



A suspicious fire destroys an historic hotel, where a stranger plunges to his death from an upper-story window. Newsman Kieran "Red" Maguire takes to the dark streets to unravel the mystery. It's 1955 in the mining city of Butte, Montana.

HEADLINE: FIRE!

By Kevin S. Giles

Order the book from the publisher BookLocker.com

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/12920.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**

The book cover features a stylized illustration. On the left, a woman with long, wavy red hair is depicted from the waist up, wearing a dark blue strapless dress with white gloves. On the right, a man with short red hair and blue eyes is shown from the chest up, wearing a white shirt, a black tie, and black suspenders. He is holding a black handgun in his right hand, looking off to the side with a serious expression. The background is a dark, textured wall with vertical yellow light streaks. The title 'HEADLINE: FIRE!' is prominently displayed at the top, with 'HEADLINE:' in white and 'FIRE!' in large, bold, yellow-to-orange gradient letters. Below the title, the text 'BOOK 3' is written in white, followed by the subtitle 'Yet another tale of Red Maguire, crime-solving ace reporter' in a yellow, italicized font. At the bottom, the author's name 'KEVIN S. GILES' is written in large, white, sans-serif capital letters.

HEADLINE:

FIRE!

BOOK 3

Yet another tale of Red Maguire, crime-solving ace reporter

KEVIN S. GILES

One confirmed death. Three-alarm fire. Four pumpers and an aerial ladder operating at top capacity. Six thousand feet of hoses. Twelve pulsing water lines. Every off-duty fireman called out and then some. Ten small businesses destroyed. More than a hundred sad homeless tenants. Smoke damage to Hennessy's department store and to Sears-Roebuck. Biggest commercial fire ever witnessed in Butte, Montana. Predawn drama befitting a city accustomed to fire and death. Headlines blaring tragedy, as they always do, as they always will.

Copyright © 2023 Kevin S. Giles

Print ISBN: 978-1-958889-63-3

Ebook ISBN: 979-8-88531-494-7

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Giles, Kevin S.

HEADLINE: FIRE!

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023907308

Printed on acid-free paper.

kevinsgiles.com 2023

First Edition

Cover illustration by Paula Richey | OtherRealmStudio.com

~ 1 ~

'Ash and memories'

A jangling telephone shook Red Maguire from a deep sleep. He switched on a light and fumbled for the receiver beside his bed. The alarm clock, he noticed, showed ten minutes to five.

"What the hell, this early in the morning?" he barked into the mouthpiece. A boy's excited voice came on the line. Sirens wailed in the background.

"It's Tommy Turkela, Red. The operator rang your number. I was out delivering my papers when I seen them sparks shootin' all over uptown Butte like nobody's business. The Liberty Hotel ... the whole block, in flames. Red, that fire could take our newspaper offices next door! Must be five hundred people out here gawking already. I ran over to the M & M saloon so's I could use the phone. They gave me a beer just for asking."

"Don't be fooling me, Tommy."

"Hey, what's the idea? You want to sleep through a big story? Gotta go. Everybody and his brother grabbing at me to use the phone to blab about the fire to all their friends, those who got any. See ya, Red."

Maguire muttered his thanks into a dead line. Suddenly alert, seeing an orange glow flickering on the walls, he raced to the window. He lived at the front of a rooming house, the Logan, four blocks north. The hot glow over the city differed from the sputtering neon sign below his window. It was brighter, more urgent. He stared out the glass to see the fire's fury filling the night sky. Embers rose and fizzled in fireworks fashion. Why he

hadn't heard the commotion, he didn't know, but it came barreling at him now like a runaway ore train. Faraway yelling voices told him this fire was a big one.

"Lily!" he shouted in sudden recognition. His long-lost mother lived in the Liberty Hotel, Room 331, on the third floor.

