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**Opening Extract from...**

# Kings of America

Written by R. J. Ellory

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# KINGS OF AMERICA

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*This novel is dedicated to my editorial director, Jon Wood, and my editor, Jemima Forrester. Without their routinely unreasonable demands, this would have been something else entirely. I owe them a debt of gratitude for their enthusiasm, their creative input and their guidance.*

*Also to my agent, Euan Thorneycroft, for those times when I needed to be told to get back in the ring and slug it out.*

*To my wife, Victoria, for her endless support and encouragement.*

*Finally, I would like to acknowledge my grandmother.*

*She had no idea how to look after a little kid, so she sat me in front of the TV with the understanding that I could watch any film made before the year of my birth.*
*It was she who introduced me to the Golden Age of Hollywood, and thus initiated a love affair with film that has been true and faithful throughout my life.*

# FOREWORD

The quantity of research undertaken for the *Kings of America* project was both fascinating and very extensive. I consulted authoritative works on the history of Hollywood, also memoirs, newspapers, magazines and a wealth of other anecdotal information. The vast majority of things I learned have not been included in the book. This was never intended to be a history of Hollywood, per se, but rather the story of individuals and their experiences during an evocative, influential and significant time period. This book begins at a time when the magic of film was still utterly magical, and the foundations of the film capital of the world were being built by pioneers and forward-thinkers. As with all works of fiction there has been an element of creative license. If there are errors in time and place, then these were either unintentional, or they were deemed necessary for the continuity and flow of the narrative. I trust that those who have a far greater comprehension of the history of Hollywood will forgive me.

# ONE

**Ireland–November 1937**

*If you're born to hang, you'll never drown.*

The thought crossed Danny McCabe's mind like a cloud shadow across a field. Something his father used to tell him, like *Fate has you by the balls*, but with a poetic lilt.

Then Danny thought, *We are so feckin' brave*, and he knew they were all thinking the same thing as they lay there in the mud watching the Garda station. The mud sucked and dragged and hungered, and he could feel the damp and dirt in his bones. There was himself and Jimmy O'Connell and Micky Cavanaugh. No one dared say the truth, but he could hear it loud like chapel bells. He knew there was no bravery here, not a shred of it between them. Sure enough they were pure stupid, fueled by blarney and poteen and the raw edge of unbridled youth. What would Danny's nail-tough ma say if she could see him? She'd grab a fist of his hair and bring him to his knees; she'd look right down into his damned and everlasting soul and tell him the truth as it was.

*Ye're an eejut, lad. Didn't bear all that pain and heartache to raise an eejut. Get back to the house.*

Danny thought of his sisters—Brenda, Deirdre, and the little one, Erin, the light of his life. He felt a chill sense of terror through his bones and beyond.

"Here we go, lads," Micky Cavanaugh said, his voice an urgent whisper.

The three of them hunkered a little further into the black mud as the last of the Garda left the small police station and walked to the car.

It was Friday; even shades craved a drink ahead of the weekend.

A dark devil of a night, no doubt about it. The mud was rotten, and the rain fell straight down like stairposts and stank like black piss. Danny McCabe, a born fighter in his hands, heart, and head, clutched a whiskey bottle filled with gasoline, and he wanted

nothing more than to be home and away. But there was no turning back. Not a prayer.

Danny looked left at Micky; he could see the ghost of fear in his eyes. Long gone was the memory of all those big words from small mouths, acting the maggot, out on the lash, making believe their hearts were as big as their egos. They'd crossed paths with Johnny Madden, and he'd said, *Where the tongue slips, it speaks the truth*, and he'd looked at all three of them in turn, eye to eye, looked right through them, in fact, and they knew well enough he was a Fenian.

*I know you*, Madden had said to Danny, singling him out with a flinty stare. *You're Clancy McCabe's boy. Heard word you were a fighter like your father. Another one plannin' to bust out of Clonegal wit' your fists. Good luck's all I can say. Drag yourself as far away as ye can. This place'll forever drag ye back.*

Johnny Madden and his kind carried a fierce national pride, a sense of disbelieving indignation, a red-hot hatred for the heathen bastard English and all they represented. Folks said Madden and his fellows were Irish Republican Brotherhood, but they were more like some half-crazed illegitimate offspring, buckled with drink, never anything but ready for a fight.

Madden went on at them, saying, "Ye gotta do ye own growin', lads, no matter how tall your father." There was a glint of shamelessness in his eyes as he added, "Now let me buy ye fellers a drink."

Three drinks in and it was, "You want a job, I can get it for you . . . that's unless ye fellers're nowt but a scatter o' gowls wit' nary a backbone between ye."

Cavanaugh was drunkest and spoke first. "If it's a fight, we'll take it," he said. "Clonegal boys don't run from a fight."

"That they don't," Madden said.

