

*Kieran "Red" Maguire, crime reporter at a Montana newspaper, becomes an amateur sleuth as several seemingly unrelated murders strike his city.*

## ***Mystery of the Purple Roses***

By Kevin S. Giles

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# Mystery of the Purple Roses



Introducing Red Maguire, crime-solving ace reporter

BOOK 1

Kevin S. Giles

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## Yet another cold body

*Clouds over the mountains felt close and heavy. Rain streamed off the windows. What a dreary day for a man to die but die he must. Six bullets, only one needed. The killer set aside the gun and caressed the photograph. Sorrow, what a regrettable thing.*

Maguire nudged the door open. The man's body sprawled on the living room floor, his head resting on glass shards from the busted coffee table. Maguire looked around. The room otherwise appeared orderly and smelled of fresh coffee. A newspaper lay neatly folded on the table next to a plate of buttermilk pancakes barely touched. That morning's *Butte Bugle*, the August 11, 1954, edition. His eyes turned back to the body. The victim, shaved and dressed for business, appeared respectable enough. Below the single bullet hole in his chest his smooth hands clutched a purple rose.

Maguire dialed a number into the rotary phone on the wall. "Butte police. What is your emergency?" inquired a woman's no-nonsense voice.

“Hello, Betty, it’s Red Maguire calling in a murder. I came to this address, 1242 Copper King Lane, to interview a source for a story. I found him dead.”

Betty asked Maguire several questions just like he knew she would. Did Maguire know the man? How did he know a murder occurred? Was anybody else in the house? Was Maguire armed? The cops would want to know. Maguire had covered crime for twenty-one years for the *Bugle*. He knew the drill. He also knew Betty. Old as dirt, for sure, but nimble enough to stay on top of it. He pictured her speaking through caked red lipstick as a cigarette smoldered in the ashtray. She told him police were on their way and advised him to step outside the house. Disturbed murder scenes make cops grouchy. Not that Maguire meddled in evidence. He knew better than to dirty his hands with the dead.

He said goodbye to Betty, to a silent line because she hung up without notice. He went outside to wait. Rain poured from the eaves of the covered porch. Two, three minutes passed before he heard approaching sirens. A prowl car rolled up. Soon a second prowl car, its tires splashing water, arrived from the opposite direction. Maguire knew most cops on the Butte force but not these two. They walked toward him cautiously in the pouring rain. The younger cop took his hand off his holstered pistol. He had that crisp fresh look that would disappear after a few years of hard drinking in Butte’s bars.

Maguire took note as he always did whenever someone new crossed his path. Such descriptions became useful in news stories. He had filed a million of them in his brain. The younger cop fidgeted with his silver badge, reaching across

his chest to oddly pinch it between thumb and forefinger. Maguire knew the subconscious gesture meant the man lacked confidence in being a cop. Or, he fretted over how to handle himself at a murder scene. Either way, he had much to learn. Maguire set his square jaw and looked hard at the men.

Crime reporters, Maguire had learned on the job, became amateur psychologists. Every cop and crook he met had a back story. The baby-faced badge-fidgeting cop stood as tall as Maguire, alert as taught in the academy, somewhat naive to the ways of the street. He would learn. The older one, gripping his gun, remained suspicious of Maguire. Shorter, duty belt straining under a sprawling paunch that screamed late-night pizzas, his red face spilling considerable cynicism from beneath the shiny bill of his police hat. Wearing a badge would do that to a man. Maguire had worked the crime beat long enough to know how it went. Butte had a surplus of ex-cops who told long stories in bars.

“You called in a dead guy, bub?” the older cop asked.

“He’s in there flat on the floor, took a round, skin turning blue as the shirt on your back. Pretty sure he’s not getting up.” Maguire smiled at his joke.

“Come off the porch with your hands up until we figure out what’s going on, OK?” Maguire complied. As he eased down the steps, arms in the air, a car flashing red light from the roof braked to a stop. Detective Harold “Duke” Ferndale jumped out. He held a clipboard above his balding head to catch the rain. Maguire knew well how Duke’s cheap brown suits hid the cannon for a sidearm shoulder-holstered under his coat. Ferndale called it “the rib tickler” because the barrel

of it hung a good three inches from the leather. Ferndale scowled at the scene before him. "Ease up, boys, that's Maguire you're holding up. No need to waltz him around like he's on the most wanted list. Hands off the heat, will you? Where the hell's the stiff?"

The older officer, hesitant, turned to Ferndale. "Who's Maguire? I don't know this guy, Captain."

"Manny, read the *Bugle*, will you? You're holding up the best crime reporter in Montana. Don't tell him that. Got a big enough head already. How long you been working the force, anyway? Put away the sidearm. If Maguire became a wild-eyed killer we'd let him write a big damn front page story to tell all about it after we pitch him into jail with the lowlifes from the Saturday night fights. Wouldn't that be something, Maguire in the slammer, eating stale bread for breakfast and making boyfriends? Now, where's the dead guy?"

Maguire dropped his hands from their "don't shoot me" position. "Living room floor, Duke. He called me at the paper about an hour ago. Said he knew something about the murders I wrote about. When I got here the front door stood partly open. I went inside and found him all dressed up with no place to go."

"You get a good quote from him, Maguire?"

