

Keep Things Merry

The Editorial Board of the *Georgia Bar Journal* is proud to present “Keep Things Merry,” by Gregory B. Grogan of Marietta, as the winner of the *Journal’s* 26th annual Fiction Writing Competition.

BY GREGORY B. GROGAN

The purposes of the ficiton competition are to enhance interest in the *Journal*, to encourage excellence in writing by members of the Bar and to provide an innovative vehicle for the illustration of the life and work of lawyers. As in years past, this year’s entries reflected a wide range of topics and literary styles. In accordance with the competition’s rules, the Editorial Board selected the winning story through a process of reading each story without knowledge of the author’s identity and then ranking each entry. The story with the highest cumulative ranking was selected as the winner. The Editorial Board congratulates Grogan and all of the other entrants for their participation and excellent writing.

Bryne Kane sat toward the back of the restaurant, facing the door. He was alone. At 7 p.m. on a Tuesday night, there were only a few other patrons. He kept his eyes alert and was rewarded when a petite woman in a red business suit clicked across the floor toward him. She smiled at his plate.

“I see you’re a fan of their Buffalo wings,” she said.

“If it isn’t Belinda Towns, assistant district attorney extraordinaire,” Kane replied. “I’m a fan of just about anyone’s wings. Have a seat. Good to hear from you. I figured I was blacklisted.” He stood as she pulled out a chair, and they sat down together.

A waitress hustled over and took Towns’ order of unsweet tea and a plain



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small salad. When she had gotten her drink, Towns swirled her tea with a straw to mix in the artificial sweetener. She also looked around to see how much privacy they were being given.

“How have you been?” she asked Kane. “Despite your current suspension, the DA believes our experiment was a success. He told me he wants all future assistant DAs to spend a week or two riding along with police officers.”

Kane smiled. “Glad to hear it—and that your boss doesn’t hold a bad opinion of the whole police department.”

Towns looked at him evenly. “Longfield likes you more than you think. I’m not saying he’s a big fan. Not even close. He’s just not as obsessed with your demise as you seem to think he is. He’s a politician through and through. I want you to remember that when you’re talking with him. I’ll apologize ahead of time for that.”

Kane, still watching the front doors over her shoulder, saw Douglas County District Attorney Longfield surveying all the tables. The two men’s eyes met and Longfield walked their way.

Kane turned back to Towns. The air in the room turned cold. “What did you do?”

“I said I was sorry. I didn’t have much choice.”

Longfield approached and stood by an empty chair like he was waiting for an invitation. When none came he pulled the chair out and sat down.

“Hello Ms. Towns,” he said and then turned to Kane. “Mr. Kane. I asked Ms. Towns to arrange this meeting. I want to discuss a matter of delicacy with you.”

Kane sat still and said nothing. It was one of his favorite tactics and everyone at the table knew it. Silence can be a very disturbing companion. Longfield watched Kane for just a moment and then continued.

“You may know that we have an important trial coming up in a few weeks. Norris Wheeler. He fancies himself a kingpin around here and he’s probably right. He’s a local thug but he has a pretty good spider web. We’d call him a mafia-type if we were a bigger city. He likes to demand money from local businesses or he scares off customers. He hides money for drug dealers and launders money for

different groups. He also pulls the occasional robbery or burglary. We have him on a robbery and murder from three years ago. He actually didn’t mean to kill the guy, most likely, but he shot him during the robbery so the charge sticks.”

Once the politician had finished, Kane leaned forward so that only those at his table could hear him. He directed his comments to Longfield.

“What does this have to do with me? I’m currently suspended from the police department, thanks to you. I’m not one of your department’s investigators and I had nothing to do with the case. I wasn’t even the officer who took the initial report.”

“The fact that you had nothing to do with the case is why I’m here,” Longfield responded. “You’re totally independent. You’re not even showing your face at the office. That’s what I need. You know how it is with the police department and my office—people hired because they were related to someone or made the right donation. Cronyism at its finest around here. Don’t get me wrong—I’m part of it as much as anyone, but sometimes an outsider is needed. You’re that outsider. You’re one of the few hires who has no internal connections or relations. It’s what makes you an easy target, expendable and valuable all at the same time.”

Kane smiled. “You still haven’t told me what you want me to do. You also haven’t told me why Towns is sitting here. You really haven’t told me why you can’t use

your own people. You also haven't told me what's in it for me. We aren't known for being on friendly terms, so why should I help you? I don't do favors, even for friends. I'm not seeing a reason for helping you."