Danny McCabe and Jimmy O'Connell didn't shed a word.

"I got a fight for ye . . . a wee skirmish if ye're up for it," Madden said.

"Sure as shite is shite," Cavanaugh said.

And then he gave them details, and they bantered together. *Yes, we can do it. Feck the shades. Burn the place out, sure. Send them a message they won't forget.*

"Be in touch wit' ye, then, I will," Madden said, and he got up from the table. He looked down at the sorry gang, gave a crooked smile, said, "Remember this, lads . . . whoever keeps his tongue keeps his friends," and then disappeared into the smoke-filled hubbub of a Friday-night pub.

And so it was, lying there in the stinking mud with bottle bombs in their hands and good intent in their hearts. Johnny Madden had given them this job with the promise that it'd make heroes of them to a man. Johnny Madden, mad bastard that he was, had become their leading light and mentor, and now they were ready to shit their pants.

Danny was the youngest, a mere eighteen years of age. He was a dreamer for ropes and rings, the smack of leather, the roar of crowds. The threat of another's fists lit a fire inside him, and he was all set to burn a road out of the past into a legendary future. Alongside him, neither leading nor following, were Micky Cavanaugh and Jimmy O'Connell, twenty-four and twenty-two respectively, both of them fathers, Micky twice over, wee babes lying at home with wives who were none too wise as to what was afoot.

The Garda car was gone, the station was empty, and out of the mud and shadows they came. Micky was up ahead, keen to show his true colors. Danny hung back a little, eyes left and right for signs of anyone who might share a word with the law. Most folks carried their tongues in their pockets, just as Johnny had said, believing it was against God and nature to share even the narrowest of truths with the shades. Rather die a squalid and terrible death by poison before telling a copper who done the poisoning.

The station was up ahead no more than fifty yards. It was a lonely stretch of road between nowhere and nowheres else. They were coming upon it fast, even on foot, and with the nearness of the place the tension and the tremors came on strong for Danny.

Micky glanced back toward Jimmy and Danny, motioning for Jimmy to head around the other side of the building, for Danny to approach from the rear. Windows on all three sides, a blessed Barrowside cocktail set to fly through each of them, and the place would rage like a hole into hell itself.

Danny's heart was a derailed train. He felt dizzy, too, like he'd drunk way more than he had. Jimmy was white as Dublin snow, eyes dark and round like ferryman pennies. Micky was twenty yards from the outer wall, jumping it now, hurrying across the last stretch of ground before the station itself. Danny saw him dip his head, and he was then out of sight until he flattened himself against the stonework and motioned for them to hurry the feck up, for Christ's sake.

Danny knew he was going to be sick, but no sick came.

He looked at the bottle in his hand, the rag stuffed in the neck,

the furious stench of gasoline intoxicating his mind, watering his eyes, there on his lips, in the back of his throat.

It was only a feckin' building, Jesus's sake. Nothing but bricks and mortar.

"Come on!" Micky hissed.

Jimmy started across the grass. Danny willed himself beyond all resistance and went after him.

Micky had a light going, was ready to fire up all three and send each of them to their positions.

Danny wondered if the thing would explode in his hand, if the bottle would bounce away from the glass and shower him with flaming gasoline, if he would burn down to a cinder right there and then as a penance for his sins. If not now, then when? Someday we all paid the piper.

"You pair of feckin' arseholes are gonna get us busted," Micky said, his voice a punch to the gut. "Hold out them bottles, for Christ's sake. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, I don't know what the feck ye pair are doin', I tell ye."

Jimmy's hand was out, the rag snatching at the flame like a hungry thing, and then it was alight, burning bright like a torch.

"Away!" Micky urged, and Jimmy went around the side of the building.

Before Danny even realized what was happening, the bottle in his hand was flaming, too.

"Go, go, go!" Micky said, and almost shoved Danny over.

Danny lost his footing for a second, and the sudden movement caused the flame to flare wildly. He was frightened then, truly frightened, more than he'd ever known, and hurried on to the window at the back.

Danny heard the glass breaking before he realized that he'd let the bottle go.

Almost as one, those three bottles went through their respective windows. A trio of dull crumps came from within as they broke and exploded.

It was not the sound that Danny had expected. He'd not have been able to say what he expected, but this was not it.

He imagined he felt the heat, but he could not have done. He saw the light, of course, and it was mere seconds before the three of them were howling back across the grass toward the low wall, vaulting it like the kids they once were, vaulting bowed backs in games of leapfrog.

"There's a bold feckin' message to the tans," Micky said, but Danny didn't feel it was so bold. He felt it was cowardly and pointless, would serve no purpose but to aggravate the Garda, inspire them to be even more random and vicious. This was the south. The north was where they needed to be, fighting the English direct, not down here making noises that would be nothing but faint echoes by the time they reached London.

