappie,” I said.

“I can’t...it’s true,” he said, so I dropped my glove and we both squared off while the other guys circled around so the cops couldn’t see in case they drove by.

“Take it back,” I said, and I gave him to five, but he didn’t say nothin’ so I had to go at him. Schultz was bigger than me, but I was madder than him and gave him a good scrap for a few minutes until he finally got me down and sat right on my chest and said, “do you give up?” I had to because I didn’t have no choice, and if I said I gave and he let me up and then I jumped him again they’d just say I was a chicken so there wasn’t nothin left to do but go home and explain to my mom how my clothes got so dirty and how I got the bruise on my arm.

At least I’d stood up for Chappie.

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Spoke brought Chappie’s body back Thursday, but the team had another game, so the rest of ‘em didn’t get in until Friday morning. I guess I knew O’Neill would be broke up about it, and I thought maybe if I saw him we could make each other stronger, so I went over. Jack Graney was there, too. I didn’t know Graney

well, but he was a regular at St. Philomene's so I'd seen him a few times. Spoke had left O'Neill a message sayin' he wanted to see them before the funeral. I didn't know what the problem was, but I could tell they was both mad. I asked whether I could go along, and they told me to hop in O'Neill's roadster. Spoke was the greatest man there ever was. Even on a day like today, I had to meet him. It only took us a few minutes to get to his place.

You know how sometimes you build a guy up in your imagination, if the guy's your hero, I mean, because all you know about him's the great stuff he does. Then you meet him and you wished you hadn't because he don't measure up. He couldn't, y'know, because you built him up so big in your brain. And no matter how hard you try it never goes back to bein' the same, your picture of him, I mean. I'd seen Spoke plenty of times, see him when he was best man for Chappie, seen him out in center field in his uniform and his cap, seen how tall and how strong he was, how fast he ran and how well he hit, read all the things he said in the papers and how he was leadin' the Indians to the pennant. I didn't see how he could do anything wrong.

When we got to his apartment it didn't seem like the same Spoke. He was makin' breakfast, which was the first problem because it was ham and eggs. Didn't he know you couldn't eat ham on a Friday? And he wasn't even startin' to get into his funeral suit. He always looked grey – it was his hair, you know – but now I could see his face close up and there was lines all over it. He looked old and

tired. He looked more than that. He looked mad. There was a hard edge to his cheeks and his nose, and his mouth was froze. He wasn't happy to see O'Neill and Graney, and he darn sure wasn't happy to see no kid with them. There ain't even no hellos.

"Look, Tris, that's where the family wants it, and that's where it's gonna be," O'Neill says when the door is just opening. O'Neill and Graney walks in and I follow. I close the door behind us because I can tell it might get loud.

"The hell," says Spoke. "You talked to his parents?"

"Kathleen's his wife, Tris, and she says St. John's."

"I ain't goin' to no damned Roman church," Speaker says. "It ain't right. Chappie's a Kentucky boy. His mom and dad say he's Protestant, and they don't want the priests to get hold of him."

"He was turnin' Catholic," Graney says.

"That's right," I start to chime in. "I seen it..."

But I don't get many words out before Spoke just hauls off and takes a pop at Graney. O'Neill jumps in and before long the three of 'em is scrappin' all out in

the living room. Spoke socks O'Neill and knocks him into the wall. Graney tries to step in and Spoke pops him, too. Then the two of 'em jump Spoke. He knocks Graney off and starts wailin' on O'Neill pretty fierce. O'Neill lands on on Spoke's jaw, and I can tell both of 'em felt it because Speaker goes flyin' while Steve starts shakin' his hand like he's hurt it. This goes on five or 10 minutes before Spoke's too bloodied up to keep goin', and as he started it O'Neill and Graney figure that's a good time to make their getaway. Besides, the service ain't more than an hour off and I have to get to the church. Nobody says nothin' on the way out..

Graney sat quiet in the car. Speaker had roughed him up pretty good around the jaw, and he was nursin' some bruises and suckin' in some blood from his lip. O'Neill's hand was sore, too. I could see the bruises. I knew they had a double-header in Boston tomorrow, and wondered how he'd be able to play. But at least he could talk.

"Sorry you had to see that, kid," O'Neill says as we drive off.

"What happened?" I asked.

