



BOOMTIME

MICHELLE E. LOWE

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“If we’re strong enough, or lucky enough—or both—a piece of our story will carry on throughout time.”

—Unknown

Business picked up at The Attic. People were packing in, ordering their gin and tonics, Jack Daniels, beer, and wines. The speakeasy was filled with cigarette smoke and chatter. George tended bar while the two waitresses, Fiona and Bernice, bustled about, as usual.

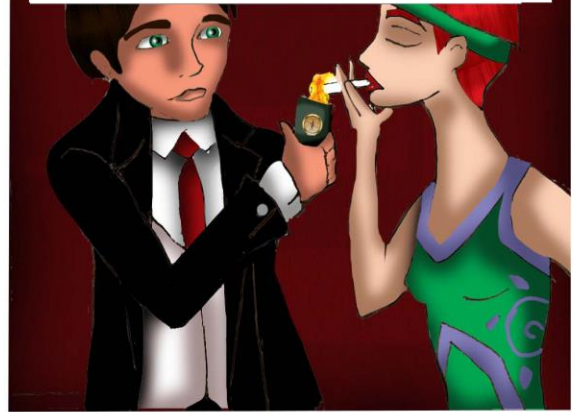


Managing had given Pierce new territory to explore, but he began growing utterly bored with the routine. Granted, it was nice not having to freeze out in Rum Row, but he had been doing the same thing since before Christmas.

Can't wait to get this bloody night over with.



After lighting a smoke for a lovely young woman, he was turning to go about his business when he found his feet nailed figuratively to the floor.

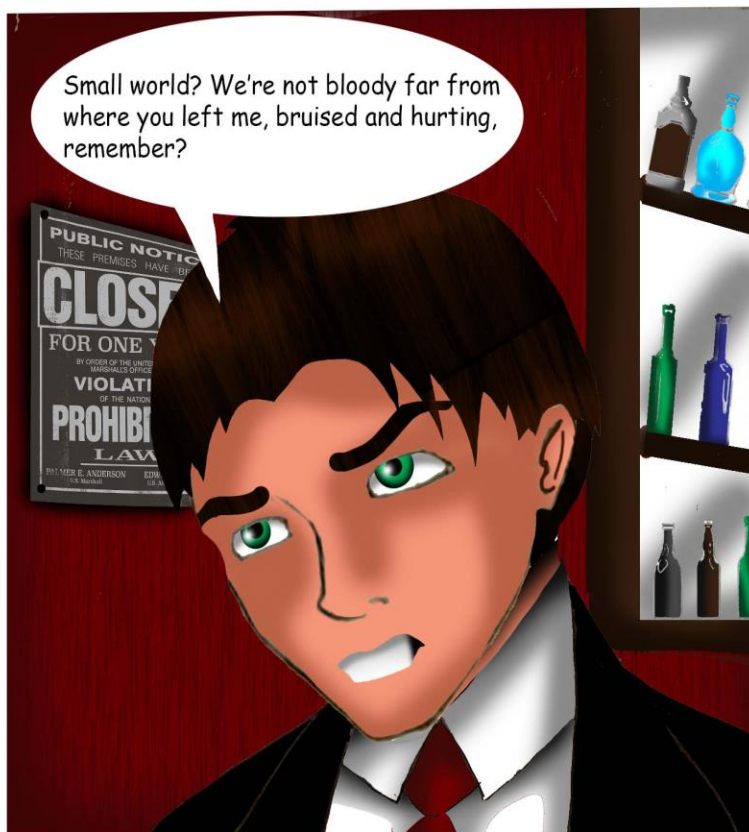


It was no other than the Trickster himself.



You've got to be kidding.











It was a bloody nightmare.



Could have been worse.



I fell into some trouble that got me mixed up in a smuggling racket. I helped sneak booze into this speak-easy. My experience in this sort of thing has earned me a rather quick promotion.



What sort of free nation bans alcohol, eh?



It won't last. It never does. It's simply a piss poor way to try to make mankind more civilized.

Aye, well, that word, 'civilized,' has no meaning, in my opinion.







Thirty

Too Many Close Calls

They headed up the stairs toward the unfinished antique shop. Why the bloody hell had Pierce stuck around? He should have taken the cash he'd saved and skipped town ages ago. Taken Lucy with him and left this crazy world behind.