Jimmy was the first to move. He wanted to be away from the scene. Soon as word was out that the place was burning, it would be crawling with shades. Johnny Madden hoped there would be nothing but cinders and ash by the time they got there, but a roaring furnace would suit just as well to make their point.

Danny could smell nothing but the gasoline on his hands and clothes. That would be as good as any written confession.

The three of them watched as the fire took hold, licking out through the busted windows, curling up against the walls, and finding the eaves despite the rain. Would take a flood of biblical proportions to put the thing out now.

"Good job if ever I seen one," Micky said. "Let's be away now, eh? 'Fore they get wise and send some gunfighters to kick our arses."

Micky started away, Jimmy on his heels, but there was something about the flames that entranced Danny, and he hesitated for a moment.

Had he not done so they would not have known until morning.

But Danny did hesitate, and when he saw that ghost of movement behind the very window through which he'd thrown the bottle, he *knew*. Not so much something he clearly saw, but something he perceived, something that was almost preternatural in its intensity.

There was someone inside, someone right there inside the Garda station, and the flames were billowing from those windows and the glass was cracking and snapping in the heat, and the brickwork around those apertures was blackening with soot, and whoever was in there was consigned to the hereafter, whether he deserved it or not.

"Th-there's s-someone in the b-building," Danny said, and his voice cracked, and he could barely hear himself above the sound of the rain and the sound of the flames.

"Danny!" Jimmy hollered. "Get off there . . . Be away with you, for Christ's sake!"

Danny looked back at Jimmy and Micky, and the expression on

Danny's face must have said all that needed saying, but still Jimmy asked.

"What're ye doin', lad? Get out of there, will ye?"

Danny shook his head. He looked back toward the station. His heart was like a clenched fist, and every drop of blood in his face had drawn away into hiding. He was washed-out and wasted, nothing but a ghost of himself.

"S-someone . . ." he whispered, and then it was Micky who was asking, taking one step backward, turning, looking at Jimmy as if Jimmy held a clue to what was going on.

Neither of them spoke, but Micky started walking and Jimmy followed on his heel.

Danny heard him first. He heard the screaming. It wasn't the sound of a man. Couldn't have been. It was the sound of a terrified beast, a creature from some other godforsaken place that had nothing at all to do with what they'd done.

Micky heard then, Jimmy too, and their eyes were wide with horror and they started running toward the place.

Danny was last in line, and even as they reached the side of the building, the fierce heat drove them back.

Micky and Jimmy backed away.

Danny stood there, could not avert his eyes from those flames.

"Get the feck away!" Jimmy shouted, and his words were swallowed as the roof started to give. It creaked and moaned like a ship gashed and twisted upon rocks, and there was a deep yawing sound as beams and rafters bowed beneath the weight of scorching-hot slates.

"Oh, Jesus!" Micky said, and for the first time the blarney was gone. He stood for a moment, and then he turned and ran backward. He stopped suddenly, walked back the way he'd come, and then started for the wall once more.

Something caught Danny's eye, out and to the left beyond the turn in the road. Was that a light? Was that headlights?

"Shades!" Micky said. "Feckin' shades are comin'!"

Danny looked toward the road. It was the shades for sure, behind them the fire engine, bell ringing so loud, and Micky Cavanaugh and Jimmy O'Connell stood and watched as their fate approached them from the road that ran adjacent to the Whelan farm.

Jimmy thought of his baby girl and started crying. It was involuntary, barely more than a physiological response, but he dropped to his knees and the tears streamed down his face. Danny

could see the smoke on his skin, the faint layer of soot through which the tears coursed.

He glanced back, saw Jimmy and Micky readying themselves for flight.

He could not go. He could not leave the man to burn.

He took a step forward.

"What in God's name are you doin'?" Jimmy asked.

"Go," Danny said, his voice low and urgent. "Go now, both of you," he said.

Micky looked perplexed. "Wha—"

Danny hurried toward them, feeling something other than fear now, feeling a strength inside of himself that was as much a stranger as joy.

"Ye have wives and little 'uns. Get away now. I'll run. They won't catch me. They'll see me go, and I'll be distant 'fore they get here. You go that way . . ." Danny said, and he pointed back over the other side of the building. If Micky and Jimmy hightailed it for the trees down past the river, they'd be a memory before the cars even reached the station.

Micky hesitated.

"Go for feck's sake! Go now!" Danny said, and the punch of his tone just sent them charging away toward the grove of willows. They were in and among those branches and shadows within a handful of seconds, and Danny turned back to the road and saw the first police car reach the long drive that wound its way down to the station.

Danny didn't look back again. He started around the building and reached the front door. The heat was like nothing he could have imagined. He felt the sweat dry up on his face and hands. He felt his hair begin to scorch, the moisture gone from his eyes, his lids unable to close.

