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The Night the Rich Men Burned

Written by Malcolm Mackay

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THE NIGHT THE RICH MEN BURNED

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**THE
NIGHT THE
RICH MEN
BURNED**

CHARACTERS

Oliver Peterkinney – A young man ready to make his way in a world that seems determined to give him few options. He's smart enough to make his own.

Alex Glass – As unemployable as his best friend Oliver, but much more of a dreamer. There are chances out there for tough young men, he's sure of it.

Ella Fowler – They call her a party girl, but it's all about work for Ella. Work a horrible job to pay for what will one day be a good life.

Ronald 'Potty' Cruickshank – Certainly the biggest, and probably the most unpleasant debt collector in the business. People are money, and money is king.

Arnold Peterkinney – Has looked after his grandson Oliver for a few years now, still worried about what direction the boy's life might meander in.

Billy Patterson – Ruthless, efficient and tough. Don't let the rough exterior fool you though, he's more than smart enough to grow his debt collection business in a crowded market.

Marty Jones – Marty is a lot of things. Pimp and debt collector are two of them, and a lot of people find those things ugly. Marty makes money though, and everyone loves that.

Alan Bavidge – There's nobody Patterson trusts more than Bavidge. Tough, yeah, and seemingly without emotion, he does his job as well as anyone in the city.

Jim Holmes – There are plenty of men like Jim. Big, brutal and inexplicably angry, he bounces from one employer to the next, wasting no time in making himself expendable.

Norah Faulkner – It's not easy building a life with a man like Jim Holmes, you have to make yourself at least as tough as he is. So she has.

Gary 'Jazzy' Jefferson – Jazzy provides a public service, lending money to those who couldn't otherwise borrow. Charge creative interest rates and sell the debt on when they can't pay. Easy money.

PC Paul Greig – A cop, and to many, a criminal. He'll take money from criminals, slip them some info now and then, but it's all in the name of crime management, you understand.

Roy Bowles – Decades doing a steady trade in selling weapons to the criminal industry. A good, reliable, solid individual: who could be better to work for?

Jamie Stamford – Alex MacArthur's hard man of choice, therefore a man who doesn't often have to face consequences. But then, you gamble like he does, and consequences will catch you up.

Neil Fraser – A tough guy, sure, but not a smart guy. Doing a few menial jobs for John Young doesn't make you important, he doesn't seem to have realized that yet.

Alex MacArthur – His organization has been running at the top for decades now, but that makes him old, and illness has left him weak. Even he can sense the change coming.

Howard 'Howie' Lawson – A man with connections and no money, looking to get a little by selling guns to the suppliers who desire them most.

Peter Jamieson – Runs one of the biggest organizations in the city, maybe the fastest-growing too. A lot of people, like Marty, are happy to be under his umbrella.

Ray Buller – People think of them as old men, maybe a little feeble, but you don't get to be Alex MacArthur's second in command without being as sharp and dangerous as a razor.

Ronald 'Rolly' Cruickshank – He created the Cruickshank family business, collecting bad debts from weak people, and trained his delightful, beloved nephew to replace him.

Kevin Currie – Controls the counterfeit end of the Jamieson business, and controls it well. A man to be trusted, a man to listen to.

Angus Lafferty – The drug business is a constant battlefield, and Lafferty is the man importing the goods for the Jamieson army.

John Young – Peter Jamieson's right-hand man, has been since the start. Very little gets past him, so you'd better stick to whatever rules he gives you. Not much to ask, is it?

Don Park – He's the brightest star in the MacArthur organization, which, coincidentally, makes him the biggest threat to MacArthur's leadership.

Mark Garvey – A gun seller, not as cautious as some, not as desperate as others. Always on the lookout for a good connection.

Gordon Aird – Mr Typical, when it comes to a debt collector's clients. A man who only knows the value of what goes into his arm and will pay for it any way he can.

Conn Griffiths – Ranks among the best muscle in the city. Like all the best, he's not just brutal, he's smart too. That's where the danger lies, and it's why Patterson hired him.

Mikey Summers – Got a reputation for brutality, and once he got it, the offers flooded in. Chooses to work alongside Conn for Patterson.