"Spoke's a good guy most of the time," says O'Neill, "but he's from down south and he's a Mason." That news hit me hard. I didn't know much about the Masons. Around the church, there wasn't much said about 'em, only that they

hated Catholics so they was all goin' to hell. They was like if the Bolsheviks was in America. My mom told me once to watch out for them, that they had secret rituals and worshipped the devil, and you never wanted to get caught with one alone. Speaker had been my hero. To find out he was a Mason of all things...well, it just didn't square.

"You mean he hated Chappie because he was converting?" I asked.

"Nah, he didn't hate him," O'Neill says. "They were good friends. He just didn't believe Chappie was serious about religion."

"But it's true...I seen it myself," I said. "Chappie was converting."

"I know," O'Neill said. "Spoke knew, too. He seen it when Chappie married Miss Daly, and we all seen it that last night at the hospital. But he didn't like it." And then he told me how it all started that last night. I was glad he did. You have a hero and he gets killed, and you have another hero but you see he ain't what you thought he was. The funeral was in 45 minutes and I needed to hear somethin' good.

"Tris and I was at the hospital with a couple of the other guys," O'Neill says.

Spoke had gone because he was the manager, and Joe Wood and Jack and I

had gone because we were Chappie's best friends. We weren't sleepin' anyway, so we figured we might as well.

"We got there and Chappie was mostly out, but he'd come around for a few seconds. He looked bad and they were already getting' ready to operate. Spoke and I are standin' over the bed and Chappie wakes for a second. I can tell he knows he's in trouble. "The priest," he says, "the priest." He could barely slur out the words, but I knew what he was getting' at. He knew he hadn't been baptized yet."

"What'd he say?" Spoke says to me. "Maybe Tris couldn't make it out, or maybe he just didn't want to hear it. Spoke's been a Mason along time. He seen all the Catholic stuff as Mrs. Chapman's doin'. He didn't put no real stock in it." O'Neill says he and Spoke darned near came to blows right there in the room..."probably would have if Joe Wood hadn't been there to keep us apart."

"Why don't Masons like Catholics?" I interrupted.

"Well, I can't say for sure," O'Neill says. "You know, they don't exactly let guys like us in on what they're doing. They're a pretty religious group, but only for Protestants. Prejudice, I suppose. You know what prejudice is?"

“Yeah,” I said. “It’s when you hate somethin’ but you can’t figure out why, except that you do.”

“You hate anybody?” O’Neill asks me.

“I dunno,” I says. “Never thought about it much.” Then I gave it a minute of thought. “Just the niggers, I suppose. Only I don’t really know any, so I don’t know whether that counts. And the Yankees. I used to hate the Huns, but we whipped ‘em, so I guess they’re OK now.”

“Let me give you a piece of advice, kid,” O’Neill says. “You think you hate somebody, try to get over it. It ain’t worth it. It ain’t worth the trouble, there usually ain’t no reason for it and it’ll eat your insides up. That’s what it was doin’ to Spoke Monday night, and that’s what it was doin’ to him today.

“Anyway,” he says, “I tell the doc that Chappie wants a priest, and Spoke gets so mad he storms out. “You bring a Roman collar in here and I ain’t stayin’” he says. I suppose he thought I wouldn’t force him out of the room. But I knew it was what Chappie wanted, there wasn’t no time to wait and I wasn’t goin’ to let Spoke stand in the way. There’s almost always one near hospitals for situations like that, and it wasn’t but a few minutes one shows up. Chappie was out by then, but the priest poured the water and said the rites and in a few seconds Chappie was

officially a Catholic. Then the docs came back and took him into surgery, and a few hours more he was gone.”

“I only wanted to know one thing more. “Did he wake up after getting’ baptized?” I asked.

“No, he never did,” O’Neill said.

That was a blessing and a relief to me. At least it meant Chappie was in heaven. Getting baptized cleans away all your sins, even the bad ones somebody who’d been a Protestant might do, and if Chappie’d been out between when he was baptized and when he died, then there wasn’t no chance he committed any more sins. So he’d made it for sure.