And then he charged that door, head down, right shoulder forward, every ounce of strength he possessed brought to bear upon that wood.

Danny collided with the front door of the Garda station like a thunderous cannon. He felt it give, but it did not break. It had been locked, and locked from within, and he could not understand why. He backed up and went again, faster, harder, summoning from some deep well of terror an even mightier reserve of force.

And this time it went through, the doors bursting open and flying backward against the inner walls.

The man within was down on his hands and knees. The smoke

was thick and hot and acrid. The crook of his elbow around the lower half of his face, Danny staggered forward and grabbed the back of the man's collar. He felt his hair crackling, his skin tightening, the heat tearing every breath from his body. He turned back, head down, each footstep he took an impossible challenge.

He knew that if he didn't make it out they were both done for. He knew that if they did, he was done for anyway, but he could not leave a man to burn, no matter who he was or what he represented.

Danny fell out of the front doorway of the station, his eyes streaming, his chest heaving, the sick rushing from his stomach as his body fought to repel the filth he'd inhaled.

The man behind him crawled forward and collapsed, but he was far enough from the doorway to be safe.

Micky and Jimmy were long gone. They were nowhere to be seen.

The sound of bells and sirens now filled Danny's head. He ran then, ran away from the flames, the smoke, the creaking building, away from the man on the ground, away from the certain knowledge that there was never a hope of running fast enough.

He knew before he crossed the pathway near the wall that they'd caught sight of him. There was more than one car, and while the first car pulled up with the fire engine and spilled four coppers into the rain and heat, the second car came after Danny.

His heart leaped and burst. He felt the heat of the burning building and the heat of his own breath and blood as he flew headlong into the evening darkness, desperate to make it away, knowing even as he stumbled, gathered his feet again, pushed himself harder and faster, that there was no way on God's green earth that he could ever outpace a car. Even the fence he hurdled gave him no advantage, for that car just plowed right through it, barbed wire and post trailing after it like some macabre wedding festoon.

The lights had him, and then he heard a gunshot, and he knew that one of them coppers was leaning from a window with a Webley and hoping to wing him. Didn't want to kill him. Oh no, for that would mean he'd never see the bowels of a tan jail.

Danny ran like a man crazed, like a man imprisoned and suddenly freed, but his legs couldn't move faster and his heart could beat no more blood, and when he finally skidded sideways in the filth and mud, he knew it was all over.

The car slid to a staggering halt merely feet behind him, and before he had a chance to right himself they were upon him, fists flailing, feet flying, hands tearing at him, wrenching him from the

ground, an elbow into the side of his head, another to his ribs. He tried to get to his knees, but he was forced down again, his face into the mud, gasping for breath, the taste of dirt in his mouth, the stench of gasoline on his clothes, the smell of smoke and the coppery haunt of blood on his tongue and lips and in his throat.

"Bastard!" one of them said.

"Bastard fucking filth," another said, and he was kicked again and again and again.

He started screaming for them to let him up. Let him up they did, but only to kick him down again. By the time he was dragged from the ground and shoved into the back of the car he was broken and bloodied and covered in shite.

He sat between two of them in the back. He thought to tell them what he'd done, that their man was alive because he'd broken through those doors and dragged him out of the station, but he knew such words would be meaningless. They would take it as some desperate lie to mitigate his situation. There would be no mitigation. They slammed him with elbows, and then the one in the passenger seat just turned and looked at him with an expression of such disgust and hatred it was impossible for Danny not to feel the shame right to the core of his soul.

That one then let fly with an almighty fist to his face. Danny felt his nose crack, and he went out like a snuffed candle.

# TWO

As a child, Danny McCabe remembered being stricken with a fever so desperate and fierce he knew it was merely a matter of minutes before his lungs would fill no more. No matter how hard he sucked and wheezed it was never sufficient; his face white, his fingernails near punched through his skin as he grasped and clawed at the bedsheets, his eyes lit with pain, his frail body running with sweat. Each time it happened he knew he would die, and each time he did not. Once or twice he'd almost hoped it would end. Such a thought could only be a cousin to pure wickedness itself, a devil thought that would scratch and scurry about the corners of his conscience, and then—finding guilt for nourishment—would gain confidence and strength and consume him whole and complete. But that thought had never been anything of substance. Truly, he'd never wished himself dead, not from the day he was born to the very evening he left after supper with a plan for drinking with Jimmy O'Connell.

That wish changed on the night of November 12, 1937.

He knew that his fate was in the hands of God or Lucifer. It was merely a matter of who got there first. He'd been battered and bruised by his father, by sparring partners, by opponents in the ring, but what he was subjected to that night was the worst pain he'd ever experienced.

Administering his formal interrogation were two fellows by the name of Jack Carey and Bobby Durnin. One of their own had almost burned to death at the hands of terrorists. They knew there was more than one guilty man in Clonegal, and Daniel Francis McCabe was going to tell them the truth, even if they had to kill him to get it.