Longfield didn't flinch. "I can end the suspension and get you back on the force once you've finished my task. I'll get you back in good graces with the department. No problem. I also believe you do the police work because you like it. You're good at it and you like serving your cause. Help me out so I can get you back out there, fighting your crusade."

Kane stood. "Not good enough. The suspension is phony and you know it. It will end soon enough. You're also wrong about my being on some holy mission. I do what I think is right or needs doing. That changes moment to moment and day to day. I don't need the badge for it. You two have a good evening. Try the lemon pepper on the wings."

Towns reached out and grabbed his arm. Kane turned and looked at her.

"You grabbed my arm," he said. "Do you have something new to offer? I like you, Belinda, but don't grab my arm. I take offense at it."

She let go. "Kane, this guy needs to go to jail. He's earned it. He needs to go for a long time. Probably forever. My boss needs a simple favor. It really is right up your alley, and then he'll owe you a favor. Think of it that way. Longfield will owe you."

Kane put his hand over his heart and squeezed. His light-weight jacket crinkled and he faked a pained look. "That's a great spiel and that's why you're here. Solves that mystery. Heartwarming. I do like the thought of the Douglas County DA owing me a favor. I can tell that Longfield is uncomfortable with this line of conversation, so it appeals to me. Throw in the suspension lift and I'll sit back down."

Longfield nodded and Kane took his seat. Kane continued.

"Let's recap so there's no misunderstanding. When you fail on your end of the deal I want to quote you. That way we can all agree on how low you can sink. In exchange for lifting the suspen-

sion and being in my debt for a future kindness, DA Longfield has asked me to work on his behalf. My role is to help the prosecution get a strong case against Norris Wheeler. This work is to be done despite my being currently suspended from the Douglas County Police Department. In fact, I am being asked because I am in no way an official representative of Douglas County. Am I being too dramatic? Towns, did you get all that?"

Longfield just stared at him. Towns nodded. Kane chuckled.

"See, he's already debating how to stick it to me. Why would I agree to anything?"

Longfield leaned forward. "You are arrogant. I can't stand arrogance. But yes, your summary is correct. We have an agreement. Happy?"

"Maybe," Kane said quietly. "Depends on what you want me to do."

Longfield pushed himself back from the table. He looked around the room and then leaned forward again. He met Kane's stare.

"Nothing much. Just find someone. Should be right up your alley, like Towns said."

* * *

Ten minutes later Kane was driving through town. He reflected on the agreement; find a guy named Robbie Blanch, and in time for Blanch to testify for Longfield. Then he would be reinstated to the police department. The problem was trusting Longfield to keep his end of the deal. Actually, the problem was that Longfield would not keep his end of the deal. Kane knew it. Longfield knew it. Towns knew it. The waitress at the restaurant probably even knew it. Still, Kane would deliver as promised and live with the results. He didn't want a case against Wheeler to fall apart.

He pulled into the housing project known as Deer Lick. He reminded himself that the proper term was "community residence" these days. He pulled directly in front of the third building, into the spot closest to the building's walkway. Kane knocked on a certain second floor door and was greeted by a short Korean woman. She gave him a quick smile and moved to let him inside.

"Mr. Kane," she said once he was inside, "so nice to see you. Gino will be glad to talk with you."

Kane smiled. "I hope he's doing well. I miss his mother. I feel like Gino started life with a tough break, and I'd like to help him out a little, if I can."

Before she could respond, they were greeted by a four-year-old boy dressed in a superhero outfit. He zoomed in and stopped in front of Kane.

"Hello, Officer Kane. Are you here in your police car?"

"No, not today. I'll bring it over soon and we'll go for a ride," Kane said. "I'm not driving a patrol car these days. I'll get back to it soon, though."

Gino didn't hide the disappointment. He grabbed Kane and pulled him into his bedroom, where Kane was shown the latest toy fort and the latest Gino the superhero show. After 20 minutes, Kane was allowed to return to the main room and sit with the elderly lady.

"How are you doing?" he asked her. "I know raising Gino wasn't part of your retirement plan."

The woman's accent wasn't thick. "I spent years estranged from my daughter. When we finally reconciled, she was only with me for a short while. I don't think I've fully come to terms with her never walking through that door again."

Kane nodded. "I understand. I still think I'm going to see her walking around the complex or driving through town." Kane mentally winced after he finished the sentence. Peanut, real name Maria Ruth Brown, was a prostitute. Her profession was the cause of the family estrangement. Kane didn't mean to mention anything that would remind her mother about Maria's past. He also didn't like speaking ill of the dead.