- John Kilbanne** – He used to be a legitimate bookkeeper with ambitions. Might not be legitimate any more, but he's still occasionally ambitious.
- Andy Leven** – Businesses like Patterson's are built on men like Leven, at the bottom of the ladder, doing the dirty work for him.
- Collette Duffy** – She hasn't quite switched on to the real world yet. When she does she might just realize borrowing money to pay your previous debt isn't clever financial management.
- Liam Duffy** – He has a good job working for Chris Argyle, and a sister he constantly needs to keep an eye on. It can be a hard life.
- Chris Argyle** – Everyone's known for years that Argyle has a growing business as an importer. Always been good at keeping himself off bigger people's target lists.
- Willie Caldwell** – He was Uncle Rolly's moneymen for years, carried on working for Potty. Not much lately though, poor old sod hasn't been well.
- Steven Wales** – Potty's full-time moneymen, charged with making sure dirty money comes out of the accounts smelling of roses, or any similarly fragrant cliché.
- Ewan Drummond** – A pal of Oliver and Alex, a boy with the same problems and the same ambitions. Bigger than them, and maybe a little dumber. Not a great combination, really.
- Adam Jones** – He's Marty's twin brother, and runs a club that Marty uses for some private parties. Whether Adam knows it or not, he's in his brother's shadow for keeps.
- Nate Colgan** – In the conversation about hardest men in a hard city, Colgan often tops the list. A man who can scare the beasts out of nightmares.

Russell Conrad – Like many gunmen, he's a hard man to know, harder still to like. If he's looking for you, you have a problem.

Ian Allen – With his cousin Charlie, he runs an efficient drug business that makes an effort to stay out of the city itself. Why pick a big fight when you're winning all the little ones?

Charlie Allen – Yes, he does get fed up of people calling him and Ian brothers, but who really cares? More than cousins, they're a damned profitable business partnership.

Donall 'Spikey' Tokely – Trying to elbow his way into the gun market, but he's mostly selling to the young and inexperienced right now. People like himself.

Robby Draper – He'll sell you a gun if you want one, whoever you are. In desperate times, anyone who'll buy is a good customer.

Stephen 'Gully' Fitzgerald – An old-school hard man, taught the likes of Bavidge and Colgan a lot of lessons they've put into meaningful practice.

PROLOGUE

He ended up unconscious and broken on the floor of a warehouse, penniless and alone. He was two weeks in hospital, unemployable thereafter, but that didn't matter. What mattered was that, for a few weeks beforehand, he had money. Not just a little money, but enough to show off with, and that was the impression that stuck.

It had been a while since they'd seen him. Months, probably. They were heading back from the jobcentre having made a typically fruitless effort at sniffing out employment. They went in, they searched the touchscreen computer near the door, and they left. Two friends, officially unemployed since the day they left school together a year before, both willing to do unofficial work if that was available. They bumped into Ewan Drummond as they walked back up towards Peterkinney's grandfather's flat.

'All right lads,' Drummond said, grinning at them, 'need a lift anywhere?' He was as big and gormless as ever, but the suggestion of transport was new.

'Lift? From you?' Glass asked.

'Yeah, me. Got myself a motor these days. Got to have one in my line of work, you know.' He said it to provoke

questions that would allow him to trot out boastful answers.

Glass and Peterkinney looked at each other before they looked at Drummond. There wasn't a lot of work among their circle of friends. The kind of work that let a man like Drummond make enough money to buy a car was unheard of. They could guess what was involved in the work, but they wanted to hear it.

'Yeah, we'll take a lift,' Peterkinney nodded.

They followed Drummond back down to where his car was parked. Turned out to be a very respectable-looking saloon, not some old banger or boy racer's toy.

'Well, yeah, got to keep up appearances you see.'

Glass dropped into the passenger seat, Peterkinney the back. They were in no hurry to get anywhere, but this was too intriguing to pass on.

'Come on then big man,' Glass said with a mischievous smile, 'what's this big job you got?'

'Well, uh, I can't really tell you much. Shouldn't tell you much, I mean. Hush-hush, you know.'

By this point Peterkinney was leaning over from the back seat, crowding Drummond, knowing he couldn't keep quiet for long. Drummond's mouth and brain had always been loosely acquainted, so things he shouldn't say frequently slipped out.

'I mean, I suppose I can tell you a bit, but you got to keep it quiet, right.'

‘Sure,’ they answered together.

‘I’m working for Potty Cruickshank. I’m one of his boys.’ He said it with such pride, such force, that they both assumed it meant something. Then they thought about it.

‘Who?’ Glass asked.

‘One of his boys? The hell does that mean?’ Peterkinney asked warily.