Load of laughs, Ferndale. Rangy pugnacious sort, medium height, arms swinging freely as a man would expect of a southpaw light-heavyweight boxer of some repute in his day. His face showed it. Ferndale figured as the ugliest cuss on the Butte force. Not only his nose, pushed out of place to the left, or the drooping right eye that had taken too many hits. Scars

covered his cheeks and chin from bare-knuckle fights. His face read like a road map of early Butte brawls. Ferndale owned a reputation as the toughest cop in the city even though his best years vanished somewhere in the past. Maguire saw him knock a man cold as they drank beer in an uptown bar one night. The drunken fool danced around, promising a beating and feigning jabs, until Ferndale tired of him. One smashing punch from a left fist put the man on the floor, lights out. Maguire knew enough about Ferndale's reputation as a fighter to play him straight. Anybody who gave him lip wound up like the goon on the floor, bleeding teeth. Soon after Ferndale hung up his gloves, he became Maguire's best source for crime news. Maguire's best stories, the ones that got readers howling when they saw his byline on the *Bugle* front page, usually started with secret tips from Ferndale.

The detective led Maguire and his fellow cops into the house, a fashionable one-story estate in a grove of weeping willows, miles away from the old-brick mining portion of Butte. The house sat on the plain known as the Flats. Ferndale walked to the kitchen table where he grabbed a pancake off the plate. He took a savage bite as he looked out the window above the sink. "Needs heating up but I ain't got time. No breakfast for the third time this week makes an old dick grouchy. You uniform boys, check around the house for anybody else, will you? That shed out back, too."

Ferndale gulped the last of the pancake. After wiping his maple syrup-stained hands on his pants, he knelt at the body, feeling the man's throat for a pulse. "Like you say, Maguire, he won't be needing no ambulance. Stiff as a board by



lunchtime. The undertakers will stand him in the corner for the embalming. Like my humor this morning, Maguire? Now don't he look pretty as a peach with the flower adorning him? Wanna bet he'll sit up any minute to say, 'How's she go?' "

The detective shifted for a better look at the bullet hole. The slug left a neat red circle on the man's white shirt. Straight shot to the heart, all right. Just like the others. The stiff's eyes stuck wide open as if disbelieving at whatever he last saw.

"Maguire, let's kick this around before I go yapping to the chief. His name, you figure?"

"David Fenton, confirmed. He sells real estate is what he told me. Somebody around Butte, I suppose, but nobody who darkened my door. First time I heard of him was this morning when he rang my telephone."

"What did he want, anyhow?"

"He read my stories in the *Bugle*. Had the makings of another good scoop, he said, a clue to these murders being committed this summer. Refused to say more on the phone. Didn't sound particularly anxious or scared but he asked me to come over quick."

"When?"

"About ten minutes after nine. I drove up about nine forty."

"So in that thirty minutes somebody knocked him off and left a familiar calling card. Now ain't that sweet?"

The two officers reappeared in the living room. The younger one spoke first. "Nothing, Captain, except for the back door standing open. Seems odd. Killer left that way, do you think?"

"Fair guess," Ferndale said. "You new to Butte, junior?"

“Came over from the Three Forks force a week ago, sir. We never had a murder in the four years I’ve been a cop.” The officer stared at the corpse. No more than an instant in time stood between a breathing thinking person and a lifeless body. Maguire, a veteran of crime scenes, nearly smiled at the stricken cop.

“Save the sir for the chief,” Ferndale said, scratching a ragged fringe of gray hair that suggested he cut it himself. “He’s the big deal here in Butte. Anybody named sir warms chairs in the office. Cops like you and me are the dicks on the street who mess with dead bodies so get used to it. That purple rose, boys, would you say it’s fresh?” Maguire fought the impulse to touch it. The delicate petals, spattered red with the victim’s blood, otherwise looked straight out of a flower shop. “I’m no florist, Duke, but it sure looks fresh to me. Just like the others.”

“Like the others, Maguire. This one makes four. Hell, we got us a serial killer in Montana. Suppose I’ll read all about it in the *Bugle* tomorrow morning?”

“Chances are.” Maguire took a long look at the stiff sprawled before him. Fenton came from wealth. Black Oxfords freshly shined, check. Black dress trousers neatly pressed at a dry cleaners, check. Navy blue bullet-nicked necktie with stripes, check. Black suit coat dropped casually on the couch, check. Curly brown hair, newly barbered and combed with a part on the left, check. Face peaceful in death, check. Maguire had seen too many dead faces contorted into masks of fright. Lips curled, eyes bulging. Fenton greeted death like another

business deal. A murderer had ruined his morning. His face didn't show it.

"You think he knew the killer, Duke?"

"That's what I make of it," Ferndale replied. "Except for his eyes stuck open and a hole in his heart you'd think he ain't had a care in the world. No sign of a struggle that I can see. What do you suppose, Red Maguire?"

Maguire pushed his hands into his pockets and leaned his tall frame against the door jamb. White pinstripes on his dark suit suggested a serious man. He tipped back his fedora and crossed his arms. That's what he did at crime scenes. Ferndale had seen Maguire do it dozens of times. Maguire didn't spill whatever crossed his mind like some people. He took his sweet time to consider details. He thought like a cop. He had learned that much from Ferndale. Savvy cops and news reporters shared one crucial talent. Observation. They watched for details that told a story. A dead man's tale. Almost everybody else missed those details. They reacted to murders emotionally.

Maguire squinted at the orderly death scene. "Looks to me like David Fenton opened his front door to somebody he knew, Duke. Invited the killer into his living room. Only natural, you see, a friend or acquaintance stopping at breakfast time. Maybe Fenton offered a cup of joe. 'It's no trouble at all,' he told the killer. The killer met his offer with an obliging smile. Of course, Fenton never made it to the coffee pot. I see only one white cup on the counter. He attempted hospitality but the killer had other intentions. Raised the gun right away. Death came quick. Happened soon after Fenton opened the

door. That quick. Betting the killer left no clues. That's what I suppose, Duke."