Maguire snapped his suspenders into place and threw on his brown suit and fedora. He grabbed his notebook off the table and clamored down the wooden stairs, past the forlorn and forgotten lobby, once busy with hotel customers when the mines boomed. The warm August air reeked of burning wood. He joined dozens of people running down Main Street to the fire scene.

Smoke and ash swirled around the Hirbour Block, the corner building that housed the *Butte Bugle*. Maguire looked to the third-story windows. He had spent his entire adult life working in that newsroom. He hoped he wasn't witnessing the end of it.

The Hirbour Block shared its back wall with the Liberty Hotel. Firemen hosed the side-by-side buildings as flames broke through the hotel's roof. Firetrucks from Walkerville to the north and Meaderville to the east roared onto Broadway Street, sirens blaring, to join an array of shiny vehicles from the Butte Fire Department. Dirty water flooded the street. A handful of edgy cops tried to push the huge crowd of delirious onlookers back from the bedlam. The odds were against them as the crowd obeyed and then pressed forward again.

One man stood out. Red Maguire, the *Bugle's* famous crime reporter, had arrived on the scene. This story was his. No one would tell it better, but he had no idea how it would end.

Firemen and cops and anyone else who read about murders and fires and other calamities in Butte knew Maguire and left him alone. This tall red-haired man, jaw jutting in determination and notebook in hand, stepped through a tangle of wet hoses for a closer look. He stood alone in the commotion, his eyes

Headline: FIRE!

searching, taking note that the fire had jumped to adjoining buildings in the opposite direction from the Hirbour. Typical summer mornings before dawn brought a chill to the Mining City, a full mile above sea level. Yet Maguire felt heat from the fire through his clothes.

He felt a tug on his coat sleeve. It was Tommy. Reflections of fire danced in the boy's eyes. He teetered under the weight of his delivery bag, still crammed with newspapers, and the influence of beer. He held a sloshing can of Butte Lager. Maguire saw right away it wasn't Tommy's first. "Whassa gonna do, Red, if'n the *Bugle* burns down? I won't get no papers to deliver. Haffa my customers lived in that there hotel."

Maguire reached out to steady the boy. "What about the other half? They're waiting for their morning *Bugle* and you're drinking beer. One paper in your hand and three more right there in your bag. How old are you anyway?"

"Thirteen next month and ain't nobody arguin' 'bout it. Over at the M & M, them boys, they opened the bar soon as they saw the fire. Free beer to newsboys."

"How many you drink, Tommy?"

"Three far as I know and I'm going back for more, sure as shootin'. Tried to sell my papers. Nobody cares. They want to watch the fire."

"Those *Bugles* you're lugging around, yesterday's news to those bums. Go sober yourself up. No more boozing on the job, hear me? We'll need every one of you newsboys on the street tomorrow to hawk my stories about this fire. You'll sell so many you can ride the roller coaster at Columbia Gardens until you're an old man. Now go before I lick you alongside the head." Maguire pushed Tommy away. The boy guzzled what remained of his beer, flicked the can into the gutter, and staggered away.

Maguire watched the boy and thought of Lily. Maybe it was the beer, maybe the insolence. It was only six months earlier, in

the winter, when he received the first letter from her. She was his forgotten mother, lost to drink so long ago he hardly remembered. She disappeared with a sailor when he was a boy even younger than Tommy. After the divorce, Red's father Sean quit the munitions plant in Chicago and drove Red to Butte, Montana. His father found work in the mines. Red never knew where Lily had gone. Then came the letter, mailed to the *Bugle*, after more than thirty years of silence. She was coming to Butte.

Maguire scanned the burning building for signs of Lily. He long ago had quit thinking of her as his mother. His adopted mother, Aggie Walsh, lived up the hill in Dublin Gulch. Aggie, confirmed Irish, named him Red when he was young. Lily, also Irish, had named him Kieran. She had come to Butte with promises of making up for all those lost years. Aggie shook her head in dismay, even disappointment, but she stood by Red's belief that he would find something good in his birth mother. He paid Lily's first month's rent at the Liberty Hotel, recently converted into apartments, and found her a job waiting tables at the Silver Star café a block away. When he packed her meager possessions up the creaking stairs in the old hotel, once the home of the copper king F. Augustus Heinze, he wondered how the building would stand up to fire.