Bobby Durnin was once a welterweight champion, little more than county angling for national, but a busted wrist put paid to any dreams he might have harbored. Some said the bitterness he felt for seeing that aspiration snuffed like a candle set him on a queer course for hatred of humanity in general. Others said he was always a twisted knot of bitterness, seeing himself hard done by, as if fate

had dealt him a bad hand out of spite. He went to the Garda for the same reason as Jack Carey, simply a means to get even with folk who aggravated him without ever being held to account.

Durnin and Carey had the McCabe boy handcuffed to a simple wooden chair in the cellar of Clonmel. Already his wrists were raw, his arms pulled tight to the lower crossbeams beneath the seat. Stripped to the waist, his nose bloodied, one molar cracked from a sideswipe Durnin landed before he was even seated, Danny knew that there were three ways to make this stop: He told them what they wanted to hear, they tired of beating him, or he died right where he sat. There was one other chair in the room, and here Carey sat and watched while Durnin used Danny's upper body like a punching bag. They were experienced, the pair of them, knew how to hurt without raising bruises or breaking skin. Kidney punches, a hard fist wrapped in a wet towel, elbows into the top of the spine, knuckles to the top of the head, twisting bones in sockets until the pain tore through every nerve and sinew.

"A man is never alone," Carey said, leaning back in the chair, front legs off the ground, a cigarette burning in the corner of his mouth. He seemed relaxed, nonchalant even, content to spend the rest of the night eliciting whatever information he could from Danny McCabe. It was already two in the morning, Saturday the thirteenth, and there was more than enough bitterness and black coffee to keep the Clonmel Garda fueled. Politics aside, John Carmody was a known and respected man, a family man, father of three, and to see him laid up in hospital with his burned hands and face was unconscionable.

"No, a man is never alone," Carey repeated. "He doesn't drink alone or work alone, no matter what he might be doin'. Now we have a good mind as to who was wit' ye, lad, but we need to hear it from your own lips, so we do. That way we make it all official and straightforward."

Durnin fetched a long length of damp cloth that was hanging on the door handle. He wound it around each fist and let it hang loose between his hands.

"So, are we gonna start cooperatin' wit' one another, or do we have to keep beatin' at ye until ye give it up, eh?"

Danny looked back at Carey through the slits of his swollen eyelids. He didn't say a word.

Carey nodded at Durnin. Durnin looped the cloth around Danny's neck a couple of times and started to draw it tight. The cloth was

damp to avoid abrading the skin, the width of it sufficient to encircle his throat from collar to chin. There would be no bruising or lesions, nothing to suggest that the hacking, desperate gasp for breath that Danny now suffered had ever taken place. His feet kicked, his hands tugged mercilessly at the cuffs that held him to the chair, but the pressure didn't ease.

Carey didn't flinch. He leaned back a little further and allowed the chair to meet the wall. He smoked his cigarette and he waited.

Durnin eased up and Danny's head slumped forward for just a moment. Barely had he time to fill his lungs before the tightening began again.

His eyes bulged, his face reddened furiously, and he had visions of his mother holding him, trying to help him breathe, trying to ease the terror that he'd felt so many times as a child.

Durnin released him. Danny tried to suck as much oxygen as he could. His head pounded, his eyes hurt, he was dizzy, sick, disorientated, but even as he heard Carey's voice he knew that whatever they asked of him would get no answer.

"Stubborn bastard," Carey said. "Give ye that, little man. Stubborn like most o' them dumb boggers. Witnesses put three o' ye there. Madden won't be among it. Never gets his hands dirty, just convinces people like you to do his dirty work. So we'll be needin' them names, Daniel McCabe. Two names and it all goes away."

Danny sat still. His chest heaved; his wrists burned like fire. He'd already pissed himself. The stench of his own urine filled his nostrils and shamed him.

But he didn't say a word.

Durnin rapped his knuckles sharply on the top of Danny's head.

Danny howled in pain. Durnin did it again and again, and Danny felt consciousness sliding away from him.

Carey, still leaning against the wall, said, "We know who ye are, lad. We know your father, too. Family of fighters ye may be, but everyone breaks, even the toughest ones. Doesn't have to be like this. You might have shot to hell your chances of ever bein' a boxer, but you don't have to take the blame for these others. Tell the truth and the hurtin' stops, lad."

Danny tried to fill his mind with nothing but thoughts of his youngest sister, Erin. The fact that there was every possibility he might not see her for years was far worse a torture than Durnin and Carey could ever inflict. Without him, she would be lost.

Danny pictured her face, her smile, the way she laughed when

he played the fool for her. Now she would barely recognize him, his eyes bloodshot, his crooked smile indiscernible due to the swelling of his lips.