If Maria's mother was offended, she showed no signs of it. "Her death was so violent. We've never fully explained to Gino what happened. He's too young. Someday we'll let him know of it and let him decide how much he wants to discover. The person who hurt my daughter—do I still have your assurances that he was brought to justice?"

"Mrs. Brown, I can't go into details," Kane said. "I will never be able to tell you

the exact nature of what happened. I can tell you that the person who hurt your daughter is paying the price for what he did. He has faced a different type of justice than what the government delivers, but a harsh justice no less. I really cared for your daughter. I wouldn't have been satisfied with anything less."

Kane thought back to the day he had chased and caught the man who murdered Peanut. The police report he wrote detailing the event was missing some information. The result was his suspension. A necessary price he was willing to pay. Plus, it made his other employers happy.

Peanut's mother reached out and squeezed his hand. "I know you cared for her. You being here shows us that. You staying in touch and checking in on Gino also shows that. I trust your assurance about justice. So does my husband. But I like hearing it again, all the same. Family justice was a part of our heritage so we understand it. Probably more than you realize."

The two sat in silence for a few moments. Kane thought it was time to bring up the present matter. "Mrs. Brown, I'm looking for someone. He's often in this area. I know you keep a good eye on the complex as you care for Gino. This man is important as a witness in a case. We need to find him quickly. His name is Robbie Blanch. Can you help me?"

She nodded and looked out the window. She pointed to the parking lot in the back of the complex, then shook her head and looked back toward Gino's room. Kane knew what she was thinking. Anyone hanging around the back parking lot was bad news. Bad news even in a low-income housing complex known for bad people. He asked her and received back a general description that matched the one given by Longfield. He then said goodbye to Gino and took his leave.

* * *

Back at his one-bedroom apartment he placed a call to North Carolina. He dreaded making the call, but it was time to call his other bosses. The phone was answered after just one ring.

"Osiyu," said the female voice on the other end of the phone.

Kane flashed a slight grin to no one. "Mammy, no one says that any more. No one has said that in many years."

"More people speak in the old Cherokee tongue than you would guess. How is my favorite of the two troublemakers your father brought into my life doing?"

"Favorite? Hah. We all know you favored the young brat."

"Mr. Bryne Kane. You still have that chip? No one could ever be a favored child over you!"

"Alright, Mammy, how are you doing? Good?"

"Good for an old woman."

"Is my brother around?"

Kane responded, "Good grief. First Mammy, and now you. Can't anyone in my family speak a language that's not dead? Oh, and there were so many things wrong with that greeting. No one speaks Gaelic anymore. You're in America, not Ireland. It actually means 'God be with you,' and I'll bet you'd catch on fire if you graced a church building. Other than that, Sean, it was perfect."

Sean said, "Well, Dad always wanted us to carry on the old ways and I don't want his teachings to go to waste. Besides, our friends like to communicate in the old language since so few actually speak it anymore. It's like having a secret code."



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"You are voluntarily asking for your younger brother? That tells me you two are up to no good. I don't like it when you two start your whispering. Then he disappears to Georgia and I don't know what you two are doing. Don't like it."

"Mammy?"

"Fine, just a minute."

Kane could hear the phone being put on a counter and then Mammy call out for Sean. He could hear more noises and talking but couldn't quite make out the words. Then the phone was jostled.

"Dia Dhuit?" came a male voice.

Kane didn't bother to hide some disgust. "They aren't my friends; only yours. They're business partners and only that because of Dad. He left that as his legacy. He left us Mammy, which was good. He left us his business dealings and debts, which were bad. We may never get out of the web our Dad tangled for us."

"Who says we need to cut ties with Dad's old group? Not me. They've been pretty good to me."

"Then you're a fool, Sean. An idiot. Look at them. See any of them over 50

Kane hung up the phone and looked at the time. It was nearly midnight. By this time tomorrow night, he should have the whole plan in place. He just didn't like having to count on his brother so much.

years old? Ever wonder why? Or does your alcohol-hazed brain keep you from wondering about anything?"

There was a pregnant pause before Kane's brother spoke. "You know our friends are always watching you. Closely. Why did you call? Was it already time for another speech about me ruining my life?"

Kane silently cursed. This was not the way he wanted the conversation to go. "I actually called to ask for help from you and your friends. I have a matter that might interest them. Well, actually, a person. He might interest them."

"If you want help, then speak in the old Irish tongue or I'll hang up. If you can lecture me and then ask for help then I can make a few demands of my own. Say it in Gaelic or say it to someone else."