Ferndale belched. "Not bad for an Irish mick from Dublin Gulch, I'll give you that. Gotta dust for fingerprints just in case."

Maguire glanced out the door at the downpour. "Call me if you find any juicy details, Duke? I've got to write my story with something more than finding a well-dressed man holding a rose."

"Ain't bad for a start," Ferndale growled.

Maguire ran outside to his Pontiac. Rain fell in buckets. Water dripped off his chin as he slid behind the wheel. He cursed his bad luck. Had he arrived even five minutes earlier he might have seen the killer. He tried to remember automobiles he had passed as he drove to Fenton's house. A gray two-door sedan, a Ford, had a blue right front fender, from a wrecking yard, that had replaced a damaged one. He recalled a chugging Studebaker pickup, a '47 model, ancient man and woman riding still as statues in the cab. Then came a tan Chevy four-door sedan, he guessed a '52, driven by a young mother in a red headscarf as two young children, boy and girl, stood on the seat beside her. Of the three Maguire could remember, the Ford with the mismatched colors seemed the most suspicious, but he knew better than to jump to conclusions. Sometimes killers drove the best cars in town. Maguire cursed his bad luck. Catching the killer in the act would have ensured newsboys screaming his story on uptown street corners. It never crossed his mind that he might be

stretched out dead beside Fenton. With or without a rose. Maguire never thought that way.

Gloom fell over the neighborhood. An old woman in a full-length apron ignored the rain while she stared at the prowling cars at Fenton's house from beneath a black umbrella. Maguire reached for a notebook on the floor of his car. He rustled through the inked pages as if looking for answers but he already knew the facts. Three purple rose murders in Butte, all men. But why the woman, forty miles away in Deer Lodge, shot dead in the alley behind a laundromat? Work of a copycat killer? Maguire had written stories about all four cases. News of it reported on the *Bugle* front page attracted eager readers in Butte. He dutifully reported details of each murder. Why did somebody knock off four people who evidently didn't know one another? Every crime committed remained a mystery waiting for someone to figure it out. Maguire knew how it went. Someone got the itch to kill, did the deed, fled the scene, hid the secret. The cops worked night and day to find the damn fool who did it. Taxpayers paid the price of the hunt. Finally the killer blabbed the truth to strangers during a night of drinking. Guilt, sometimes, after the third or fourth beer. Bravado, sometimes. Maguire kept his ear to the ground, making acquaintances all over the bar district, because he wanted the first call when a killer made a barroom confession. He had solved crimes, big and small, in the *Bugle* news columns. There would be more. Red Maguire, news reporter and amateur detective. People knew his name in Butte.

As Maguire sat in his car, a lime green two-door hardtop, Police Chief Donald Morse drove up to Fenton's house. He

splashed through the rain in a billowing blue overcoat. Morse and Ferndale talked on the covered porch. The men waved their arms and pointed. Thunder rumbled. The noise disguised what they said. The grouchy detective never liked explaining things to the front office. He despised political types. The governor would call from Helena to turn up the heat. Already he had complicated the investigation with premature public promises about catching the crook. The chief by nature became the first cop caught in the line of fire. Maguire knew how it went. In writing hundreds of newspaper stories about Butte crime, maybe thousands big and small, he had crossed paths with the state folks in Helena too many times. Ferndale had no use for them. They tried to put a happy face on stiffs shot all to hell, he said. Maguire couldn't disagree.

Maguire thumbed through his notebook as the rain hammered on his car. That morning, during his brief phone conversation with David Fenton, he had scribbled an observation. It said, "DF says killer might be closer than you think." Maguire kicked himself for not pressing Fenton for more answers before agreeing to meet in person. He should have known the killer would beat him to Fenton's house. In murders, his experience told him, take nothing for granted. Desperate people wait for no one. How futile to pry the truth off the lips of a dead man.

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## **Red Maguire, crime newsman**

When Maguire was a boy his father divorced his mother. They lived in Chicago where his father killed wailing cows with a sledgehammer at a slaughtering plant. His mother, perpetually married to alcohol, hit the bars by noon. She had little interest in being a housewife. Lily married Sean at fifteen years old. By seventeen, she gave birth to Kieran, the boy destined for newspaper crime reporting. He remembered his red-haired mother as being sufficiently beautiful to turn heads. Sean called her “my calendar girl” and sometimes made curvy lines in the air with his hands. Young boys know more than they should. Kieran recognized that his mother appealed to men other than his father. He watched her flirt when she took him to the grocery store and post office. The drink held power over her. A whiff of it lured her, seduced her, stole her away on impulse. At least a half dozen times, Kieran stood nervously outside Eddie’s Bar down the block, peering into the dim interior to watch his mother toss beers with men who just came off shift at the munitions plant.

Even as a grown man, Maguire never understood what led her to a life of drunkenness. Maybe the young Lily lacked the strength to face life as wife and mother. Because of her, Kieran knew cops early in life. They came to his family’s South Side

house to bring his mother home from whatever trouble she had found. She reeked of cigarette smoke and beer. She also smelled of something else, something carnal, which he later knew as the lingering scent of her flings. Sean noticed too.

After the divorce, Maguire came home from school on a September afternoon to find their meager furniture, including his bed, lashed with clothesline rope into the back of his father's pickup. "Get in. We're going to Montana," Sean told Kieran, who didn't know anything about Montana. Sean stayed silent until the next morning when they crossed the border into Minnesota. "Going to a city named Butte. Fair distance yet, Kieran. I hear they got copper mines out west, deep as a trip to Hell, that pay union wages to any man not afraid of hard work."

