

A Mixed Blessing

The cell door slammed shut with a harsh metallic finality. My knees sagged and I collapsed onto the hard cot. I felt sick and bile reflux burned my throat. I kept telling myself not to panic but amid the swirl of emotions clouding my brain one thing was crystal clear. I was for the long drop.

“Why the hell did I ever team up with Micky Hagerty?” I asked myself. *“I’ve always known he was bad news.”* But I knew why. A few months earlier my life had imploded. I’d lost my job and then been evicted from my bedsit when I fell into arrears. I was sleeping on the floor of a mate’s crappy flat when Mickey resurfaced in my life. We’d been close at school but I’d put some distance between us when Mickey’s behaviour moved from shoplifting to more serious and often violent offences. He was sent down for a five year stretch after a vicious assault on a pub landlord who had refused to pay him protection money. When he got out his capacity for brutal retaliation against anyone who stood in his way saw him climb quickly to the top of the local criminal fraternity. You crossed Mickey Hagerty at your peril and after putting his most serious rival in a wheelchair he held total sway over his manor.

One night he appeared at the flat where I was crashing for a poker game. Afterwards he took me to one side. “Joe, you and me were good mates right? I don’t like to see you having to doss down on Ken’s floor so I’m going to put some serious readies your way for old time’s sake.” I tried to back away from what I figured would be a dodgy job. “Nah you’re alright Mickey I’m going to get a job soon. I’ve got a few feelers out.”

That’s when things took a nasty turn. Mickey’s bonhomie disappeared in a flash. “You don’t understand me son. I’m not going to let you pass on my generous offer. I need you to have the bottle to do something for me. In return I’ll make sure you get plenty of bread and honey so you don’t have to stay in this shithole any longer.”

That’s how I found myself sitting in a souped-up Cortina outside a warehouse near Heathrow when all hell broke loose. Mickey was legging it towards me chased by three coppers. He yanked the door open. I panicked and stalled the motor. As the first copper tried to open the door Mickey shot him in the face. As we fishtailed away from the scene I knew my life was over. I didn’t know Mickey was carrying but that wouldn’t save me from the hangman’s noose as an accessory to murder.

The trial dragged on for months but that turned out to be good news for Joe. He was found guilty on the ninth of November 1965, the day after the death penalty was abolished.