Now he knew. It crackled and popped as flames fed on varnished bannisters and the rich décor in the lobby. Smoke poured from the windows. Tenants emerged from the front door lugging potted plants and books and pillows. An elderly woman braced a calico cat under one arm and carried a silver coffee pot with the other. The fire grew. Two cops, bracing a huge man between them, staggered under his weight through streams of water. Another man ran coughing into the street and collapsed. Maguire watched the strange parade. Lily wasn't among them. He edged toward the hotel's entrance.

Headline: FIRE!

Someone grabbed him. "Tommy, I told you —." It wasn't Tommy but police captain Harold "Duke" Ferndale. Maguire tried to shake loose but Ferndale held firm. "Maguire, an old dick like me spots any man who thinks he can run into a burning building and get away with it. Don't think twice."

"Lily, Duke. I don't see her."

"Let them hose haulers do their job, will you? Look there, that her over there?"

Maguire turned to see a burly fireman hurry from the building just as a floor collapsed somewhere inside. Spectators screamed as a wave of ash roiled over them.

Draped over the fireman's shoulder was a white-haired woman in a pink nightgown. She looked pitifully small against the big man. Ferndale released his grip on Maguire. "That's Bull Gorniak, one of them new hose haulers over at Butte Fire. Looks like he pulled her out without a second to spare, Red."

Maguire nodded. As he stepped toward Lily, he saw something else. A man yelled for help from a shattered window on the top floor. He crouched inside the frame, clutching each side, an orange glow silhouetting his tensed body. His mouth moved but his cries for help disappeared in fire and chaos. He turned to look at the flame and turned back, screaming in panic. Maguire grabbed a fireman and pointed. That very instant a burst of fire wind blasted the man from the window. He hung in the air, arms and legs swimming wildly, before plunging to the sidewalk. Maguire and Ferndale ran to help but it was too late. The man had landed hard. Gorniak appeared beside them.

"Get the hell out, boys. It's coming down. Drag him if you have to but get far away if'n you want to see yourselves in the mirror tomorrow."

Maguire pulled the dead man by the arms across Broadway. His bare toes tracked ripples in the water. Then came an abrupt rumble, reminding Maguire of a heavily loaded ore train on

rough tracks, as the hotel's façade collapsed in a shower of sparks and fury.

The block fell into ash by mid-afternoon. All of the Liberty Hotel was down and smoldering. So was the Windsor Block and the annex that connected the buildings. Gone were a cigar store, a barber shop, a tool company, an antique shop, a bridal store, an eye clinic, and several business offices. Red Maguire walked back and forth staring into the damage and making notes for the story he would write. One confirmed death. Three-alarm fire. Six thousand feet of hose. Four pumpers and an aerial ladder operating at top capacity. Every off-duty fireman called out and then some. Twelve water lines running at once from hydrants blocks away. Ten small businesses destroyed. Smoke damage in Hennessy's department store and Sears-Roebuck across the alley. More than a hundred homeless tenants. Biggest commercial fire ever in Butte, a city of fires. Drama befitting a city accustomed to fire and death.

The devastation accomplished its task in ten hours. The fire departments fought valiantly to save the Hirbour Block, the tallest building in Butte. It remained undamaged. The *Bugle* editor, Clyde Stoffleman, arrived in the city room soon after the fire started to begin work on an *Extra* edition. He closed every window to block the choking black smoke. The blustery Stoffleman, rarely inclined toward sentimentality, felt different when he saw what the fire had done. He growled when Maguire, his brown suit blackened and his handsome face smudged, walked into the city room.