"What about school, Pop? What about my friends?"

"I'm sure Butte has schools. Your friends, they'll get by. You'll make new ones soon enough."

"But what about Mommy?"

They rode in silence for five miles before Sean answered. "What about her anyway? We go our own way, now, son. If you're thinking of crying over her, it don't do no good, hear me? Never forget that she left us. She don't want us, understand? Your mother, I can't control her, never could." They followed endless narrow highways that wound through tall corn. Somewhere in western North Dakota the corn gave way to red and orange valleys and mesas that billboards described as badlands. Then, in Montana, came oceans of sagebrush and forests of pine. Never had Kieran imagined vast empty prairies and mountains that loomed beyond them



to the West. Kieran marveled at a land devoid of honking cars and skyscrapers. He had known only the urban bustle of Chicago.

On the third night Sean steered his coughing old pickup onto a mountain pass named Pipestone. Twice the radiator boiled over. Sean pulled off in the gravel at the edge of a canyon. Kieran held the brake hard to the floor as his father poured water into the steaming radiator. "You been wondering all along what we use this canvas bag for, boy?" He slung the strap over the antenna on the side of the hood. Night fell by the time they crested Pipestone. A few miles later, they left the canyon and saw their first glimpse of Butte. Its lights glittered on a mountain of torn earth. Looming towers, silhouettes against the commotion of lighting, stood protectively over their mines. Kieran would learn later that those towers, known as gallows frames, lowered hundreds of miners far below ground. They hoisted tons of ore to the surface with mighty steel cables. Sean and Kieran spent the first night in a rooming house where he got his first taste of Butte. Two drunken men, swinging clumsily, fought over a painted woman in a pink dress. The owner of the place, a thick crabby matron swathed in a green apron that hung to her knees, ended the brawl with a vicious arc of a broom handle that slammed one combatant on the ear and rendered him whimpering in a corner.

"What a town!" Sean marveled later that evening as he watched Butte's churning industry, always in motion, from a window of their dusty bedroom. Kieran, young and bewildered, listened to rumbling machinery and blowing

whistles. He heard sirens and barking dogs. Even in the dark, the sidewalks coursed with people, many of them yelling. Maybe Butte resembled Chicago after all.

Sean and Kieran soon learned that newcomers gathered with their own kinds in neighborhoods such as Corktown, Centerville, Finn Town, Dogtown and the Cabbage Patch. Many, like Sean Maguire, were born to parents from Ireland. Kieran and his dad moved into a ramshackle Irish neighborhood known as Dublin Gulch. A smoky stretch of shacks and boarding houses, between the Kelley and Steward mines, teemed with immigrants. Boys earned their reputations on the street. Kieran grew up fighting. He made new friends and new enemies. The boys of the gulch threw insults and punches as readily as they threw baseballs.

Soon, Chicago became a distant memory, except for Lily Maguire. Kieran never forgot his mother. Sean found a girlfriend, Aggie Walsh, who lived in a flat full of Irish families four doors down. She doted on Sean and Kieran. His mop of red hair earned him an obvious nickname. She took to calling the boy "Red" in a motherly way. Soon everyone in the district knew him by that name. At St. Mary's school, where Sean enrolled him, he remained Red. Kieran became a distant identity as lost as the mother who had named him.

Two weeks after he graduated from Boys Central High School and the day after his eighteenth birthday, Red went searching for his mother. Sean turned over the keys to the pickup, handed Red a half-empty bottle of foul whiskey and five cans of motor oil, and sent him east. "Don't figure you'll

find what you're looking for," his old man said and left it at that. Sean Maguire wasted no time on words.

As Red drove through Chicago, realizing his foolishness at trying to find his mother in a huge city, he stopped at his old house. Abandoned, shutters hanging askew, windows broken. Someone had started a fire in his bedroom. He felt no emotion at the decay of his neighborhood. Down the street, on a block of sagging boarded-up buildings, he found a phone booth. He tore through the pages searching for his mother's name. He found a LaVonne Maguire, and a Lucy Maguire, but no mention of Lily. Maybe she remarried. Maybe she died. The young man hoped his mother would show up in Butte. The Maguires would be a family again.

As Red scoured Chicago, tragedy hit in Butte. An explosion half a mile below the surface at the Kelley Mine killed his father and three other men. He returned to Butte three days later to find Aggie crying on the front porch. "I have sorrowful news, me boy."

Sean Maguire lost an arm and half of his face. A doctor determined that internal injuries from his crushed chest caused his immediate death. The undertaker put Sean on public display during the wake despite his shocking appearance. A parade of men in dusty coveralls set glasses of beer beside his broken body to honor him. Sean, forty-seven years old, looked like an old man. Hard labor has taken its toll. Sean departed the mortal world no different from hundreds of miners before him. Underground work claimed his life. That's how it went. Nothing more to say about it.

After the funeral, Red searched for a job to pay the bills. He knew the quick answer. Walk up Anaconda Road to the Kelley. The mine's gallows frame, two hundred feet high and swarming with ravens, loomed over Dublin Gulch as a constant reminder of Sean Maguire's death. The union men, sympathetic to Sean's untimely departure, told Red he could take his father's place. Sign papers in the union office. Find a peg in the dry, the changing shack, to hang his clothes. Squeeze into the chippy hoist with five other men and descend into a life of hard rock mining. Red feared going underground after Sean died. He couldn't bear the compressing loneliness of dark shafts and drifts.

