

Crime Watch

By Jack English

Chapter One: Money, Money, Money, Money

In a city as old and rich as Philadelphia there are bound to be a lot of secrets, a lot of money, and a lot of secret money.

Demolition began on the Baldwin Building at 6:00 A.M. It was the one-time headquarters for the Baldwin Locomotive Company. Seven stories tall with a granite façade and massive brass doors, it was a beacon from the past. Built in the age of the steam engines, it was one of the last pre-World War I buildings in the city.

A chain link fence surrounded the site and the police had blocked off Fifth Street between Spruce and Pine. Two dozen people stopped to watch as a giant crane, its diesel engine snorting under the load, lifting a two-ton wrecking ball in the air.

The operator turned the crane sideways a little and the wrecking ball drew back, gathering speed as it swung toward the corner of the classic building. The ball's momentum ripped through the structure sending a cloud of granite, brick, wood and paper exploding into the air. A cheer went up from the crowd. Students of architecture winced, but everyone else just wanted to see a wreck. People loved a wreck.

The brick and granite crashed to the ground with an enormous thud, kicking up a cloud of dust. Wood paneling clattered to the ground an instant later. The paper floated down lazily. The crowd watched quietly until someone pointed to the paper and shouted, "It's money!"

People knocked down the fence surrounding the building and grabbed as much of it as they could. The construction foreman shouted and tried to wave people away as the wrecking ball swung overhead and the operator positioned the crane for another whack at the building.

People scrambled over the rubble stuffing bills into their pockets. Others grabbed bills that skittered along the ground. Fights broke out as people grabbed bundles of cash from one another. A screaming woman pounded on an old man who dove onto a pile of loose money.

The crane's operator, concentrating on where to strike the building next swung the ball again, taking another bite out of the building. Granite and plaster leapt from the building along with another cloud of green paper. The rubble knocked a half dozen people to the ground.

Word of the money spread and people came running from blocks around. The crane operator positioned the crane to take another bite out of the building. Police sirens wailed, and the crowd surged forward, each person trying to grab as much as they could.

The construction foreman shouted into his

walkie-talkie. “Stop! Stop! Stop the demolition!” As he pleaded with the crane operator, the ball began to swing again. The crane operator finally saw what was happening and jerked the controls so that the wrecking ball missed the building but swung wildly in the air above the crowd.

Police formed a line, holding batons at chest height, and tried to push the crowd away. But it was like sending a squad of ten-year olds to stop the tide. The crowd fought back and surged forward knocking several police off balance. They were nearly trampled by the crowd.

An ambulance pulled up. Paramedics climbed over the rubble looking for the injured and got elbowed aside as the mad rush for money only got more frantic. One of the medics grabbed a bundle of cash and ran.

More police arrived and more on-lookers dove into the rubble looking for cash. It took the better part of an hour, but the police finally gained control of the site. By then, most of the people who had scooped up armfuls of money had gotten away.

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Wilson Kiley was a freelance crime writer. He had been up all night on a police ride-along. They dropped him off at his Camac Street row home. He clicked on the television while stripping off his tie. He headed for the kitchen and a stiff drink.

“Riot on Fifth Street... police in retreat... dozens hospitalized...” urgent disconnected

phrases spewed from the television as he slid onto the sofa, drink in hand. He upped the volume. “Police are still battling crowds trying to get to the money scattered around the streets.” The camera panned up and he recognized the partially demolished building not four blocks from his house.

“Shit!” He put down his drink and grabbed his notepad slamming the door behind him. It was mid-morning and getting hot. He jogged down Pine Street and saw police cars blocking the street. He squeezed past the barricade and ran into a uniformed policeman big enough to block out the sun.

“Where do you think you’re going?” the officer asked.

“Press.” Kiley showed him a worn press pass.

“Sorry, can’t let you through,” he said.

“Detective Whitehead.” Kiley waved at an officer standing on a pile of rubble fifty feet away, “Can I...” he waved his notepad toward the scene of the crime.