"Is it a fair conclusion that I should know my crime reporter is on the job when we have a major fire and not sleeping off a

Headline: FIRE!

bad hangover? Or romancing the illustrious Irene Rossini, whom I hear has become your nightly habit?"

"Honey went to Missoula to see her aunt."

"So, you're without your pretty girlfriend? The belle of Butte? To this day, Maguire, I marvel at your capacity for lost love. Hang onto her but never forget you're married to this job. I told you that when I hired you as a punk kid. My expectations haven't changed."

"I've got the story, boss."

"You better come with news the rest of us don't already know or I'll have you mucking rock a mile down in the Mountain Con until your heart breaks, Maguire."

"Figure you can count on me, boss. You ought to know that after, what, those long-lost Depression years?"

"Given that we're well into 1955, Maguire, I applaud your math skills. You're a fine testament to your Catholic education at Boys Central. So, your time there wasn't all basketball and girls and juvenile pranks? Now, enlighten me. What caused this fire? A drunk smoking in bed? Some kid playing with Dad's matches? Cow kick over the kerosene lamp?"

"Funny, boss. The big shot mayor says it's too early to tell. Says determining a cause might take months while they clear away the rubble. Who knows what mysteries we'll uncover?"

"I trust you'll make it your business to find out," Stoffleman said. The editor ran his fingers over the ugly scar across his jaw. It's what he did when he was upset.

"What's eating you, boss? Biggest wild news day we've seen in Butte since the shootouts last winter. When I write this story, we'll sell every newspaper we print. I expected to see you warm all over."

"Bad pun, Maguire, but I'll excuse you for it under these circumstances." Stoffleman swiveled in his chair to catch a view through the grimy windows. "True, Red, we make our money

telling the news but it's the loss that's got me down. I don't expect you to know the history of the Liberty Hotel, but you should, and you better damn well include all of it in your story or you'll make new friends in the unemployment office. The hotel was a landmark, Red. Once a place of true distinction. When it was known as Liberty Hall at the turn of the century, Theodore Roosevelt spoke from the balcony. So did many other great orators who extolled the city's riches and political power. In its heyday, the Liberty was among the finest and most ornate in Butte. Make a note of that."

Stoffleman paused to light a cigarette.

"So, here's more. The Liberty had a tonsorial shop second to none. Business owners and stockmen from all over Montana came to parlay in the lobby. Now it's ash and memories. Between never-ending fires and the Anaconda Company tearing everything down that stands in the way of that voracious new open pit, we're seeing Butte disappear in large chunks. Sure, Red, we'll sell newspapers as we reveal all the disturbing details about the decline. Trouble is, our stories won't bring back what we've lost. You want to know what's eating on me? Losing the Liberty rekindled my personal deep misgivings about the future of this town. I should have preached my anger over these wretched fires from the top floor of the Liberty Hotel when I had the chance. Fires and the wrecking ball. The destruction never ends. Sure, I write editorials demanding action, but who listens? Nobody takes on the Company except the unions and us poor ink-stained saps here at the *Bugle*. All these fires in uptown Butte leave me wondering what will remain of our city in ten years. Every fire steals more away from me, from you, from every resident of Butte. It tires me out. Now go write your story."

Maguire walked over to his desk. Ash swirled outside the grimy windows. "Boss? Suppose the fire had taken the *Bugle*. What then?"

Headline: FIRE!

"We'd both be shoveling rock a mile down, Maguire."

The *Bugle* went to press by dinner time. The paper's sales staff sold sponsorships to local merchants who called for fire safety. The advertisement covered the *Extra's* back page. Stoffleman stuffed the remaining space with Maguire's story, which filled two full pages, and half a dozen dramatic photographs of the fire. One of them showed Gorniak rescuing Lily. Obituary reporter Calvin Claggett had no luck naming the man who fell from the window. The fire destroyed any documents identifying him. Long before the press roared into business, Claggett went to the Forever More funeral home to view the body. He worked there in the evenings, helping embalm bodies in Butte's ever-generous funeral trade, and over the years had bent over hundreds of mangled victims. "Bad as any I've seen," he told Maguire when he returned to the *Bugle*. "You saw for yourself at the scene."