Instead, he hustled billiards games in uptown bars to pay rent on the shack. Maguire had learned a thing or two about putting spin on a cue ball from Aggie Walsh's son Patrick. The older boy fed off the considerable vice in Butte's saloons and gambling parlors. Patrick taught Red how to play billiards, but also how to play a man for a fool, making jingle from it. Red learned how to invite drunks to play, men much older, because they jumped on the temptation to whip an Irish kid on the green felt. His opponents slammed their sticks in disgust when they lost. The dollar Maguire bet on a game usually stayed in his pocket. Aggie Walsh, never happy with Patrick's nocturnal prowling and his influence on Red, clucked her disapproval to neighbor women as they hung their wash behind the shacks. "Me boy Red would be better off working shift," she told them more than once.

Red tired of hustling two years later when Aggie finally convinced him that respectable men worked honest jobs when

they could find them. It was 1936 in the heart of the Great Depression. Maguire had watched newsboys on street corners calling out headlines. A *Bugle* crime reporter named Peter Sullivan wrote most of the big stories. Red admired Sullivan's colorful tales of heroes and villains. He wondered how Sullivan found out so many details about people mentioned in his stories. Red Maguire decided that someday, somehow, he would become a newspaper reporter. One morning he saw a classified advertisement in the *Bugle* seeking someone to hang out at the police department on nights and weekends. The job required reading crime reports at the police department and listening to conversations between cops for news tips. He went to the *Bugle* offices for an interview with the editor, Clyde Stoffleman, whose piercing eagle-like gray eyes bore into him. The man scared Red. Opinionated, inquisitive, wicked smart.

"So you were a basketball hero over at Boys Central," Stoffleman said. "I read about that big crosstown game with Butte High when you scored eleven points and took a punch to the eye."

"Eighteen, Mr. Stoffleman, and punches to both eyes. One during the game and one after."

"You're no stranger to fighting, Maguire?"

"I ain't never backed down, for a fact."

"How tall are you anyway?"

"Three inches north of six feet last time I measured."

"Ever married, Maguire?"

"I'm too young for that, Mr. Stoffleman."

"You didn't get one of those cheerleaders in trouble? A dashing sports star like you? Don't all girls like redheads?"

"Never crossed my mind, sir. See I —."

Stoffleman interrupted. "The *Bugle* is no place for a personal life, Maguire. Unlike your possible inclinations toward romantic entanglement. You would be married to the job. Know what that means, sonny?"

"That you would own me?"

"In a manner of speaking, yes. Being a reporter at a newspaper means the job never ends. Fast as a reporter writes one story, another awaits. A reporter who fails to report the news, all of the news, is of no use to me. I want a constant flow of stories told with drama."

"Like Peter Sullivan?"

"Cream of the crop, that man. Glad you brought up his name. He writes stories that sell papers. You know what the word 'sensation' means?"

"Making people want to read the *Bugle*?"

"Well, sonny, you might have some promise after all."

"Why is *Bugle* the name of the newspaper?"

A quick smile flashed over Stoffleman's lips. "Curious, are you? That's one feather in your cap anyway."

"Why a feather?"

Stoffleman shook his head in impatient dismay. "Never mind. The *Butte Bugle* has been around since the turn of the century. You heard it right, our beloved newspaper is a piece of history, a compendium of knowledge. As the story goes, the founder of the *Bugle* grew fond of the notion that his new paper would blare out the news, much like a bugle stirred troops to action on a battlefield. He wanted a forceful newspaper. One that appealed to the working man in Butte.

When the price of beer jumped in Butte he wanted to shout the news to his readers. He wanted the unions represented in his paper. He considered any murder committed by knife, gun, rope, and bludgeoning instrument ripe for the front page. He wanted stories that attract readers, not put them to sleep, which is too often the result when a newspaper quakes at its own shadow. Name of this crusading man? Barclay Cole. His photograph hangs in the *Bugle* city room as a reminder that the paper we print every morning has a broader purpose than to soak up ink. My job, as editor, is to carry on his legacy. Now, no doubt you wonder why the *Bugle* wants to hire somebody while people out of work stand in lines all over this country for a bowl of soup. This nation has unemployment approaching 25 percent. You've noticed, I would hope."

The boy nodded. Stoffleman shook his head. "I expected an articulate answer, sonny. Hearing none, let me explain. Our crusading founder, Mr. Cole, made it clear that even in hard times the *Bugle* would sustain as the working man's paper in Butte. He wanted news reported that caught the eye of any man down on his luck. Therefore, as President Roosevelt tries to straighten out the financial disaster throttling this country, we do our part by pricing the *Bugle* accordingly. In other words, we sell it cheap in hopes of recovering our cost with more sales. The more news we report, the more papers we sell. Follow me?"

The young Maguire, bewildered at the fancy language, attempted a compliment. "It's the paper that gets my attention on street corners," he said.

Stoffleman snorted. "Big difference between hearing headlines shouted out and reading the stories behind them. Even bigger leap between reading the news and reporting it. Now, tell me, how come you never joined the Army? A strong boy like you would make President Roosevelt proud. The recruiting depot is a block from here. Didn't you see Uncle Sam in the window? Despite all the isolationist talk we might need to send troops to Europe someday to reason with the German socialists."

"Who are they, Mr. Stoffleman?"

"Your ignorance astounds me, Maguire. You apparently know every alley and gulch in Butte but seem to understand nothing about international affairs. Disappoints me, in a way, considering you earned a high school diploma from a fine Catholic high school. Are you a practicing Catholic?"

"Only when required," Maguire said. "I go to confession once in a while."