“Let him pass.” Whitehead said. Wilson Kiley had known Billy Whitehead, now Detective Whitehead, since the second grade. They grew up on Sepviva Street, frequented the playground at Huntington and Trenton Avenue; and played in the rail yards north of Leigh Avenue. In a lot of ways, Philadelphia is a small town with small town sensibilities.

“What gives?” Kiley asked.

“Looks like somebody left a safe full of money in the Baldwin Building. The wrecking ball must have smashed it open and that created a hell of a mess.”

Kiley pulled out a notepad, “Can I quote you?”

“Would it matter if I said, no?”

Kiley shrugged. “How many injured?”

“Eleven hospitalized. A lot of the injured just walked away with arms full of money.”

“How much did they get?”

“Don’t know. They were scooping up money for ten minutes before we got here. There must have been a hundred people digging through the rubble; no telling how much they got, or even how much is left.” Whitehead stooped down and snagged a fifty-dollar bill. He glanced at it and handed it to Kiley.

Across the top was printed, “Fifty Dollars in Silver Payable to the Bearer on Demand.” “You don’t see many of these around,” Kiley said. “I guess you want this back.”

Whitehead just held out his hand.

“Mind if I look around the building?” Kiley asked.

“I’ll go with you.” Whitehead waved over two uniformed officers. “Murphy, Vento, follow me.”

The heavy bronze doors which once guarded the entrance to the Baldwin Building had been removed and plywood had been nailed over a hastily built frame. Murphy and Vento pried off a piece of plywood and climbed inside. Kiley and

Whitehead followed.

The first floor was cavernous. All of the brass window frames, elevator doors and hand rails had been salvaged as well as most of the marble. It was a sad to see the once eloquent building stripped to its underwear.

Detective Whitehead wasn't interested in the architecture, what was left of it. He wanted to see where the money had come from. He headed to the stairs, Murphy and Vento in tow. "Come on. I don't have all day. I got to get back before the Captain starts barking for me."

They climbed six flights of stairs to the top floor and made their way toward the front of the building where the wrecking ball had torn a gaping hole in the wall.

Two offices had been placed next to each other and each had a large window. But what looked like a wall separating the two offices was really a void, a cavity, a hidden room about six feet wide. At one end of the room narrow shelves held piles of money. Some of the wrappers said, 'McAdoo Miner's Bank.' Others were wrapped in paper bands from other banks.

"You guys," Whitehead motioned toward Murphy and Vento. "Secure this money and get it to the station and no samples. Understand?"

"Yeah, yeah," they grumbled.

"Let me take some pics first, OK?" Kiley asked.

"Sure. You got two minutes."

Kiley used his phone to take photos of the

undisturbed cash and the broken shelves at one end of the hidden room. Then he took photos of the two adjoining offices, being sure to document how there was no break in the ornate plaster ceilings of either office. “This room must have been here from the jump.” Kiley said, “designed into the building.”

“Probably.” Whitehead leaned out of the hole in the front of the building and looked down toward the ground.

Kiley examined the walls on both sides of the void, going from one office to the other, looking for a hidden door or other way in. Running his fingers across the lobby wall between the two offices, he felt what seemed like a piano hinge running from the floor up to a break in the paneling about six feet high. It was covered with fifty coats of paint.

He went back to the office where Murphy and Vento were securing the money under Whitehead’s watchful eye and climbed into the hidden room and walked back toward the lobby. There, at the end, he saw a latch that would have let him out into the lobby, but for the fifty coats of paint holding the secret door shut.

Chapter Two: The Interview

The office of WKQE radio was in the Pennsylvania Suburban Station building. Having

been up all night and then crawling over the Baldwin Building, Wilson Kiley was bone tired. He would have canceled his meeting with the station manager, but it had taken two months to get it. Kiley took the elevator up to the seventh floor and to his interview with Gregor Lobowski, owner and operator of WKQE.

Lobowski was an overweight, middle aged, cigar smoking man trying to eke a living out of a 5,000-watt radio station. His programming was a motley mix of news, weather, sports and music. It was less than the sum of its parts and provided no clear evidence of what it wanted to be to either listeners or advertisers. Kiley knocked on the open door.