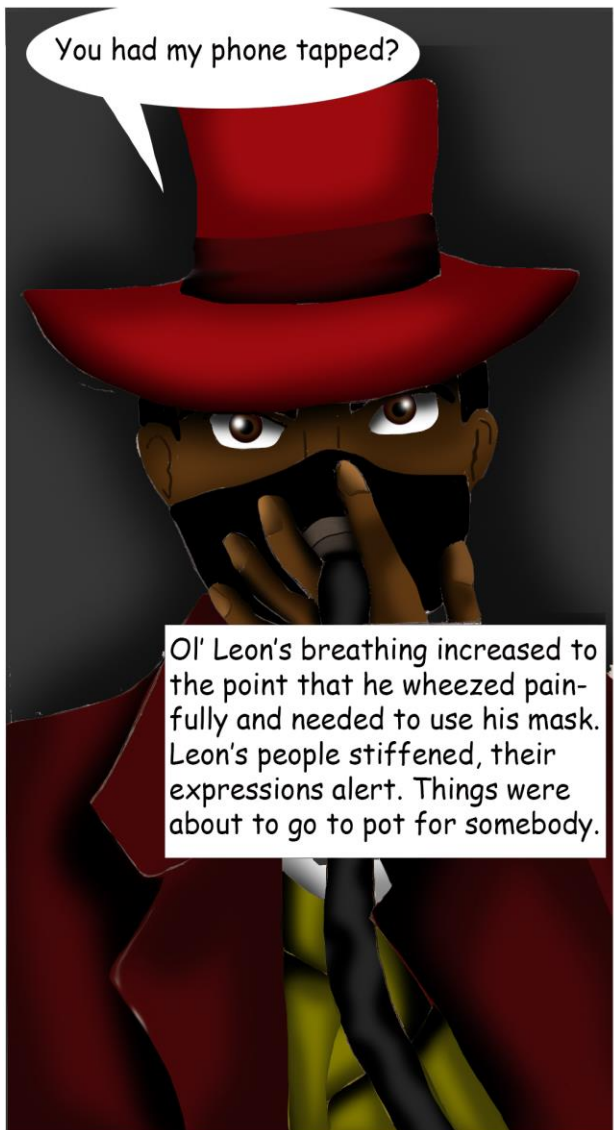


Now it was too late.

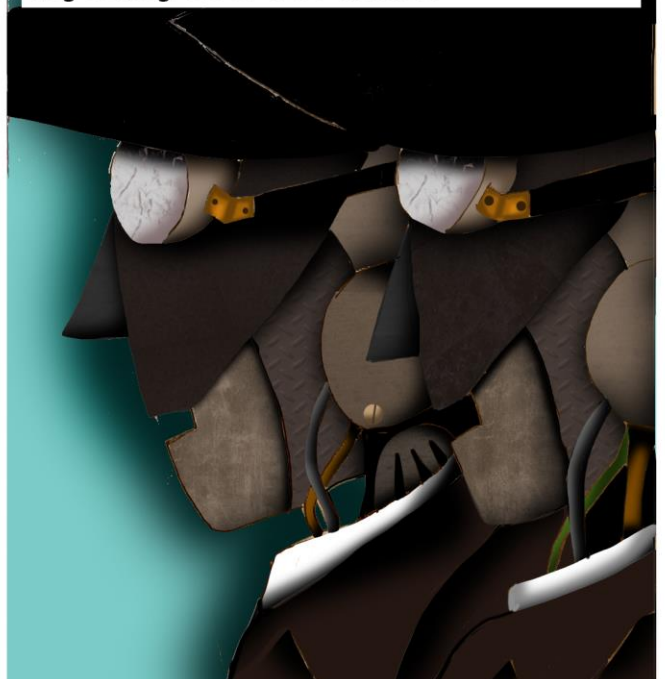


Pierce held a shimmer of hope that someone, perhaps Kelly and Frank, would be upstairs. Maybe the Trickster would appear. Instead, something else entirely different waited for them.





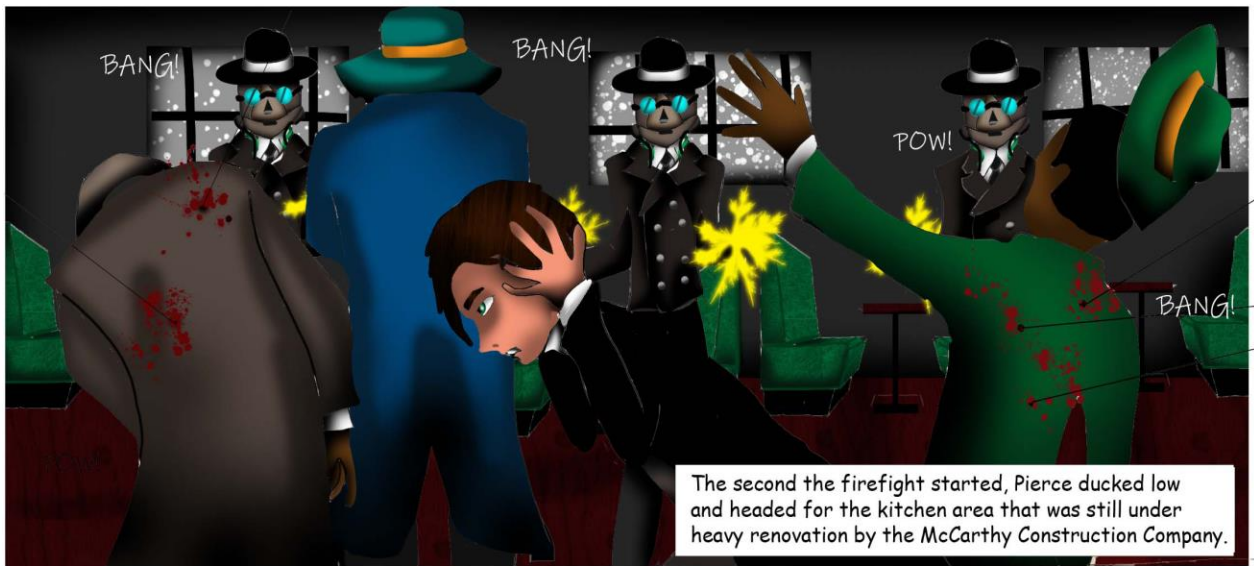
The gents with their heads bowed like some sort of dramatic choir ready to sing a hymn raised their heads. They didn't seem real. Their faces appeared to be made of patches of metal, yet their eyes were human, set deep inside eye sockets and guarded by goggles. Each of them shared similar features such as blocky noses and thin mouths. Their throats consisted of a single clear tube surrounded by a series of wires, thin pipes, and gears that turned whenever their heads moved. These blokes seemed manufactured. Each had a faint fog coming out of their mouths.



Christ, were they . . . ?

Machine Men!







The End