Kane sighed and decided to skip any further argument. He was beat and he knew it. He took a moment to reflect on what he remembered from his dad's lessons and began. His dad had been a pretty good teacher.

* * *

The next night Kane was back at the Deer Lick complex. He didn't stop to see Gino. He drove a rented car directly to the back part of the complex where Mrs. Brown had indicated. There was a small group of men standing in a tight bunch with their backs to him. As he drove closer two of the men turned and walked toward him. Kane parked and got out before they made it to his door. As he stood fully upright the two men stopped. One of them pointed at him.

"Officer Kane in regular clothes. What are you doing here?"

Kane looked hard at the man's face. Laggit Rose. Kane had arrested him at least twice on theft charges. Nothing too big. Misdemeanors.

"Laggit, I'm only here to find someone. Trying to do them a favor, really. I'm not here for you or interested in what you're doing."

Laggit rubbed his chin, which added to his permanently dumbfounded look. All the men in the area were now watching the situation. Laggit looked around at their faces and then back to Kane. Kane wondered if Laggit would be capable of adding two plus two at the moment.

Kane broke the silence. "Let me help you out, Laggit. I'm looking for Robbie Blanch. Like I said, it's in Robbie's best interest to talk with me. If he's here tonight then that's all there is to it. If not, well, me and my friends will keep coming back until he shows. Every night and all night. Most of the business out here in the park doesn't do too well with police cars around. Right?"

Laggit stepped a little closer. "You're not in a police car tonight, though, are you Kane? You're just another rich guy coming out here. Another guy who thinks he can come out here and buy stuff, sell stuff and act like a big shot. You have no police people to help you out."

Kane kept up a firm gaze. "Don't need another police officer with me. Not on police business, exactly. One more time, tell your friends that I need Blanch. Heard he's hard to find. Need him right now, though."

Laggit smiled. "Sorry, Kane, but Blanch doesn't want to see you. He doesn't want

to talk with you. He's not even here for a meeting."

Kane maintained the even gaze and said, "Sure he is, Laggit. I see him in that crowd over there. He's in the dark blue shirt." Laggit didn't flinch. "I don't see him. Never even heard the name."

Kane sighed. "Sad that it has to be that way. I had hoped for better. I'll get my friends and be on our way. We'll be back tomorrow night."

Laggit laughed. "What friends? You're here alone. Don't rush off. We'll have some fun."

Kane didn't answer, but pointed to the street light almost above their heads. It hadn't worked in years. The sound of the glass and plastic shattering reached his ears at the same time as the sound of the rifle. The men stood frozen in their tight circle.

Kane looked at Blanch, who was now crouched down. "There are a few friends of mine out and about tonight. They're watching me right now, as you can see. Since, as you noticed, I'm not here as a police officer, there is a certain amount of freedom we enjoy in what we are doing. Now, where were we? Blanch. I'm trying to help out Blanch. I need to see him. Immediately."

Laggit, who looked like he wanted to run, said, "Robbie, get over here and see Kane before he shoots something else."

A large man with some markings on his face walked over. He looked down at Kane with no expression. Scars accented the ink around his mouth. The eyes were empty.

Kane said, "Robbie, let's take a walk. What we discuss is no one's business but ours."

The two men walked toward a basketball hoop that hadn't seen an actual net in years. The area for playing the game was just the parking lot. No painted lines marked the pavement and small sprouts of grass had managed to break through the asphalt. When they were about 30 feet from anyone else, Kane stopped walking. Robbie Blanch had yet to speak.

"Mr. Blanch, I'll get right to it. You are listed as a witness in an upcoming trial. The person on trial is Norris Wheeler. You're a witness for the prosecution. There are statements you have made about seeing Mr. Wheeler with a gun and seeing him at the scene. The story is that you were playing a small part in stealing from the victim, but Norris Wheeler altered the plan by killing the guy. The DA is giving you a break in exchange for the testimony. That's the story."

Robbie said nothing. He kept his gaze moving from Kane to the other people out in the parking lot. The others seemed to have forgotten all about the interruption.

Kane continued. "There is also information that you are sort of handling things for Wheeler now that he's in jail. You have taken over parts of the business until he returns. Word is also spreading that you're taking care of his woman."

Kane looked for a reaction but saw none. Again, Robbie Blanch just kept a stoic expression while he watched the other men.

"Whether or not all this is true doesn't really matter," Kane added. "The DA believes it's true and he's told the defense attorney his theories. Word is reaching Wheeler about your testimony and about your running things while he's out of the neighborhood. So, let's make this plain. Your days are numbered. If Wheeler gets out, he will want you gone. If he doesn't get out he'll at least partially blame you and want you gone. The end result seems to be the same. See what I'm saying to you?"

