

# The Cigar



A short story by Brian McAleer

## **The Cigar**

**by Brian McAleer**

In a city where everyone is a stranger, Mason Quinn had become well known. For reasons that were both good and bad, just about everybody in the underworld and high society had encountered him, all under their own specific circumstances; sometimes violent, sometimes strange, a few times for love, but mostly for a very short time and only ever once.

He was a burly man and not the type of gangster that had been seen yet in the 1930's. His face, however, was innocent looking, with his still youthful, thick hair and warm green eyes creating a contrast of image between his body and his face. He dressed well, as if he was always going to a function or dinner party; shoes shining bright, tie always perfect and suits that fitted him to a tee. A cold silver knife he would keep in his inner left jacket pocket had entered many a man's flesh and would always remain hidden when not in use. Something else that almost always remained out of view was his left forearm. On the inside of that arm, was a tattoo. Only two men had ever seen it; Mason and the man who gave it to him. No one had ever seen him after it was done for that matter. And no one knew exactly what it looked like, but rumour had it, it said something in Gaelic – some kind of motto or quote – and was the guiding word that gave Mason his drive to be a successful and powerful player in organised crime.

The Don that had once chosen Mason to be his main conductor of operations had quickly lost faith in him after looking to pass on that torch. Mason's reckless ways had begun to earn him power and reputation all throughout the city, and slowly creeping out into the rest of the country, and with those advantages, the young man was pulling off many of his own jobs at an age that was considered to young to be doing so. These jobs were too careless and noticeable for the Don's liking and he believed Mason was drawing too much attention towards himself. Considering what happened when one young, hot headed gangster did such a thing, it would have a ripple effect and bring down every other gangster he had come into contact with. But Mason didn't care.

'The law won't catch me. It's in my blood. I'm free and wild and won't be taken down'.

'I partly agree with you and the reason no one in your family has been taken down by the law is because none of them have ever opposed the law Mason, except for you.'

Victor said, Mason's last remaining true friend, and an operator lower in the criminal food chain. A position he was committed to keeping.

'What's your point?'

'I'm not saying anything else because I believe you know who you are and what you're doing. I always believe you and I've always stood by you Mason, always. I'm with you to the end. You know that' said Victor, and it was said with more passion than anything he said before. Mason had acknowledged this and with his eyes lost in his glass of red wine he said,

‘Thanks. You’re all the family I have left Victor.’ A minutes silence followed as the two of them looked at each other and around the room. ‘Do you think I’m nearing my end though? I feel I’m still two steps ahead of the law’. Silence followed again. All that could be heard was the crackling of the fire that gave the small office a warm, orange glow. Parts of the room remained in shadow, making the antique furniture and ceiling-high shelves of books look almost sinister and gothic. However, any sinister activity that was happening on the floor below was among a hundred members of New Yorks high society; some of them honest, most of them not, chatting and laughing, and all accompanied by the sounds of jazz. The smell of cigars and the constant pouring of whiskey and champagne topped it off as a classy gathering.

‘If you leave the city tomorrow night, right after you pull off the job, then yeah, I think you’ll be home free’. Mason looked at Victor hopefully. ‘But you *have* to leave the city first thing after the robbery Mason, and once you do...’ Victor leaned forward.

‘Yeah?’ Mason said, sitting up and listening,

‘You can never come back’. The room was silent again, but only for a second as the grandfather clock struck nine. Once it had chimed the nine chimes, Mason opposed,

‘*Never* return?’

‘Well think about it’ Victor said like a lecturer ‘apart from the cops, you’re gonna have the Prescelly boys after you because after tomorrow afternoons job, that’ll be the last straw. They won’t stop looking for you. They’ve been watching that bank for weeks, and you’ve been watching them, have copied their plans, waiting, waiting, and you’re gonna take the prize from right under their nose. That’s not the Marzoni way – we’re not cheap sneaks!’ Victor finished and Mason exploded out of his chair.

‘You’re supposed to be with me to the end Victor’ he yelled. The door to the office burst open, blowing a rush of air into the fire which caused the flames to whip onto the floor. Masons last remaining body guard Tony, had heard the commotion from outside the door where he was standing and had opened it before Mason even finished screaming.

‘Wh – ‘ Tony started.

‘It’s alright, shut the door Tony’ Mason snapped.

‘You got it Mason’ Tony said obediently and slowly pulled the door to a close, observing Victor like a hawk, who stared back at him just as carefully. He then returned his attention to Mason and said,

‘I’m not backing out on you friend, I’m just providing you with the reality of what you’re about to do. Now come on, tonight is your last night in this city, so let’s darn well enjoy it.’

Mason continued to stand, trying to contain his anger, with bulging eyes that reflected the flames. A vein pulsed in his neck and he was clenching his fists so tightly that his fingernails were digging into his palms. Mason breathed heavily trying to intimidate Victor, who remained completely calm. He had seen this performance from Mason before and knew that it was just another demonstration of his character; passionately stubborn and fuelled by purpose. Victor had to re-direct Mason's attention and bring him back down to a workable mood, and knew just the thing to do calm him down. Slowly, he reached for his top jacket pocket and gracefully pulled out a cigar. He pulled it up to his nose, sniffed it lovingly and watched Mason immediately loosen up and observe it like a trained dog. The young gangster sat back in his chair, slowed his breathing and closed his eyes.

"Very few people have ever met the Don, Mason. Did you know that?" asked Victor in a tone that had suddenly shifted to sinister and almost menacing. Mason didn't seem to notice that.

"Of course I knew that. It pays to know that. I don't intend to meet him. I've heard you only meet him right before he kills you"

"That's true. He smokes cigars you know. Like this one. I've smoked many of these myself. It's a popular one. It's also his calling card" Victor said, and his eyes blackened, his focus shifting into a dark place. Mason sat up in his chair, as a cold shiver ran up his spine. "He kills you and leaves an unsmoked cigar, resting on the chest of your cold, lifeless corpse"

"So I've heard" Mason said. A worry grew in his mind. Victor stood up and walked over to the door, his back facing Mason. He seemed to be gazing up at the ceiling.

"You know Mason, there comes a point in every man's life where he has a choice. A choice as whether or not he should cross the line. We've all crossed that line, but then we come to another line in which we cross the line of trust, and respect. You crossed that line" Victor said, slowly turning around. The cigar was in his left hand, and a black gun in his right with a silencer screwed onto it. Mason stood up quickly, his face grew white and scared.

"So long my young friend" Victor said, and pulled the trigger. A silver bullet entered Mason's forehead, sending his small, impotent brain out the back of his skull, and a splash of blood onto the wall behind him. He dropped to the ground, knocking over the small table and alerting Tony outside the door. The door burst open, Tony ran into the room and headed straight for Mason's corpse. He had not time to draw his weapon or turn around. Victor put three bullets into his large back and he fell on top of Mason. Victor slowly shut the door and walked over to examine his kills. With one foot, he lifted Tony off of Mason's body, bent down and placed his cigar on Mason's chest.

"And the Don will remain hidden" he said and proceeded to stare into the fire, finishing his glass of wine.