Of course it also meant Tris Speaker was going to hell, and that was an even bigger revelation. I mean, you couldn’t hate Catholics without goin’ to hell. And if Tris Speaker hated Catholics, that meant he hated me. I tried to think about that, but I don’t think I thought about it very well. Anyway, it didn’t fit. Tris Speaker was my hero. I knew Tris Speaker. I’d seen him out in center field plenty of times. I seen the way he hustled and the way he swung the bat. I cheered for him to drive ‘em around, and he did. I didn’t see how God would even let Tris Speaker be manager of the Indians if he hated me. Yet he did. I seen it with my own eyes back in the apartment. I couldn’t hardly get around that. The only problem was

that now we'd arrived at the cathedral and now I hated Speaker. The cathedral ain't a good place to take your hates. I said a prayer askin' God to make my heart right and hurried around to the back to the altar entrance. I'd deal with my feelings later. Now it was time to worry about my Latin.

"Sed libera nos a malo."

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Rev. Scullen gave a fine talk about Chappie. I thought so anyways, and from watchin' I'd say most of the folks in the cathedral felt about the same. It was packed, just like I figured. The players was all down toward the front. All of 'em except Tris Speaker and Graney. Somebody put out a story that Graney was overcome and couldn't make it on account of that, and it might have been true I suppose, although I think he didn't want to have to explain how he got beat up. They put out the same story about Speaker, but I guess whoever said that decided sometimes it was better to lie than tell the truth. Part of me feels the same way. In the newspapers, I read about him sayin' so many great things. How in order to win you got to pull together as a team. How the secret to the Indians is that everybody plays together so well. How they all liked each other. I sat there listenin' to Rev. Scullen, but part of me couldn't help thinkin' on that and what it all meant.

“He played the game of life as he played the game that was his profession, and there were two great phases in his life, one of which is but the reflection of the other, and that was our friend as the ballplayer and our friend as the man. He played the game of life as he played the game which was his profession.”

*But I barely knew him as a man. Surely, Rev. Scullen, you don't want me to assume that the man I saw on the field was a true and accurate personification of the man himself. How did I know that Chappie – Ray Chapman, I mean – was any of the things I had imagined him to be? I'd never been in the clubhouse. Did he get along with his teammates? Was he moral and upright? When they were on the train traveling to Boston, did he play cards? Did he cheat? Did he lie? How could I know? How could you know when you, like I, have only the image to go by? If Tris Speaker could live two lives, then couldn't Ray Chapman?*

“He went into every game with that indomitable spirit, the desire to win, and despite that desire, he played the game clean and honestly, and this I say: that our friend was the spirit of the American youth.”

*Until today I thought Tris Speaker was the spirit of the American youth. But now I knew that wasn't true. I knew it and God knew it and O'Neill and Graney knew it. Do you know it, Rev. Scullen? Do you know that Tris Speaker hates you? Do you*

*know that's why he's not here, because he hates Jesus? Do you know Tris Speaker had ham for breakfast this morning? If you don't even know about somebody as famous as Tris Speaker, how can you know for sure about Ray Chapman? What if he wasn't perfect, like you said? Sure, he laughed and joked and smiled when you saw him, but what if beneath it all he was a scheming hypocrite? For all any of us knew...*

“To the small boy, the grown man, the aged, he was ever the same, and to those whose privilege it was to know him, he was the friend, the friend that understands, the friend that sympathizes, the friend that sees only the best in us...the idol of a city.”

*Or did the city only think he was? But even if the city only thought he was, what was wrong with that? I knew now what Tris Speaker was like. Suppose for a second that Ray Chapman was the same. Suppose how he played on the ball field was just image, that off the field he was a jerk, or maybe even worse. Suppose he was a hypocrite. Was that so bad? Suppose Tris Speaker is a hypocrite, talkin' about team unity and effort and then turning around and trying to ruin his own shortstop's funeral by getting him sent off in some kind of Protestant ceremony because he hated Catholics and Ray Chapman had decided to become a Catholic. Well, the world needs hypocrites, doesn't it? You, Rev. Scullen...you talk every week against sin. But you sin, don't you? That makes you a hypocrite...makes every preacher a hypocrite. The way I see it if it*

*wasn't for hypocrisy, we wouldn't have any preachers because there wouldn't be anybody left who could preach against sin.*

*"Thru all those years, that sweet spiritual longing for the truth was ever there, and when he was struck...when the moment of consciousness came, a smile broke over his countenance. Oh yes, he won both games."*