Kane finally got a reaction. Blanch looked at him with some concern.

"No, I don't see what you want," the younger man said. "I testify and Wheeler goes away. He doesn't get out for a good long while. He's not a problem. Plus, who says I'm testifying? I may get too sick. I

may not get notified. I may get lost on my way to the courthouse. Lots of things could happen."

Kane answered, "I think you underestimate the man. He has connections. He's not Al Capone or anything, but he can get things done around these parts. Also, it doesn't matter how credible or damaging your testimony will be against him. It's the fact that you can testify and stay out of jail. He won't forgive that and he knows through his attorney that you are on the witness list. You won't live to see the trial."

Blanch kept his pose. "You here to scare me, Kane? What do you want me to do? I can't tell if you want me to testify or back out."

Kane was ready. "I want you to do what's in your best interest. Stay alive and put away Wheeler but then have an escape plan. One that doesn't involve the police or the district attorney. Understand? Have a plan that means leaving this area."

Blanch asked, "What's in this for you?"

Kane shrugged and said, "I'm a do-gooder. I just want what's best for everyone involved. I have a plan for you if you'll agree."

Blanch actually smiled. "I'll think about it."

"Fine," Kane said, "and I'll be back every night to make sure you do that. I need to make sure this situation stays on your mind."

An uncomfortable silence ensued as the two men walked away. Kane climbed back in his car and drove away, leaving the group to continue their nightly activities. He watched them in his rearview mirror until he was out of the complex.

* * *

Kane could hear the phone ringing as he opened his apartment door. He quickly grabbed it and spoke a greeting.

"Dia Dhuit," was the reply.

"Good shooting tonight," Kane said. "Glad you only had to prove yourself once. You got their attention."

"What's next?"

"We go back tomorrow morning. Bring a couple of friends. I don't need to give him more time than that. Also, if your buddies are doing their job tonight then we'll have all we need."

Sean answered, "They're doing their job. You don't have to worry about that."

"Alright. I'll see you tomorrow morning. Let's say 9 a.m. No need to get out too early. I'm a man of leisure these days."

"Doesn't suit you. Come work with me full time," said his brother.

"No thanks. I wouldn't get along with the coworkers."

"You don't get along with your coworkers now. I won't push it. Tomorrow morning then, big brother."

Kane hung up the phone and looked at the time. It was nearly midnight. By this time tomorrow night, he should have the whole plan in place. He just didn't like having to count on his brother so much. His delusional brother who envisioned himself and his coworkers as righteous servants to a cause. Kane had wasted too much time trying to show him the failures of that thinking. Now they just kept an uneasy truce and did their best to make Mammy happy.

Mammy had been the woman to make Kane's father happy again. A Cherokee Nation woman who met Kane's father

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while they all lived in North Carolina. She clung to her heritage as much as Kane's father clung to his Irish roots. Kane grew up learning Gaelic one day and then the Cherokee alphabet the next. Languages he never heard anyone other than his father and stepmother ever speak.

After Kane's father passed, Mammy had taken care of the two young men better than anyone could have wished. Kane was her studious one. Sean was wild and carefree. They got along like tuna fish and strawberry jam. They moved for a short while to Georgia, where Mammy was promised a good job. They settled in Douglasville and the boys attended the local high school. Soon, though, the job didn't live up to the promises and Mammy missed her home too much. Sean and Mammy moved back to North Carolina. Kane, by then a junior in high school, convinced her to let him stay with friends. He didn't tell her it was for a girl. That didn't work out too well. Kane snapped back from his memories and went to bed.

* * *

He was awakened by the telephone. It was 6 a.m.

"Dia Dhuit."

"I think, in the Irish culture, it's legal to shoot a younger brother for waking you up. Especially if he's speaking a dead language no one cares about."

"Careful brother dear. Four things we Kanes don't disgrace are the language, our dead father, Mammy or our heritage."

"Wouldn't dream of it, but that's big talk for a grown man still living with his stepmomma. Are we all set?"

"Of course. Meet you over at that crappy parking lot where you left your buddies last night. See you there in 30 minutes."

Kane hung up the phone, thought about shaving, and then ate a Pop-Tart. It was going to be a long and interesting day. He washed his face and headed out the door. It would only take him about 15 minutes to get to the parking lot, but he knew Sean was already there.

* * *

Sean stood waiting as Kane pulled up. He wasn't alone. There were three other men with him. Things were very

quiet and the five of them were the only ones outside.