"Any confessions I should know about, sonny? Rob anybody, kill anybody, slipping it to somebody's young wife on the sly?"

Maguire failed to hide a smile at the line of questioning. The *Bugle* editor took no prisoners. Stoffleman's relentless personality reminded Red of the priest at the elementary school who liked to spank boys with boards. He smacked their bare bottoms in a windowless room behind his office. Red got it once after offering a cigarette to a nun. The priest kept hitting him like he enjoyed it. "None of that, Mr. Stoffleman. No terrible crimes in my background. I tapped my old man's



hooch until I got caught. Aggie Walsh didn't stand for misbehavior."

"Who's she?"

"Aggie is my stepmom, or close to, seeing that she never married my pop before the explosion killed him."

"Kept you on the straight and narrow, did she?"

"Best as she could," Maguire replied.

"Who's Montana's new governor?"

"Elmer Holt."

"Why is he new?"

"Because the other guy died."

"Who was that?"

"Frank Cooney. He had a heart attack."

"I suppose you know Governor Cooney's home city?"

"I know that one. It's Butte."

"Let's try another. Who's the mayor in Butte?"

"I don't know."

"Who's the police chief?"

"I don't know."

"What do police do in Butte?"

"Crack heads, near as I can tell."

"You aren't far from the truth although I had hoped for a more universal answer."

"I ain't old enough to know," Maguire said in his defense, smiling at Stoffleman's persistent questioning. The boy recalled similar interrogations from the Irish Christian Brothers who taught at the high school.

"I doubt you've written nary a coherent sentence in your life despite the very best diligence by the brothers over at

Central," Stoffleman continued. "It's clear that except for your cursive recollection of Cooney you don't possess the vaguest idea what goes on in Butte, at least among adults, and you know nothing about journalism. I encourage you to subscribe to the *Bugle*, not any paper but the *Bugle*, and do it today. You can't expect to amount to anything in journalism if you don't read the news. You're likable, I'll give you that, but I caution you to listen to me and listen close if you want to succeed. Here's some more free advice, sonny. Work on your grammar. The word 'ain't' doesn't belong in my newspaper."

"I'm hired?" Red asked, mystified.

"Pay attention to what's going on," the editor said. "That's the first lesson in newspaper journalism. Yes, you're hired. We'll pay you twenty-five dollars a week provided you earn it. Remember you work for the *Bugle* and not the cops. Stay sober. Come to work on time. As long as you do your job, the way I expect it done, you get paid. Show me what you can do."

Stoffleman told Red to make notes on little crimes, phone in big crimes to the paper, and watch for anything unusual. Some weeks into the job he began contributing minor tips to the city desk. Sometimes a hotshot reporter, usually Sullivan, used Maguire's tips in his big murder stories. Predictably, Sullivan whipped up a tale for the morning paper that could make madams on Mercury Street blush from ear to ear. One of his stories read: "She wore nothing, naked even of the bedsheet-scented perfume that wafted off her customers in uptown saloons after their ten-minute inspections of her womanly ways." Sullivan once advised Maguire, "Dull

descriptions don't sell newspapers in Butte. Find somebody in bed with the mayor's wife and then write the hell out of it as if you were watching."

By the time Stoffleman had taught Red Maguire how to report news, Sullivan's legendary *Bugle* career came to a drastic end. He died when an ore train crushed him as he wandered home from a midnight drinking binge at Babe's Bar in Finn Town. What a pity Sullivan's obituary lacked colorful insinuations as if he had written it himself. The reporter in charge of such work, Calvin Claggett, did his best. Sullivan's death silenced the *Bugle* for a week or so. The news columns seemed boring and mournful without his seductive descriptions. After the funeral, Stoffleman declared his interest in finding a new crime reporter. Maguire got the job after Stoffleman told him, "Don't screw up this job or you'll find yourself mucking ore four thousand feet down and they tell me it's no picnic." Maguire never understood how he could mess up a murder story in Butte except for missing it altogether. Ferndale and other sources at the jail made sure he didn't make that mistake. Maguire learned he had a way of getting along with cops. Cops got a kick out of seeing crime in print. They put him on to good stories. Because of Duke Ferndale, his most reliable source, Maguire often knew of a murder before police arrived at the scene. Ferndale never wanted his name in print. The detective felt more comfortable telling stories on bar stools. "Just keep me out of it," Ferndale warned Maguire more than once. "You burn me, no more gravy."

On the day David Fenton died, Maguire drove back to the *Bugle* city room on the third floor of the Hirbour Block. True to Barclay Cole, the *Bugle* never faltered in its reign as Butte's independent newspaper. The Hirbour Block commanded the northeast corner of Main and Broadway. Maguire looked down on the busy streets from his desk near a front window. The people scurrying below him knew hard work. Butte impressed him as a city built on sweat and dirt.

A dozen reporters and editors and a solitary photographer named Stu worked from mid-morning to midnight in the long city room. *Bugle* journalists were rebellious sorts, molded in the image of Stoffleman, a fierce newsman. An odor of ink and old wood mingled with the stench of cigarette smoke. The *Associated Press* teletype machine clattered all day long, spitting out a slithering tongue of yellow paper that reported the latest news from around Montana and the nation. Reporters wrote their stories on typewriters atop their brown wooden desks. Some of them worked on those newfangled electric machines suddenly advertised in the catalogues. "Why not? It's 1954, for god sake," Stoffleman told Maguire one day.