‘Nah, nothing like that. He’s, like, a debt collector. I go round and pick up money that people owe him. It’s all legit. Well, sort of, financial services, that sort of thing. Good money, real good money. You know how much I made last week alone?’

‘Isn’t that dangerous?’ Peterkinney asked.

‘Not really, no. Well, now and again, but you got to be tough to make a living these days, guys, that’s how it is. How else you going to make good money?’ Said with wisdom he presumed but didn’t possess. ‘So come on, guess what I made last week.’ He was desperate to tell them by this point and unwilling to wait for a guess that might be accurate enough to take the wind out of his sails. ‘Six-fifty I made last week. Worked four days, couple of hours a day. Six-fifty. I’m telling you, it’s the life.’

They didn’t say much more to Drummond; just let him rumble on about how much money he was making until he dropped them off. They walked up to the flat Peterkinney shared with his grandfather, a poky little place you would

only invite a real friend back to. They went silently into Peterkinney's small bedroom, a cramped room with nothing in the way of luxuries. There was only one subject of conversation.

'Six-fifty a week he's making. Him,' Glass said. 'He's making ten times what we make on Job Seekers.'

'Come on, it ain't six-fifty a week. It was six-fifty in one week, but that doesn't mean he'll get it every week. And look what he has to do for it. How long you think it's going to be before someone kicks the living shit out of him? His teeth will be down his throat and his money will be up the wall.'

Glass sighed. 'All right, yeah, fine, but look at the money. He's making good money. Even if it's short-term, right, it's still money. And he's got to do some shitty stuff for it, but come on, you think we're going to get a job that pays us that for non-shitty work?'

'I don't think we're going to get a job at all,' Peterkinney sighed, and slumped back on his bed.

A sentence he was tired of uttering. Glass sat on the chair in the room and tilted his head back, thinking about Ewan Drummond. No smarter than either him or Peterkinney, probably less so. No tougher when push came to shove, although he was bigger than them, which helped. He was no better connected than they were, which was to say that he hadn't been connected to the criminal industry at all as far as Glass knew. Must have gotten his foot in the door without

realizing where he was stepping. All of which suggested that employment in the business, and six hundred and fifty quid a week, was within their grasp.

Glass didn't say any of this to Peterkinney because he knew what the reaction would be. Peterkinney would pour scorn on it; tell him he needed to get real. Peterkinney was all about getting whatever job he could, no daydreaming attached. That was fine by Glass; how his best friend had always been. A realist. They left school underqualified and stumbled together into a job market that had no room for them or interest in them. So they struggled along together, and were still struggling.

Glass couldn't stop thinking about it, and that was really the point. People like Ewan Drummond were useful both in the work they did and the people they encouraged. None too bright and loaded with cash. He was a walking billboard for employers like Potty Cruickshank. A debt collector like Potty had a high turnover of staff, so that positive PR was worth its weight. Glass saw Drummond and knew he was at least as capable. Six-fifty a week, four days a week, a couple of hours a day. Think about it. The money, the cars, the women, the parties. Him and Peterkinney, lounging around doing fuck-all, waiting for some godawful nine-to-five that would pay them buttons and last six months if they were lucky. No, what Drummond was doing, that was real work.

It wouldn't have mattered if Glass had known. Even if

he'd seen Drummond lying on that warehouse floor two weeks later, it would have made no impact. He would have spent the previous two weeks thinking of nothing but the money Drummond was making, and working out how he and Peterkinney could do the same. Nothing, no matter how grim, was going to change his mind. That was the way to make good money. That was the best option.

'I'll ask the old man if he's heard of anything going,' Peterkinney said quietly. 'We can go back down the job-centre again in a couple of days.' His grandfather was going to have a word with a friend at a packaging factory on their behalf sometime today, although that would lead nowhere as usual. Their names on a list for future reference.

'Yeah,' Glass said. But he wasn't thinking about the job-centre. Wasn't thinking about any sort of work that was going to be advertised. He was thinking of the world Drummond now inhabited. He was thinking of the money. He was thinking of the life.

PART ONE

1

Start with a kick to the door. He got a crack out of it, and the plain door shuddered in the frame. Didn't open though. Still staring back at them. Try again. Not a boot this time. Give it a shoulder. A short run-up and a collision with the door. A bigger crack and the door caves in, buckled on the hinges and smashed around the lock. Alex Glass stumbles in with it.