Once Kane came close he saw Sean give a nod. The men turned and began walking toward the buildings. Kane could see one was carrying a duffle bag over his shoulder. He started to ask but thought better of it. He and Sean followed. They climbed a staircase and stopped in front of a badly painted green door on the second level.

"They'll be armed," Kane said.

"They'll be passed out. We made sure of that," Sean said with a wink.

Without a word, the biggest of the men gave the door a kick. Wood splinters flew through the air as the door swung backward. The men all rushed inside as quickly as possible, Kane in the rear. They covered the entry, living room, bathroom and two bedrooms in less than 20 seconds. Kane could hear screaming from the back bedroom. He walked back to it and found Sean's team on top of two men and one woman. Kane knelt down and looked at one, then another. He turned to the one whose head was underneath his brother's knee.

"Well, Mr. Blanch, I am so glad you decided to cooperate. I was afraid you would turn me down or decide to leave town. I have decided to give you a gift. An all-expense paid vacation. Get ready for the ride of your life."

Out of the duffle bag came a pair of flexible handcuffs and a black pillowcase. Robbie Blanch was cuffed and the pillowcase put over his head. Sean made a quick call and their captive was put on his feet. He was pulled with more force than necessary out to a waiting van, which sped away once Blanch and the three toughs were inside. Kane and his brother were left in the apartment. Each was kneeling over one of the remaining occupants, but they talked as if they were alone.

Kane asked, "Are we all set up for tonight?"

His brother didn't answer. Sean just looked amused.

Kane continued. "Fine. I won't badger you. See you tonight at your new office. If all goes as planned, this will be over quick. Then we'll be off to wrap things up. That will be fun, too."

Kane then looked down at the people lying on the ground. "So sorry to wake you this morning. We had some business with Mr. Blanch that couldn't wait. Don't worry, though. We'll take good care of him. I don't think he'll be back around anytime soon, but just know he'll be treated as a valued guest at his new home."

The two brothers stood and walked away, leaving the apartment and its occupants behind. They didn't say any sort of farewell as they climbed into their cars. Kane was back home before 8 a.m. He waited until 10 before calling Belinda Towns. She answered on the second ring. He wasted no time with greetings.

"Tell Longfield that I need to see him. Tonight. It's about that matter we discussed the other day. I'll need to see the both of you. Let's meet at 8 p.m. at that same place. Tell him I'm delivering what we discussed."

Towns answered, "Alright. I'll tell him. He'll have questions, I'm sure."

"Tell him to be there. All will be answered then. I'm sure the witness will have questions too, so it will be better for them to meet each other and answer the questions all at one meeting. I don't want to be the errand runner for the both of them."

"Alright," was all she said, and he hung up the phone. All was set. There were many moving parts and Sean was involved. Still, so far so good. He shaved and headed out for breakfast. He spent the day driving around Douglasville and browsing around stores. The day moved by slowly until it was time for his meeting.

He arrived early by about 20 minutes. He took a table that allowed him to watch the door. Longfield and Towns walked in just a minute before the scheduled time. They arrived at the table and Longfield gave Kane a scowl. Kane ignored it.

"What's this about, Kane?"

"We're going to meet your witness. Robbie Blanch. Not hard to find, but he's a little shy of you and the whole criminal justice system. So, we're going to go meet him. Be ready to talk sweetly."

Kane led them to his own truck and they proceeded to Highway 92, merging onto I-20 heading east.

Towns asked, "Where are we going?" Kane looked at her in the rearview mirror. "It's an office complex area in Atlanta. Don't worry. It's safe. I've been there before. There's actually security at this place. If the other people around knew who they allowed in their buildings then they would throw a fit."

Longfield asked, "What have you told him?"

"Not much. I told him that he is a needed witness for a case against Norris Wheeler. I told him that you wanted his testimony and assistance against Wheeler. I threw in that I would not be pleased if he tried to disappear before the trial. That's all. No promises or guarantees were made. Nothing to tie your hands. What happens down here is up to you."

Longfield nodded. He was pleased. "I'll make sure he cooperates. Once I get my hands on him I'll make sure he sticks with the trial plan."

They rode in silence the rest of the way. Kane turned off the interstate and made his way to 3414 Peachtree Road. There was a gate with a security guard who looked more asleep than awake. He straightened up as Kane's truck approached. He stuck up his hand.

"Sorry, this is private property."

Kane smiled. "I'm expected. Bryne Kane. Let them know our party has arrived."

Longfield asked, "What is this place? What kind of offices?"