"Hit the little fucker again, Bobby," Carey said, and Bobby stepped around the back of the chair and let fly with a right hook into Danny's kidneys.

Danny howled in agony.

"Again," Carey said.

Bobby was on his knees then, his fist like a stone, jabbing repeatedly into the small of Danny's back. The pain was close to unbearable, worse than anything he had ever suffered against the ropes, but Danny forced himself to believe that the pain was something else, some other feeling, something he could bear. He tried to breathe slowly. He tried to focus his mind on something other than what was happening to him. And even as the blows kept coming he knew it would be only so long before he passed out.

Eventually he did, but only for a short while. Durnin was slapping his face, urging him to wake up, shaking him by the shoulders and screaming into his face.

"Maggot! Feckin' maggot bastard! Wake up, ye feckin' maggot bastard!"

The cloth around his throat again, the desperate gasp for breath, and Danny couldn't hold on any longer. He passed out once more, this time into some deep hole of shadows and painlessness that welcomed him with open arms. The last thing he recalled was the feeling of pain against his tongue from the tooth that had cracked and broken.

After that there was nothing.

# THREE

By the time it was over, Johnny Madden was dead. Spoofer and toe rag and bullshitter he may have been, but when it came to the raid on the Clonmel Garda station there wasn't a man who could've said a harsh word about him.

Madden had told Danny McCabe's confederates Micky Cavanaugh and Jimmy O'Connell that the situation needed to be taken care of, even if he had to do it himself. Danny McCabe was to be rescued, and that's all there was to it. Frankie Doolan was recruited to drive, and the four of them headed on up through Bennettsbridge to Clonmel.

Perhaps they saw it as a simple act of defiance, an act of loyalty for a fallen brother. Perhaps Madden needed no excuse for further violence. Here would be the force majeure for events that not only crossed the Atlantic, but generations yet to be born. What transpired no one could have foreseen, but the storming of the Clonmel Garda station marked an auspicious and notable beginning for a far greater history to come.

Madden was not the only one who'd crossed swords with Carey and Durnin. Frankie Doolan knew them, too, had himself been a guest at Clonmel, and they knew that building like their own homes. The ease with which four masked and armed men overtook that station defied explanation, but they did. There were merely three Garda on duty, Carey and Durnin still in the basement with Danny McCabe, and when Micky Cavanaugh and Jimmy O'Connell burst through the door of that interrogation room all hell broke loose.

"Bastards!" Micky hollered, and he charged forward like a mad thing. With one almighty hook, he leveled Bobby Durnin. The man went over like an empty bottle, and Micky laid in with a few kicks to the ribs.

Jack Carey had still been sitting on his chair, front legs off the ground, back against the wall. In a desperate move to get up, he lost his balance and the chair keeled over. Carey was on his back,

the chair still beneath him, when Jimmy O'Connell dropped a whirlwind of fists on him.

Carey fought back wildly, his arms thrashing, but Jimmy was down on his knees, sending a few swift hooks to the face and neck. Carey curled up, knees into his chest, and made it clear he wouldn't be doing any more fighting.

"Keys!" Jimmy screamed at him. "Give me the feckin' keys!"

Carey gave up the keys, and Jimmy let Danny out of the handcuffs.

"Up we go, lad," he said, lifting Danny bodily from the chair and making his way to the outer hallway.

By the time they reached the end of the corridor Danny had found his own feet. Every bone in his body, every muscle, every nerve and sinew screamed with pain, but he was standing and he was not going to fall again.

It was then that they heard the gunshot from above.

Everything stopped for a second, and then Micky Cavanaugh gave both Durnin and Carey a half dozen more kicks and fled after O'Connell.

The three of them charged headlong up the stairs, found Frankie Doolan holding the remaining Garda back with a pistol. Johnny Madden was on the deck, his head in a pool of blood that was ever-widening.

"Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, what the feckin' hell happened?" Jimmy asked.

"Bastards shot him," Frankie said. "He's dead, for sure."

"We're away," Micky said. "They can account for their own mess, so they can."

Frankie aimed his pistol at the Garda back against the wall, and then he raised it and fired a couple of shots into the ceiling.

"Follow us and ye're dead fuckin' meat, so ye are."

They backed away—Jimmy O'Connell, Micky Cavanaugh, and Frankie Doolan, all of them still masked.

Danny hesitated then, looking down at Johnny Madden, seeing that brash grin, that blarney, that bravado, that fire in his eyes . . . all of it extinguished.

"Come on, for feck's sake!" Frankie Doolan hollered. "Get the hell out of there!"

The sound of footsteps pinned Danny to the spot.

Someone was coming up from the basement.

When Bobby Durnin appeared, gun in hand, that gun pointed directly at Danny's head, he knew that this was what they wanted.

They'd wanted Madden dead for a long time, and now Danny McCabe would join him, and the shades would make an example of them for all the world to see.