'Shit.' A mutter under his breath. Embarrassed by his ungainly entrance. Embarrassment pushed aside by an attempt at professionalism. He's taking the lead here. Older by six months. His accomplice, Oliver Peterkinney, is still only nineteen. Anyway, this is Glass's job. He set it up. He found the target.

They're searching downstairs, through the kitchen, through the living room. It's a small house, which helps. Tidy as well, everything where it should be. No rubbish for someone to leap out from behind. Flicking lights on and off as they check each room. No attempt at subtlety, not after that entrance. To the bottom of the stairs. If he's here, he's heard them by now. He's had time enough to get a weapon. They didn't plan for that. What if he keeps a weapon by his bed?

Something else to put on the long list of things they didn't plan for.

A light comes on at the top of the stairs. Glass and Peterkinney look at each other. Never been here before. Never been in this situation. If they had to make a split-second decision, they would be too late. A man has emerged at the top of the stairs. Older than these two by ten years. Fatter by three stone. Wearing nothing but his boxer shorts. That makes up their minds for them.

They're looking up the stairs, necks craned. Suddenly feeling confident. The amateurs just got lucky, as all amateurs need to in this business. Peterkinney moves up one step.

'All right, Holmes,' he's saying. Because it is Jim Holmes, the target. He doesn't need clothes to look like his picture. Big and broad, with a thick head of dark hair and a dimpled chin. 'We can sort this out nice and quiet. No need for trouble.' Peterkinney's smart enough to know how dumb that sounds. You smash your way into a guy's house and tell him there's no need for trouble. This isn't how Peterkinney would have played it.

Holmes had his hands in the air, but they're falling now. Who did he think he was going to find at the bottom of the stairs? Maybe the police. Probably the police. Would be about fucking time. He'd raise his hands to them; try to make a good impression. Could have been worse than the police. Could have been a real tough guy. He knows Marty Jones is looking

for him. Wants to send a strong message. Marty's big on sending messages. Marty is under the protection of Peter Jamieson. That could get him the use of a man like Nate Colgan. Now there's a man you raise your hands to, no matter how tough you are. But these two? These are just kids. The one coming up the stairs doesn't even look like he's started shaving.

'The fuck are you pair?' Holmes is growling. Going for his best tough-guy voice, which is pretty good by general standards. He's had plenty of practice. Being a tough guy is his job. It's how he makes his living. Marty lends money to people. That money gathers interest at a mathematically improbable rate. Men like Holmes collect the debt. But Holmes got a little tired of handing all that nice money over to a smarmy prick like Marty. Holmes did the hard work, deserved more of the reward. So he started keeping a bigger share for himself. Took Marty an awful long time to work that out, for a guy who figures himself as sharp as a razor. But he was always going to work it out eventually. Marty's no mug.

'We're here for Marty,' Glass is saying. Saying it like it means something.

Peterkinney, three steps up, is looking back at him. Scowling. Shouldn't have said Marty. Should have said Jamieson. That would have carried more weight. Common sense says you exaggerate the power you have behind you.

'Pft.' A snort of derision. Not aimed at Marty. Holmes

isn't stupid either; he knows how dangerous Marty can be. A well-connected guy with a big ego and a short temper? Those are always dangerous. 'He sending kids to do his fighting for him now?' There's a smile in his eyes. Marty actually has sent kids. There are other debt collectors he could have sent. Tough guys. They'd have done it too, for the right price, even though they know Holmes. Plenty of general muscle he could have hired for the job. But Marty sent the cheap option. A couple of kids looking to make a good first impression.

'Look, we can sort this out,' Glass is saying from the bottom of the stairs. Still trying to lure him down. Trying to fool a man who does this for a living. Still hoping this can be easy. It was never going to be that easy.

Peterkinney isn't waiting. Holmes won't be won round. Once he has it in his head that they're kids, he's going to treat them that way until they change his mind. Only way to change his mind is to do what they came here to do. And the clock is ticking. You don't think the neighbours heard them smash the door in? You don't think they'll be calling the police right now?

Glass is about to open his mouth to say something else when Peterkinney moves. Jumping two steps at a time, getting to Holmes and making a grab for him. So what if he's older? So what if he's tougher, has a reputation for bad things? He's nearly naked. There are two of them. They came here to send a message for Marty. They can't leave

until they've tried and they need to leave soon. So you do something, don't you?

Holmes has seen him coming. Leaning his weight forwards on the balls of his feet. Shoulders down, ready. Peterkinney is two steps from the top and reaching out for a grab. It looks like a wild attempt. A throw of the arms in the general direction of the target. An amateur lunging at a pro. That's what Holmes thinks. It's what he thinks when he throws his weight directly at Peterkinney. He thinks he's going to knock the kid back down the way he came.