Maguire tried to slide into his chair without catching Stoffleman's attention. When the springs creaked Stoffleman's head swung around. He wore a corny green eye shade and rectangular eyeglasses that resembled a windshield on a bus. He smiled a crooked grin. A nasty scar trailed from his jaw to his left eye. Stoffleman said little about his wounds from the Allied invasion into Germany during World War II. "Damned Krauts," he responded predictably to questions. Except for the war, he had lived in Butte most of his life, a bachelor married

to the *Bugle*. Stoffleman's absence from the city room for nearly four years led to a quieter *Bugle*. Older men such as Calvin Claggett avoided the rush to join the Army or Navy. Maguire remained out of uniform as well but not by choice. The government exempted him from military duty to cover important mining news in Butte as the mines churned out copper ore for the war effort. Some days at the *Bugle* he helped Claggett write stories about Butte men and women killed overseas. When the war ended, and Stoffleman returned to the *Bugle*, he revealed nothing about his combat ordeals as an infantry sergeant. He barked orders at his reporters as if he had never left.

Now, as Maguire hurried into the newsroom, Stoffleman sensed a scoop. "How's she go, Maguire? Got another stiff for us? Waiting until tomorrow's paper comes out to tell me? Or until I read about it in the Company papers?" Stoffleman hated the Anaconda Company press. It marched to corporate orders from the suits on the top floors of the Hennessy Block farther up Main Street. The *Bugle*, a working man's paper, chased crime and labor stories with glee. Maguire fit right in.

"Don't go raining on my parade, boss. I've got a purple rose saying my story goes front page." Stoffleman, suddenly all ears, said nothing as Maguire described David Fenton's murder. "The killer shot him dead during breakfast. None of the neighbors admit to seeing or hearing a thing, maybe because of the distance between houses out there in that country club estate."

Stoffleman smirked. "Hell, in this town, half of everybody might cover for the killer. You think of that, sonny?"

Maguire leaned back in his chair. "Anybody who's lying to me can kiss my Irish butt." He pulled off his fedora, pushing his thick red hair into place with long fingers. Maguire, although pushing forty, looked ten years younger. He had his father's strapping physique and his mother's chiseled features. "You're an attractive man any sensible young woman would want," Aggie told him in her lilting Irish accent, "but you're too shy around the girls and they think you're not interested. You seem aloof, Red, too wrapped up in your work to find love." Maguire knew he echoed Stoffleman in that respect. They were men who invested their lonely lives in the daily paper.

"That's my boy. Before you go out looking for more news, write everything you know. Dress it up in some purple prose, get it?" Stoffleman, laughing over what passed for humor at the *Bugle*, went back to where editors worked at the other end of the long room. Maguire glanced outside at the brick buildings in uptown Butte. Near noon. Shoppers filled the sidewalks. Down the street, doors at the M & M bar were flung open to the wet day, men gathering with glasses of beer. He turned back to his desk to insert a sheet of paper into his typewriter. Nobody gave him one of the experimental electric ones and he felt glad for it. The keys had a mind of their own, he heard, automatically typing letters like nobody's business. He began writing:

*"David Fenton started his day with the Bugle and a short stack of pancakes, but in the minutes before he ate the first bite, he became Montana's fourth victim in what's become known as the Purple Rose Murders."*

Maguire lacked Sullivan's gift for colorful prose. Instead, he wrote the news in a concise style all his own. He continued:

*"Fenton, a real estate man of some repute, was found slain in his south Butte residence on Tuesday morning by a Bugle news reporter. The killer fired one bullet into his chest and placed a purple rose on the wound."*

Maguire then wrote more details about the scene. He included a quote from Chief Morse who vowed to find the killer in a matter of days. Maguire recognized the chief's comment as intending to pacify fearful Butte residents rather than represent a true declaration of crime fighting. Solving a murder took time. Solving several crimes at once took longer. Newspaper reporting sometimes depended on luck. Maguire opened the city directory and began dialing the telephone in search of someone who knew Fenton. Half the calls rang and rang. The few people who answered had little to say. One man described Fenton as a responsible resident who kept his property in good shape. Another had seen him carrying groceries into his house. It appeared Fenton avoided neighborhood conversation. Nobody knew him personally. He had no office, no staff, no obvious trail of civic accomplishments. Fenton, it seemed, hid much of his life from public view despite his apparent wealth. He worked long hours selling houses. He otherwise lived in relative isolation in his well-furnished house on the Flat. Fenton had friends, surely, but they evaded Maguire for this story.

After Maguire exhausted his notes, he realized how little he knew about Fenton's background and the circumstances of his

murder. Why did the Purple Rose Killer target a middle-aged real estate salesman? He ripped the last page of his story from his typewriter and walked it over to Stoffleman. The editor waited happily with his blue pencil. Nothing gave him more delight than to put a reporter on notice that a story failed to meet expectations until it had the Stoffleman touch. He moved paragraphs around, crossed out some sentences, wrote others into the story and occasionally corrected factual references. "It's what we call editing," he reminded Maguire again and again. Stoffleman loved his work.