"Blood was what I saw and plenty of it."

"When a man loses his face, he loses what people know about him. Our mystery victim could be anybody. Nobody's gone to police to report a loved one missing. He'll keep for a day or two at the Forever More before they plant him. Without a name he'll go to a pauper's grave. Sad, isn't it?"

"You make your living writing about sadness, Calvin."

"So do you, Red. Repeating the obvious, aren't we?"

"He screamed for help. I saw him but couldn't hear him in all the noise. His last words, unheard."

"Not unusual for a dying man, Red."

The *Bugle's* owner, an upstairs recluse known only to the news staff as the Old Man, wanted fifty newsboys on the street to hawk papers in the uptown business district. Barely half

showed up. The truants, including Tommy Turkela, couldn't stop retching stale beer. Stoffleman, never daunted in times of crisis, sent his reporters to bars and street corners with stacks of newspapers. Maguire sold fifty in five minutes. Half an hour after the press stopped running, all the papers sold out. The Old Man soon demanded another press run of five thousand copies. By mid-evening they too were gone. The *Extra* proved popular in the M & M bar as the night wore on. Some of the regulars had stayed anchored to their red stools all day to trade tales about the fire.

"Says in this here story by Red Maguire the hotel reopened two years ago," one miner told another at the food grill along the back wall. "They refurnished the damn thing into apartments before it burned up. Sure as hell glad I never owned stock in it."

"Mind if I use that quote?" It was Maguire, standing a few feet away, ordering a hamburger.

"Who the hell are you, sonny?"

"You read my story just now. You tell me."

"You're Red Maguire? The real one? Damn, Red Maguire right here in the flesh. So how did that fire happen anyhow?" The miner burped, grabbed a baked potato from his plate, and gnawed on it like a dinner roll.

Maguire tipped his fedora back and crossed his arms. He was thinking.

"Fire has a mind of its own. You know any different?"

The miner shook his head and continued to gorge the potato. Ketchup dribbled from his chin.

"So, I see it like this," Maguire said. "Maybe a wise guy had a beef. Happens all the time but we never know at the beginning, do we? What we see is the ending. This big fire, maybe it was nothing intentional at all. Maybe the wind blew over a candle. Being that it was a summer night, some people opened their windows to catch a breeze. And so, as they

Headline: FIRE!

slumbered, a small lick of flame came to life somewhere in that big hotel. A flame no bigger than your pinky. It flickered for a moment. A flame so small we could snuff it out with a single breath. There would be no fire and we would go about our business today. But say some wise guy lit that flame. Figure his mind was in a bad place. Say he lit that flame and fanned it into a fire. If he's a criminal in a racket for fast money, he'll play his cards sooner rather than later. He won't hide forever."

"You gonna tell us all about it in the *Bugle* when you find out who done it?"

"Bub, the *Bugle* is the only place you'll read the real story. Bank on it."

The miner wiped speckles of potato from three-day-old whiskers with a grimy sleeve. "Tell me, Red Maguire, whaddya know 'bout that man blown from the window? I seen it happen. He come flying out of there like a kite come loose in a stiff wind."

"You ever know a dead man who had much to say?"

When Maguire left the M & M, the air still stinking of wet smoking wood, he remembered Lily. Where had she gone? He hurried back to the *Bugle* to call Ferndale.

