

“Terrific! Super! Beautiful!”

The chief of detectives was euphoric, talking into the phone, and hanging up, he pulled a box of expensive cigars out of a drawer and presented the box to the seventy-something ex-detective across the desk from him.

“For me?” the detective, McGillicuddy said, taking the box.

“The reign of terror is over,” the chief said. “Think that’s not worth a box of cigars?”

Mac nodded, smiled.

“The big one confessed, said it was all on him,” the chief said. “He asked could we take it easy on the other two, since he bullied them into going along.”

“They’re as guilty as he is,” Mac said.

“You think so?”

“They maybe didn’t commit murder but they set the victims up for the big guy.”

“Well, I’d be a fool to argue with you, Mac, with what you’ve done for us, and I’m sorry for doubting you.”

“Oh, it’s OK,” Mac said. He removed the cellophane wrapper from the box, opened the lid, took out two cigars and passed one to the chief.

“To be honest, Mac,” the chief said, after they’d lit their cigars and were puffing contentedly, filling the office with blue smoke, “I didn’t bring you back expecting you’d solve the darn thing. I did it because I didn’t know what the hell else to do. With all the pressure I was getting from the tabloids and the city council and the mayor, I put everything I had into this one and with no resolution, until I recalled what Chief Brown said, when he retired and I stepped into his shoes, fifteen years ago.

“ ‘Whenever you’re stumped,’ Brown said, ‘when you don’t know where to turn, turn to McGillicuddy.’”

The chief laughed. “The mayor was apoplectic when I brought you back. He asked how a fellow who couldn’t even use a cellphone was going to solve the worst crime spree this city has seen in years.” He laughed some more, enjoying himself immensely, and sucking on his cigar: “Maybe you can’t work a cellphone, Mac, but you damn sure know what to do with a tin can and a ball of string, don’t you?”

“Yes, sir, I suppose I do,” Mac said.

“When the mayor saw you unravelling your string and tying a tin can to the end, he got all snarky. He asked me was tin cans and string how my detectives communicated and maybe it was time for him to scrutinize my budget, since I obviously wasn’t using it to equip the department. You showed him, didn’t you, Mac?”

“Yes, sir, I guess I did.”

“You’re a genius, Mac.”

“A genius?” Mac said, and smiling: “Sometimes we just get lucky.”

“What the hell gave you the idea?”

“Oh, something I read a long time ago,” Mac said.

“How’d you know they’d be hiding in the park?”

“I just looked for the greenest grass.”

“But a tin can dragged at the end of a string, Mac?”

“They know better than to go after it,” Mac said. “They know it’s a trap but it’s something they can never resist.”

The phone rang, the chief picked up.

“Yes, sir, Mr. Mayor. He’s right here with me. Yes, sir, I’ll tell him, and thank you sir.”

The chief hung up.

“Can you picture yourself, Mac,” he said, grinning broadly, “wearing a sash and a derby and riding in the back seat of a convertible, awash in the accolades of a grateful city?”

“Sir?” Mac said.

“The mayor has nominated you for Troll of the Year.”

Humbled, Mac reached up and rubbed his horns vigorously, something all trolls did, when the elation got to be too much.

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