Lobowski was sitting behind a desk stacked high with paper. He motioned Kiley in.

“My name is...”

“Yeah I know. It’s Kiley. You got an idea for a show? You got two minutes.”

“I’m a freelance crime reporter.” Kiley handed Lobowski a folder full of clippings. “And I’d like to do a half-hour crime show maybe three or four times a week.”

“Crime shows are a dime a dozen,” Lobowski said.

“What about crime and treasure?” Kiley asked.

“What do you mean crime and treasure?” Lobowski asked.

“I guess you heard about the money that came pouring out of the Baldwin Building this

morning,” Kiley said. “It was hidden treasure. A city as old and rich as Philadelphia has got to have more secrets, more hidden money, more treasure waiting to be found.”

“Like what?” Lobowski pressed.

“Hire me and I’ll tell you.”

Lobowski cut him off. “Got no money for features, kid.”

“You’ve got advertisers, don’t you?”

“A few.”

“Suppose I work for half the new advertising I bring in?”

“I got nobody to sell ads for your slot. It’s just me here.” Lobowski waved at the room around him.

“I’ll get advertisers.”

“Why’d you come to me kid?”

“You gotta start somewhere. You can’t go from zero to network news overnight.”

“What the fuck are you taking about? You come here to ask for a job and you’re already telling me you’re gonna quit and go network? What kind of bullshit...”

Just then a side door to the office door banged open and tall unshaven man with dark circles under his eyes burst in. He was wearing a worn and slightly dirty trench coat. Not the normal thing on a day pushing eighty-five degrees. He looked slightly manic and a little like Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber. Kiley looked for a place to duck if the man started shooting.

“I want the raise you promised and I want it now!” the man demanded.

“Crenshaw, I told you we just don’t have the money.”

“Well you better find the money in the next ten minutes or I’m not going on the air.” They both glanced at the clock. It was ten minutes until three. “You’ve been promising me another five hundred a week for a year now. So, either you pony up right now or I’m through.”

“You can’t quit without two weeks’ notice.”

“Screw you!”

The man slammed the door as he stormed out.

“Ever been on the radio kid?”

“No.”

“Well this is a good time to start.” Lobowski grabbed Kiley’s arm and dragged him down the hall to a small office that he called the broadcast studio. There was a desk with a microphone on it: stacks of newspapers, a clock on the wall, and a couple of computers. There was an engineer on the other side of a glass partition. “Read the news, Google stuff, recite poetry for all I care. Wally,” Lobowski pointed to the engineer on the other side of the glass, “will turn on the yellow light thirty seconds before a commercial and the red light when the commercial begins. The yellow light comes on thirty seconds before the commercial ends and when the red light goes out, the commercial is over. Green light means you’re talking, playing music, making noise, I don’t care.

Just don't go to dead air.”

“What's the pay?” Kiley asked as he slid in front of the microphone and put on the headset.

“Thirty-six thousand a year, same as Crenshaw.”

“Thirty-six thousand plus half the new advertising I bring in,” he said.

“We'll discuss it,” Lobowski said.

“I'll do your show after we discuss it.”

“OK it's discussed,” Lobowski said as the second hand swept up toward 3:00 P.M. “Thirty-six a year and half the new advertising.”

The green light went on and Wally pointed to Kiley. “Good afternoon, this is Wilson Kiley, your crime reporter. I'm going to tell you about the fortune that came flying out of the Baldwin Building this morning.”

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Kiley went on to riff for the next three hours until the show ended at 6:00 P.M. He was exhausted and exhilarated. He was able to keep the audience wound up talking about the Baldwin Building but, what would he talk about tomorrow?

Chapter Three: Executive Order 6102

Wilson Kiley was excited about his second day in broadcast journalism. He put on his headset and settled in, spreading newspapers around him; key articles were circled in red magic marker.

“Welcome to a brand-new show called *Crime Watch*. I’m Wilson Kiley. You probably heard about all the money hidden in the Baldwin Building. The police recovered a million three hundred and seventy-eight thousand and the police figure the crowd got away with another two hundred thousand.”