Danny was not going to let that happen. He could not let that happen.

He heard the car revving outside, someone shouting his name. Beyond that he heard nothing else, saw nothing but Bobby Durnin walking toward him, in his eyes the trademark glint of malice. The last Garda hesitated, and then he flattened himself against the wall and sidestepped his way along to the staircase. He disappeared as fast as he could, and Danny believed he'd make good his escape.

"Wee bastard, ye are," Durnin growled. "Ye've had it now. You'll swing, Danny McCabe. You're gonna die right here like Madden, or I'm gonna see you swing."

Durnin took another step forward and kicked Madden in the side of the head. The final ignominy.

The gun in Durnin's hand was unerring and steady.

Danny felt the rage boiling in him. Durnin was a bastard, a maggot. The man took three or four rapid steps forward, and the gun was up in Danny's face.

"Ye think I won't?" Durnin asked. "Ye think I don't have the nerve?"

Danny was not ready to die. The will to survive consumed him, possessed him. This was between himself and Bobby Durnin, and one of them wasn't walking away.

Durnin prodded the barrel of the gun in Danny's face.

Danny smacked Durnin's hand aside, but the gun was back in his face within a moment.

Durnin sneered. The fire in his eyes was fierce. He was a fighter, and a good one. The man was once possessed of a fearful reputation, and had it not been for that broken wrist so many years ago, he'd have been a champ. Danny knew the man could let loose, for only a matter of minutes before he'd been tied to a chair while Bobby Durnin pummeled hell out of him with his bare fists.

The world stopped. A hiatus, a vacuum that excluded everything but two men facing each other, and Danny knew—one way or another—that this was where it would end. If he went down, so be it. He would not die in a jail cell; nor would he die running away.

Durnin stepped back. He took another step, three, four, and then he took a sly glance at Danny.

"I see where your mind is going, Danny McCabe," he said.

Durnin took the bullets from the gun and put them in his pocket. He set the gun down and kicked it toward the wall. He pushed his shirtsleeves further up his arms and assumed the stance. He was a southpaw, and his weight was heavy on the right. He stood too high for his center of gravity, and Danny saw the weakness.

Danny leaned back a touch, felt the bruising and muscle damage that had already been inflicted upon him. He knew he couldn't take much more, that he could not let Durnin strike low in his solar plexus, that he had to keep his kidney and the small of his back out of the line of fire.

Durnin came forward. He was agile, quick, and despite his inaccurate stance and tenuous balance, there was something altogether forbidding about the man's certainty. So much of it was the certainty, the lack of inhibition, the speed with which the first strike was delivered. Catch a man unawares, deliver that blow to the face, the stomach, and not only did you unsettle him physically, but you unsettled his self-assurance.

"Let's be gettin' about it, then," Durnin said. He started weaving, and his center of gravity settled. The immediate weakness was gone, and Danny knew he had a fight ahead of him.

The first strike was delivered, and it came fast and furious and straight out of the sun.

Durnin launched a rocket into the side of Danny's head. Danny went sideways, lost his step, skidded on the outer edges of the ever-widening pool of blood that had escaped Johnny Madden's head. He looked up to see Durnin advancing on him, a grin on his face that said victory was all but a strike away.

Danny was up on his feet, skipping backward, avoiding further blood, and he came around Johnny Madden's spread-eagled body and returned to the fight on Durnin's right.

Danny knew the others were set to leave without him. He sensed it. He could feel their desperation. But he would not be leaving. Not now. He would not back down. He cared not if it was blind stubbornness or muleheaded stupidity. Durnin was not going to shame a McCabe.

"Come on, then, ye little bastard . . . Let's see if you've got anything worth tellin' the girls about," Durnin said.

That smirk, that sneer, that condescending expression.

Danny raised his defense. He took a breath, paused for just a second, and then he went for Durnin.

Durnin was stunned by the first blow, if not by its force then by

its speed. The fist that collided with the side of his head was done and home before he'd even seen it coming. He stepped back, his eyes losing focus, and Danny was back again. A right to the center of his face, a left beneath the rib cage.

Durnin grunted awkwardly, and he found himself against the wall. How long it had been since his last competitive round Danny did not know, but the agility and precision that marked a frequent fighter was already visibly lacking.

But the man was strong. Bobby Durnin could take a punishing as well as anyone, and he'd not be going down until there was nowhere else to go.

Bobby pushed himself away from the wall. He used the impetus it gave him to rush Danny. Danny stepped back, lost his balance, and went sprawling.

Bobby was over him like a hurricane, and it was only Danny's rapid turn to the left and the speed with which he regained his feet that saved him from a brutal fusillade of knuckles.

"Bastard!" Bobby howled as Danny disappeared from beneath him.

Danny came around to the side, caught Bobby in the side of his body before he'd had a chance to get up.