That's not what Peterkinney's thinking. He's thrown his arms out there, but he's not watching where he's throwing. He's watching Holmes's feet. Waiting for that reactive lurch forwards. And now it's coming, and Peterkinney's moving his feet, pushing himself backwards against the stair wall with a thud. Watching as Holmes goes sailing past. Holmes's shoulder catches him, but it's glancing, no impact. Holmes is falling onto the stairs, shouting something loud that doesn't involve words. But Holmes has experience of falling over at other people's insistence. This is standard for him. He's managed to push out and wedge himself in the stairs, three steps down from the top.

But that isn't enough to make him safe. Not nearly enough, and Holmes knows it. You can't be on your back in this situation. You're either on your feet or you're out of the fight. You can rely on them being kids, but you can't rely on

them being stupid. Before Holmes can struggle to his feet, Peterkinney's got his first kick in.

Knocking Holmes down a couple of steps with the first kick. Holmes shouting, but this fight is over. All Holmes has left is noise. Peterkinney jumping downward, kicking into Holmes with both feet. Peterkinney's landing on his arse, it's jarring but worth it. Holmes is bouncing down the stairs now. Glass had been moving up the stairs to help, now jumping down the last three to get out of the way. A grunting ball of flesh crashing down after him. Holmes has rolled to the bottom. Lying there. Not moving. Groaning, but not moving.

Glass is watching, doing nothing. Standing beside Holmes, looking up at Peterkinney. As far as Glass is concerned, this is over. Peterkinney's quickly down the stairs, standing beside Glass now. Looking down at Holmes. Taking a step back and kicking him hard in his ample guts.

'Try and knock me down the fucking stairs,' Peterkinney's saying. Speaking low, a little spit on his lips. 'That's for Marty. You remember that. That's what happens.' An intensity conjured from a place Glass didn't know his friend possessed.

Glass is pulling at Peterkinney's arm. The job is more than done, time to go. A second person has emerged at the top of the stairs. A thickset woman, glaring down at them. The woman who keeps this house organized and tidy.

'Get out,' she's shouting at them. 'Go on, get out.' She's

starting to march down the stairs towards them. Wrapped up in a thick dressing gown, hair tied back, slippers too big for her making an unsettling slapping noise as she walks. Scowling like she was born that way. Moving towards her partner at the bottom of the stairs. He's groaning on the floor, rolling slightly. Trying to twist into a position that relieves the pain. Trying to turn his back on them, so they can't kick him in the stomach again. Facing the striped wallpaper, hoping this is over. Peterkinney's given him one last kick in the small of the back, he and Glass turning for the door.

The woman's still shouting something, but it's unintelligible and entirely her own business. They're out into the night, across the small front garden with no fence and moving down the street. Trying not to run, but walking fast enough to draw attention. The neighbours will have heard the door being broken. They'll hear the shouting. People will be looking out of windows.

'We should have brought balaclavas,' Glass is saying.

'We should have brought a lot of things.' Peterkinney's thinking of all the things they did wrong in this job. More than he realizes. Their first job. Thrown into it by Marty Jones. Someone with experience, a professional, would have done it differently. They did the best that amateurs could.

'First thing I'm spending money on is a car,' Glass is saying. They're still walking too fast, but they're putting distance between themselves and the house. Looking backwards

half the time. Nobody following. But then, nobody would need to. You can see their guilt from a distance.

Peterkinney isn't saying anything. Glass wanted this. He's in charge, so let him do the talking. He's his best mate, and you don't puncture your best mate's balloon. But this has been a shambles. They didn't think about it beforehand. Marty gave Glass the job. Their first chance to make a good impression. They rushed out to do it, knowing the prize that will be waiting for them. Next time will be different. Next time they'll make an effort to plan it. Having a vehicle to get away in will be a good start. Neither of them owns a car. Peterkinney doesn't even have a licence.

They've reached the bottom of the street, round the corner. A little relief. They're out of view of the scene of the crime. Walking faster, almost jogging. Anyone looks out a window and they see two guilty-looking young men running past. The kind of guilty young men you remember. Maybe mention to the police if they knock on your door looking for information.

'We did it though,' Glass is saying. 'We fucking did it.'

'Yeah,' Peterkinney's nodding, and he's smiling despite himself. 'We fucking did.'