“The money was all in silver certificates. That’s right silver certificates. The time was when a person could take a twenty-dollar bill down to the bank or to the Treasury Department and demand twenty dollars’ worth of silver. The dates on the bills I saw ran from 1902 to 1933. Much of the money recovered by the police was wrapped in MacAdoo Miners’ Bank money bands. MacAdoo went bust in 1934, so the money was probably stashed there before 1934. How much before, we don’t know yet.”

“Is anyone surprised to find a stash of money like this? Philadelphia is more than three hundred years old. In that time the city has been the home to millionaires, billionaires, industrialists, crooks, embezzlers, bootleggers, and greedy politicians. It’s been the home of Presidents and the Treasury of the United States. People have been born, lived, died, worked, saved, stolen and hoarded money here. Up until 1830, Philadelphia was the largest city on the continent. You think a city that old, that complex, and that rich has given up all its secrets? Not a chance.”

Kiley leaned into the microphone and whispered

as though telling a secret to a friend. “Our job, yours and mine, is to peel back layers of secrets and see what’s underneath. Together, my friends, we are going on a journey... an adventure. We’re going to find the treasures that lie beneath the city’s surface. And we’re going to do it together.

“Now you might ask why I think there’s more treasure to be found in our fair city. The answer is simple. Those who have money want to keep it. We take banks for granted and think they’re safe, but that has only been true for the last seventy years or so. Before that, you had as much chance of keeping your money safe by hiding it under a mattress as by putting it in a bank. Back then, many banks were little more than scams.

“I’ll give you two more reasons to think that people have hidden money in the city: the income tax and prohibition. Once the income tax was passed in 1913, people started hiding money from the government as well as hiding it from crooks.... no comment on the similarity. And since the government controls banks, money deposited there is going to be found and taxed. The other reason people hid money was prohibition. People made vast sums of money from bootlegging and where could they put it? Not in banks where the government could find it. They had to hide it. People are still hiding money from the taxman.”

“Friends,” Kiley whispered, “does April 5, 1933 ring a bell? That’s when President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 6102 which

required all Americans to turn in their gold to the government.”

“Do you think people did it? Do you think people turned in their gold? If you said no blankin’ way you’d probably be right. Do I know this for a fact? Well, I know human nature. And you do too. What if the government said, ‘We want you to turn your IRAs, 401k’s and savings and the government will manage it for you?’ Would you trust them?”

“No? Well that’s probably the reaction of everybody who had gold. Unfortunately, some had gold where the government could find it. In 1933, the Swiss banking firm Uebersee Finanz-Korporation had a million two in gold coins on deposit for business purposes. When they went to retrieve it, they were shocked to find that it had been confiscated by the United States government.”

“What did people do? When President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 6102, they just buried their gold a little deeper.”

“And think about this. If a mobster or bootlegger had a stash of gold bars somewhere, do you think he’d say, to his friends and neighbors, “Guess what I have in the basement?” Of course not. It would have been his deepest, darkest secret. And what if he died before he told anyone where he hid the gold? Mobsters and bootleggers didn’t have a long life expectancy. Their lives could have gotten cut short by a rival at any time. There is no guarantee they told anyone where they stashed

their gold before they died.”

“So where is all this gold now? Great, great Aunt Sadie may have hidden gold coins and jewelry between the attic rafters. Great, great grandfather Leon Rosier may have removed a few bricks from a basement wall, dug out a little hiddie-hole and put back the bricks. Bootleggers and mobsters may have buried it in caves, abandoned railway tunnels, under basement floors, at the bottom of wells or any of a hundred other places. And, they may have stored it in hidden rooms just like the one in the Baldwin Building.”

“Maybe, dear listener, we, you and I can figure out just exactly where some of that gold is hidden. Until next time, good bye.”

Wally the engineer said, “Jeez-us! That was great! Is any of it true?”

Kiley spread his arms wide, “Most of it. Look it up if you like. I’m sure our listeners are on the Internet right now trying to find out whether I’m bull shitting them or if there’s something to the ‘hidden gold’ story.”

“And if they find that it’s true?”

“Ratings gold, my friend. Ratings gold!”

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