*You don't know whether any of that's true. You weren't there to see it most of the time he lived, and you weren't there when he died. But that isn't your point, is it? Whether it's true or not, the important thing is that we, all of us, believe that it was true. Because materially, all Ray Chapman is now is a lump of dead flesh in that coffin up front. And it's past, all of it. What's important is the future. That is yet to be shaped, but it will be shaped by our perceptions and inspired by the heroism we draw from our role models. Your point is that the perception people have of Ray Chapman, whether true or false, is what matters now. That's true for young people like me, especially. Does that hold for Tris Speaker as well? Does it matter that Tris Speaker isn't half the idol in reality that I'd pictured him to be in my hopes and in my mind? Or does that just lead me down the road to cynicism? But if I continue to believe in Tris Speaker, am I then the hypocrite? And if the answer to that question is 'yes,' then the next question is: Is that bad? Or is it necessary that I accept hypocrisy as a natural condition of life, because the alternative to accepting it is eternal skepticism? And is that acceptance really and truly the first step on the road to hell?*

The rest of the mass was a muddle, but I moved through it in a sort of automatic fashion. When you've done a lot of masses, that happens. You hear the priest say, "Dominus vobiscum," and you automatically say, "Et cum spiritu tuo. The priest says "Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus," and you ring the bells three times. He finishes the Pater Noster, and you say, "sed libera nos a malo." You don't think about the words. All they are is syllables, and the only time God gets mad is if you don't pronounce them right.

The tricky part is the Agnus Dei. At the Sunday masses, when the priest says "Agnue Dei," we always respond "miserere nobis" the first two times, then we say "dona nobis pacem" once. But at funeral masses they change it, so you have to catch yourself not to say "miserere nobis," but instead to say "dona eis requiem," and then the third time to say "dona eis requiem sempiternum." It means, "grant them rest, grant them rest, grant them eternal rest." I know that one.

It was a muddle and I couldn't think much about it. I couldn't keep my mind still. I was thinkin' about what Rev. Scullen said, and thinkin' about Ray Chapman, and thinkin' about Tris Speaker, and about this mornin', and all the time I knew I was supposed to be thinkin' about God. I wasn't doin' right, but I couldn't help it. At least by the time we genuflected and left the altar, first the other altar boys and me, then the priests, I'd figured out one thing. It wasn't the one thing I shouldda

been thinkin' about, but it was somethin,' and I was clear on it. I wished the world was like baseball. On the field, I mean. Baseball I could understand.

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The afternoon paper – the edition with the scores in it from back east – comes out about 5. I was at the newsstand early, so I got one as soon as it arrived. Mitch had heard the rumor from New York, but it was too terrible to believe without seein' it for myself.

Turned out Mitch was right. Mays had gone ahead and pitched against the Tigers. They didn't walk off. Worse than that, he shut 'em out. I didn't know Mays from any of the other players, but I knew starin' at that paper that what I'd felt since he killed Chappie with that pitch last week must be true. He didn't have a heart. And that made him evil. How could anything else be the case? Here it was, not a week since he killed a guy right there on the field, and he goes out like nothin' happened and pitches a shutout.

I couldn't believe the Tigers let him. Why didn't they walk off like the papers said they was gonna do? Gutless, that's what they was. I thought ballplayers was supposed to be tough, to have the sand to do what was right, but the Tigers stood in there against Mays as if nothin' had happened and then let him shut them out. How could a great man like Ty Cobb let such a thing happen?

We were two back of the Sox by then, not that it mattered much. You couldn't hardly focus on the pennant race ... at least I couldn't. If I stared at the standings and the stories too long, I saw Chappie. And what was the point of that? The point of the race was to win, and you couldn't win thinkin' of a dead guy. But I wasn't ready to go back to the race yet. It didn't seem like the Indians were, either. Tris Speaker hadn't even put himself back in the lineup yet. The team got on the train as soon as the funeral was over because they had to make Boston for a double-header Saturday. They got there...at least their bodies did, but the Sox won both of the games. The papers said Tris Speaker stayed behind until Sunday because he was helpin' Mrs. Daly, and maybe that was true, although knowing what I did I doubted it. Maybe he was still too busted up from what O'Neill and Graney did. He met up with 'em Monday in Boston, but him bein' there didn't seem to help much. We split a couple on Monday, then we got beat by the Sox again on Tuesday. When Philly beat us on Wednesday and Thursday, we were three back of Chicago and it looked like we were done for. But we won a couple in Washington, and when Chicago coughed up a couple of games in Boston before you knew it we was only a half game out again. The papers said Tris Speaker got one of the big hits against the Senators. Yeah, I cheered him. Part of me didn't want to, but the biggest part did.