Maguire looked around the city room. Smoky rays of light from the dirty windows revealed a jumble of desks. Claggett, the sour old obituary reporter, slumped as he pestered someone over the phone about yet another heavenly departure. Deep in his work, his lips clenching two glowing cigarettes, he scribbled notes between questions. Claggett resembled an ancient mortician. He looked as dead as the people in his stories. Antonio Vanzetti, who covered local government and city politics, lived in Meaderville, the Italian enclave farther up Butte Hill. Vanzetti spent hours combing his hair, black and slick, between bursts of clacking on the typewriter. A pretty boy, yes, but also a crack reporter. Vanzetti's news judgment, Stoffleman often said, ranked with the best in the business. At the desk next to him sat labor reporter Ted Ketchul. He straddled his chair like a lumberjack. Unlike the black suit crowd around him, he wore overalls and heavy boots and a plaid shirt calculated to blend with miners and unions. Ketchul wrote stories about safety violations and mine accidents that never appeared in the Company press. He



had covered the closing of the Travona mine, one of Butte's oldest, and he dug deep into the Company's plans to abandon underground mining in favor of a yawning open pit. "They'll dig it a thousand feet deep and swallow up half of Butte," Ketchul told Maguire one day. The Pit would cost Butte jobs. Everyone knew it, the unions deplored it, but the Company embraced the Pit as the sensible next generation of metals mining. Behind Ketchul, near a windowsill decorated with potted plants, sat the *Bugle's* newest reporter. Mary Miller wrote feature stories about Butte history. She covered tea parties and other social events for the society pages. Miller brought visual relief to the drab personalities in the black and brown city room. This day she wore a cream-tinted dress and, around her neck, a bright blue scarf. Mary's hair, brownish-red like honey, didn't go unnoticed either. Her way of shaking it when she smiled aroused some life into even the cadaverous Claggett. Maguire knew nothing about her. He vaguely remembered her coming to work at the *Bugle* during the winter, when snow drifted in the recesses of the windows.

How unlike Maguire, a journalist wedded to detail, to ignore a pretty woman. He typically took note of personal characteristics at first glance. He would have remembered that Mary walked like she meant business. He would have seen her tall elegance, her penchant for necklaces, her dainty gold watch, her even white teeth flecked with orange lipstick. He would have wondered what brought her to the *Butte Bugle*, to a city room inhabited by rough men like himself who never got around to shining their shoes. Maguire watched her for a minute, admiringly and even longingly, before feeling some

guilt at neglecting more urgent matters. Pressing news awaited a diligent crime reporter who had a name in Butte. A name associated with dead people and drunks and domestic assaults and the like. Maguire knew of his reputation. "Never think you're anything special, me boy, just because you hang your name on every ugly crime in Butte," Aggie Walsh told him time and again. "A responsible man knows the difference between right and wrong, Red. Do the right thing. That's how you'll be remembered, aye." Nobody commanded more influence over Red than Aggie.

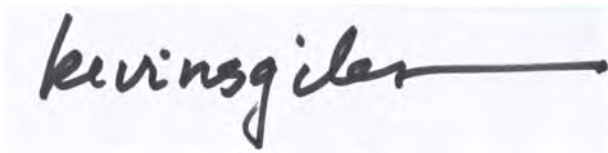
Maguire thought of these things as he reached for the telephone receiver. "Get me Helena, Luverne, you sweet adorable thing," he cooed to the older woman working at the switchboard across the hall. "Yes, I know you'd marry me if I were twenty years older. But, Luverne? How would you break the news to Howard? Your poor suffering husband, what would he do without you to keep him from gambling away your life savings down at the Board of Trade? No, I won't tell anyone. ... Yes, I know, you can't wait forever for me. ... Yes, I'll remember to let you know when I'm ready for some loving. ... Thanks, Luverne, I appreciate your compliments. ... He said what? Well, tell Howard that if every man in town is after you, he had better shave once in a while and change his underwear like he means business. ... Helena, you have that right, connect me with the state crime bureau, Luverne. Yes, I'll wait."

Meanwhile, Stoffleman put down his pencil and yelled across the city room. "Damn fine story, Maguire. We might find a place for it in the back of the paper with the classified

ads." That led to a storm of guffaws from everyone, even Claggett, who barked his approval through a cloud of blue smoke.

"Bastards," Maguire said to himself. As he waited for someone to answer his call to Helena he reached for his notebook and began scribbling. "Purple rose, purple rose," he wrote. "Flower of enchantment ...."

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "kevinsgiles" followed by a long horizontal flourish.

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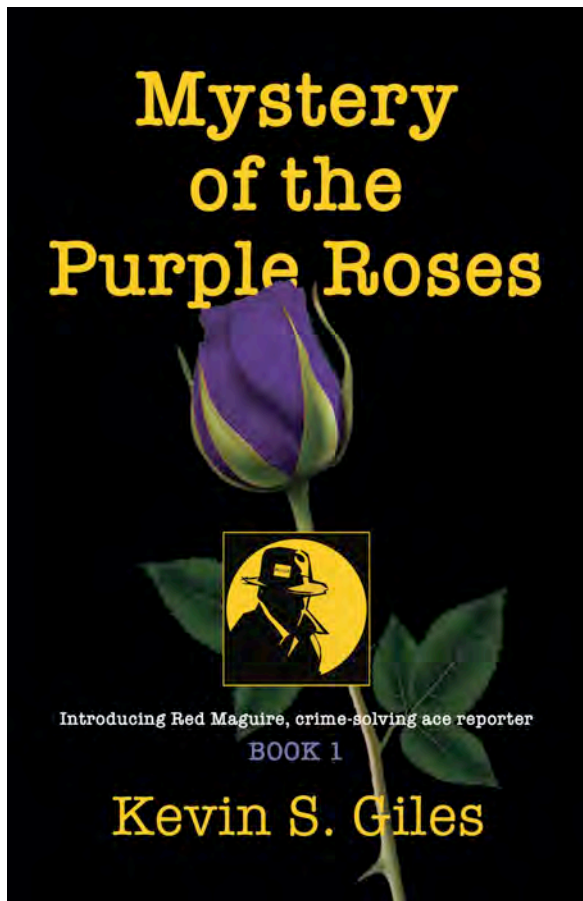
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