"Where all of today disappeared to, I ain't got a clue," Ferndale was saying. "Them women tenants went to the YWCA, Red. Lily included. Seemed scared but no injuries far as I could tell. Them people lost everything. Sorry sight, seeing them folks in nightgowns and pajamas under gray blankets on cots. Ever notice how fires break out while people sleep? St. Vincent de Paul brought clothes. My uniforms asked the tenants what they knew about the fire starting but nobody admitted to knowing. I didn't hang around to find out more. Spent all afternoon

keeping gawkers away from the fire scene. Some of them people think they have license to hunt for treasure. We caught one mug trying to break open a burned-up cash register. Had the drawer half open when I cuffed him. Soon enough, them dayside miner boys come off shift, curious and such, drinking off their thirst in a dozen bars and then stampeding to Broadway to stir up trouble. Drunks hate boundaries. Don't suppose that comes as news to you. We pushed 'em back and a few picked fights."

"Hit anybody and make 'em sore, Duke?"

"One mug whacked me on the jaw. No stranger to cops. Thinks he's a big shot down in the mine. Likes to fight, maybe, but he ain't got skills to win any. I put him down with a straight shot to the nose. Felt good. I can still throw a punch."

Maguire laughed. "He must be new in town, Duke. Maybe somebody will acquaint him with the fact that you won more bouts than any light heavyweight boxer in this city. A southpaw to boot. Bet the mug never saw it coming."

"We hauled him to jail to think about it. Damn fool."

Maguire saw Stoffleman staring his way. "I need news, Duke. It's late and the boss wants to know what I've got."

"News, Maguire? That rag the *Bugle* put out this afternoon ought to last a week. Your story ran on so long I fell asleep before I could finish it. Now you want to write even more? Give it up."

"Wish I could but the morning paper comes out no matter what. That's why we call the extra one the *Extra*."

"Never took you for a fool, Maguire. At least not today."

"Give me something new to go on, will you?"

Maguire heard Ferndale's sigh of exasperation over the line. "Here's a disturbing clue and you owe me. That man who fell from the window? The one we dragged across the street? After we hauled him off to the morgue, Coroner Mike Martin found a half-used book of matches in the man's shirt pocket."

Headline: FIRE!

"What's the big deal about that anyway?"

"Where do you carry your cigarettes, Maguire?"

"In my shirt pocket. Don't you?"


"The man had no cigarettes."

Maguire exhaled in recognition. "He had no cigarettes, begging the question, what was he lighting, then?"

"Keep me out of it, Maguire, until evidence shows a crime was committed. Chief don't like me talking out of school. But it's sure as hell curious, ain't it? I'll tell you this. You wouldn't be wrong if you printed this clue in tomorrow's paper. You and I both know how more clues turn up when the public knows what the cops know."

Ferndale hung up without signing off. Deadline looming, Maguire turned to his Remington typewriter and began to write.

Headline: FIRE! is my third Red Maguire mystery novel. The first is *Mystery of the Purple Roses*. The second is *Masks, Mayhem and Murder*. The stories take place in the legendary mining city of Butte, Montana, in 1954 and 1955. Maguire reports crime for the *Bugle* newspaper. Thanks to my readers who bring Red Maguire, Honey Rossini, Duke Ferndale and the others to life.

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

Website: kevinsgiles.com

Email: kevin@kevinsgiles.com

Free newsletter signup: green button at kevinsgiles.com

Facebook: facebook.com/kevsgiles/

Twitter: [@kevsgiles](https://twitter.com/kevsgiles)

Amazon profile: amazon.com/Kevin-S-Giles

Also by Kevin S. Giles:

Nonfiction:

Flight of the Dove: The Story of Jeannette Rankin

One Woman Against War: The Jeannette Rankin Story

Jerry's Riot: True Story of Montana's 1959 Prison Disturbance

Fiction:

Mystery of the Purple Roses

Masks, Mayhem and Murder

Summer of the Black Chevy

To order: <https://booklocker.com/>



A suspicious fire destroys an historic hotel, where a stranger plunges to his death from an upper-story window. Newsman Kieran "Red" Maguire takes to the dark streets to unravel the mystery. It's 1955 in the mining city of Butte, Montana.

HEADLINE: FIRE!

By Kevin S. Giles

Order the book from the publisher BookLocker.com

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/12920.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**