Bobby grunted painfully. Then he let loose some primeval roar and charged Danny.

Danny sidestepped again, and he knew that the urge for revenge had gotten the better of Bobby's emotions. That was the primary flaw of the fighter, the one place from which it was impossible to return. Vengeance was like quicksand; it gripped you, would not let go, and the more you tried to resist it, the more it swallowed you.

Danny saw it in Bobby's eyes.

This was it now. If Danny missed this chance, it was all over. He was bruised and tired and unsteady on his feet. His shoes were slick with Johnny Madden's blood, and if he took two or three more of Bobby's bruising roundhouses, then he doubted he'd be able to stay upright.

Bobby's defense was strong, his balance good, and there was not a flicker of fatigue in his eyes.

Danny held his ground. He raised his fists. He knew the next blow would count for everything, and he hesitated just a moment longer than he'd have done in a competitive match. This was no match; it was a battle of wills, a battle for life, and if he did not put Bobby Durnin down, then he knew Bobby would kill him. To hell with

recrimination, penalty, the right of law or anything else. Revenge alone would put those bullets back in the gun and the muzzle to Danny's head. Danny knew that Bobby would not hesitate, even if Frankie and the others came charging back to kill Bobby for what he'd done.

The first jab could have been stronger. It could have been a killer. Danny gave it all he had, but his arm had been weakened by handcuffs and the strain they had exerted against the muscles in his upper arm. Notwithstanding the fact that it was limited in its force, it collided with Bobby's temple as Bobby turned his head to avoid it. That was a bad move, and Bobby knew it even as his balance was thrown. He threw out his arm toward the wall, hoping that the wall would curtail the fall, but he misjudged the distance. The wall was a good six inches farther away than he needed, and his hand slid down it as he went to one knee.

Danny was over him. The second blow caught Bobby Durnin full in the face. Danny heard the man's nose break. Blood rushed from both nostrils like a tap.

Bobby howled in agony.

Danny saw red, and his mind was full of mist. Scarlet mist, blood-red mist, and the sound rushed in his ears and the blood was behind his eyes, and he could feel something like a tourniquet around his throat, and he knew that if he didn't let loose with everything he possessed, he would somehow implode and disappear in that very moment.

His rage and anguish boiled furiously, and before he had a moment to think, he was firing one blow after another after another into Bobby Durnin's torso, his throat, his face, the side of his head.

Bobby was on his side then, his knees tucked up to his chest, his hands over his head in self-defense, but it was hopeless. Danny's temper was raging, and that rage found vent in every single fist that was released, withdrawn, fueled once more by sheer fury and let loose again.

Danny was outside of himself. His body worked ceaselessly, the sweat leaping from his brow, his breath like a train, the pummeling relentless and rapid and savage.

Those fists kept pounding down into Bobby Durnin's body long after whatever light had fired the man's temper was extinguished.

When Micky Cavanaugh and Frankie Doolan finally dragged Danny away from the bloodied, motionless form that was Bobby Durnin, Danny was rambling and out of control.

Danny did not resist their efforts to hold him back, but when he looked at them each in turn they saw that the focus was gone from Danny's eyes, that he was no longer there, that Danny himself had somehow vacated the body and left behind nothing but a fierce and uncontrollable animal. But the force was spent, and they carried him away from that awful scene with no resistance.

Danny said not a word that made sense, and even as they bundled him wholesale into the back of the car, it was as if he'd been drugged.

Frankie Doolan took the driver's seat, headed away toward Kilsheelan. Johnny alone had known the full details of the plan, but Johnny was dead. Frankie knew enough to get Danny out to Waterford, where Johnny's cousin was waiting for them. Frankie guessed it was onward to Rosslare Harbour and out of the country, maybe get him to Pembroke Dock and vanish him into the Welsh countryside. Frankie didn't know, didn't care to know; Johnny Madden was lying in a pool of his own blood at the Clonmel Garda station and they needed to be rid of Danny McCabe.

In the backseat, Danny remained delirious and incomprehensible. He sat between Micky and Jimmy, the pair of them doing what they could to hold him upright as the car tore around corners and bends.

Danny was groaning and moaning; at one point his head slumped forward and he stopped breathing.

"Get his feckin' head up, will ye?" Frankie said. "Get the bastard breathin', will ye? Jesus, all that to get him out o' there and he dies in the feckin' car."

They got Danny's head up straight, but whatever he was saying made no sense.

In truth, none of them knew what to say. What had happened was not to be undone.

They didn't speak of Johnny Madden, didn't want to speak of him, didn't want to think of him. The man would be a martyr to the cause, for sure. Maybe that's what he'd wanted all along.

It was now all so much history, especially for Danny McCabe.

The law wouldn't rest until they had him.

As for any life he'd imagined, he was as good as dead already.