Kane didn't answer as he watched the guard talk on the phone. A moment later he lifted the gate and Kane was allowed to park.

As he climbed out of his truck the guard yelled out that they were to go to the front of the building. A sidewalk led through a beautifully maintained garden area. They were met by a second security guard. This one took them to an elevator where he put a key in the wall before pressing the button.

As they started to rise, Kane turned to Longfield. "I'm sorry. You asked a question. It's a big building. Lots of different types of businesses are run out of here. I couldn't begin to guess them all."

The elevator doors opened and the guard stated, "Suite 260 is to the right. Glass doors." Then he was gone.

They found the doors easily enough since the office was the only one with lights blazing. Other than the suite number, there were no markings, signs or logos on the door. The carpet was green. They were greeted immediately by a man with a strong Irish accent.

"Good evening, everyone. One of you must be Officer Kane. Good of you to come. Tricky business tonight, but hopefully all will be settled satisfactorily."

Longfield took the man's offered handshake and said, "Sorry. I don't know who

you are or what's going on. I'm expecting to meet a Robbie Blanch."

"I am Tony O'Hara. I'm just here as the office custodian for the evening since you folks are coming in after hours. Robbie Blanch is here. He should be coming down the hall any moment."

Kane peeked back out the glass door and could see Robbie walking down the hall toward him. Kane saw his brother behind him and one of the men from Robbie's abduction also in tow. Sean gave a slight wave as they walked past Kane and into the room.

Longfield didn't wait for introductions. "Robbie Blanch. I am Douglas County DA Longfield. You may have heard of me. I'm sure you know that we have important business to discuss. Let's be on our way to Douglasville."

Blanch replied, "I don't plan on going back with you tonight."

The unknown man beside Sean spoke up. "Yes, my client will not be going to Douglas County tonight. He has cooperated and I believe you will have all you need right in this bag."

He held out a black soft briefcase but no one took it from his hand. Longfield just looked from Robbie Blanch to Kane to the unknown figure speaking and to the briefcase. He was not happy.

Robbie Blanch broke the silence. "This man is my representative. I have given the authorities a statement. I have turned

PHOTO BY ISTOCK.COM/AEROGONDO



over some valuable evidence. I have done all I needed to do for your case. I'm not going back to Douglas County."

Kane reached over and took the briefcase that no one else seemed to want to touch. "Do you mind telling us what is in here?" he asked.

The unknown man answered, "It's a disc with a taped statement. I was present. Mr. Blanch discussed his rights and voluntarily made a statement describing the events of Norris Wheeler's crime. Mr. Towers, our resident garda, was present and participated in the questioning. Mr. Blanch discussed Mr. Wheeler's role, his own role and the horrible outcome. He made this statement with me present, his counsel, and also local law enforcement authorities asking questions. Mr. Blanch also turned over the name of a certain individual Mr. Wheeler had bury the gun that was used. Mr. Blanch also turned over a couple of bullets, unused of course, that Mr. Wheeler left in the car after the crime had been completed. I believe you will find that the bullets match the caliber and name brand of the bullets found at the scene."

Longfield had listened attentively while looking at the briefcase. "All good," he said. "It will be even better when he comes to Douglas County with me to tell it to my investigators and in court."

Blanch spoke. "Not coming. I'm done with Douglas County."

Kane answered before Longfield could speak. "You are a witness to a murder. There is legal power to hold you in jail if needed."

The unknown man stepped near Kane. "In your country that might be true, but you're not in your country. When you walked through the office door you stepped into Ireland. This is an office of the Irish consulate. Mr. Blanch is here with us and does not wish to leave the country. We have our reasons why he should stay. You have all you need."

Longfield's face turned about five shades of red. He stomped around looking at the paperwork hanging on the wall and the papers on the desks. He then stomped passed Kane and up to Blanch. "Why would a foreign country have any interest in you?" he asked.

Blanch didn't flinch. "That's my business."

"We'll file papers for extradition."

"That takes a while. I'll fight it. Why do it anyway? You told me I wouldn't be prosecuted. I gave you all you need."

Kane gave Longfield a slight grin and said, "If our district attorney has made you a deal then I can assure you he's a man who stands by his word."

Kane could see Towns smile while Longfield's already crimson face turned a shade darker. He paced around the room and continued to inspect every wall plaque and paper he could find.

The unknown man said, "As I understand your laws, Mr. Blanch can be declared unavailable. He is clearly out of the state and even out of the country. My consulate would be happy to put this in writing. His statement is also a statement against his own interest. He provided some physical evidence and he made his statement with full knowledge of his rights and with counsel present. I think you are in good shape."

Longfield turned to Kane. "You did this. There's no reason Ireland would have any interest in a thug like Blanch. No reason at all. You made some crazy deal and it gets you something. I don't know what yet."

Kane grabbed at his chest. "You hurt me. I bring you here after finding the witness you need. I put in a face-to-face meeting. He picked the spot. You get all the evidence you need. I did my part of our deal. Are now saying you will not honor your part of the arrangement? Are you now saying that I won't be getting my badge back?"

As Kane spoke he lifted the soft briefcase up higher and higher. Then, he lowered it back down. "I guess this briefcase is pretty valuable. I hope I don't drop it. I am a little clumsy, you know."

Longfield snatched it. "What deal? I don't know what you're talking about."

"Wow. It seems like you're breaking deals tonight. Careful, Mr. DA, it's a long ride back to Douglas County. It can also turn into a long walk."

* * *

The next day Bryne Kane was called into the police chief's office. He was told that the investigation into the disappearance of the assistant district attorney was progressing and he would hear back from them soon. No specific dates were

set. Kane had made arrangements to meet Belinda Towns for lunch.

He sat down with her and they ordered their tea. She smiled weakly at him.

"It was a late night."

Kane answered, "It was. How was your boss today?"

"Happy. It seems Norris Wheeler is strongly considering a guilty plea. Very surprising."

"Congratulations."

She looked at his eyes. "Know any reason why he would do that?"

"No idea," he said, meeting her stare.

"Did you know we were going to the Irish Consulate last night? Never mind. Of course you did. I checked. That really is the Irish Consulate address. We were technically on foreign soil. Do I even want to double check on those officials we met last night?"

Kane just held her gaze. She shook her head and took a swallow of tea.

"You know, Longfield is not going to keep his word. He dislikes you just a little bit more today. He can't control or predict you."

Kane feigned a faint. "You are kidding! I just knew I was as good as back at my patrol duties."

Kane then reached into his left shirt pocket and pulled out a mini recorder. He pushed play and Longfield's voice came across. Loud and clear and discussing Kane finding a witness in exchange for getting his suspension lifted. Towns lifted her eyes and smiled.

Kane explained, "Whenever I know that Longfield is going to be around I find it convenient to have one of these. So, when you see me act out the old Redd Foxx bit where I grab my chest, it just means I'm turning this on."

Towns laughed. "It's not worth much. Not sure you can use it in court for anything."

"No, it's not for court. It's something to make me smile on a rainy day. It might also come in handy around a reporter or two. You never know."

She smiled. "You're not as dumb as they think you are."

Kane nodded. "I couldn't be, could I?"

Later, back at his home, Kane called Sean to congratulate him. After the usual dance

about their ancestral language, Kane got down to the point. He changed his tone to show he was serious.

“Listen, Sean, good work with Norris Wheeler. He’s ready to plead guilty. I don’t need to know how you pulled that off. Good work on Robbie Blanch, too. He giving you guys anything of value?”

“We’ll make him worthwhile. He has connections and he knows Norris Wheeler’s operation. There’s money in it. We’ll see where it goes. He knows he’s not going back to your area. Not unless it’s in an advisory and very controlled role. He’s a new and shiny pawn.”

Kane nodded, knowing Sean couldn’t see it. He then said, “You know, Sean, one day your agenda and mine are going to conflict. I think you’re living in a fantasy about some old ideology our father pursued. You think I have a hero complex and am turning my back on our parent’s heritage. I think the world has moved on from the battles our great-great-grandparents fought. You look around and see insults and slights that I don’t see. The only thing we agree on is keeping Mammy healthy and happy.”

Sean replied, “We’ve made it this far on decent terms. I don’t worry about hypotheticals. We’ll cross that bridge when we have to cross it. Hope you get your badge back soon. My bosses and friends like having a friendly police officer in Georgia. Having them in North Carolina is nice. More the merrier though. You’re more use to us that way.”

Kane thought for a moment before saying, “I like for people to be merry, Sean. I like to keep things merry.” ●



Gregory B. Grogan, Law Office of Gregory B. Grogan LLC, spent 10 years as a police officer for Fulton County prior to pursuing a career in law. He

worked in Fulton County as a prosecutor before switching to real estate law. Grogan worked at three different law firms before starting his own office, as a solo practitioner, in Marietta and has been in business for six years. He is a member of the Real Property Law Section of the State Bar of Georgia, and is also licensed to practice law in North Carolina.

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