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Meliora Hero's Journey

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I was born in Chicago. It's my hometown. I spent several years in Cleveland, as well, but Chicago holds a special place in my heart. When I started working for the Justice Department, in the Prohibition Bureau, I started hearing about Al Capone: a Chicago gangster who had been bootlegging enormous amounts of alcohol, on top of his alleged tax evasion. I was appointed as the leader of a squad of men whose sole purpose was to take Capone down. By wire-tapping phone calls and surveilling Capone and his cronies, we were able to locate many of his underground distilleries, which we then shut down. Once he figured out that he couldn't out-manuever us, Al Capone sent one of his men into my office to bribe me: I told him to leave my office, and immediately spoke with the press. I told them that neither me nor my men could be paid off, and we wouldn't be stopped. The very next day, a reporter gave my men and I a nickname: The Untouchables.



Al Capone obviously didn't take kindly to us costing him millions of dollars. He increased security around his distilleries, our phones were wiretapped, and there were even several attempts made on my life. But that didn't slow me down. We were untouchable. I figure that if I tell this story, I should start from the beginning. I was born in Chicago, as I already said, in 1903. I attended the University of Chicago when I was 18 and majored in commerce, law, and political science.

I worked for a credit company for a short while after college. I didn't enjoy my work there, so I started looking for bigger and better things. Eventually, I found those bigger and better things; I moved on to the Chicago branch of the U.S. Treasury in 1927. I became an agent there, but was transferred to the Justice Department the following year. I guess you could say that's when I started making a real difference in the world.

My work at the Justice Department was simple in spirit, but much more difficult in action: I was to stop people from bootlegging. At first, I was mostly shutting down small-scale distilleries. The kind that were run by some hicks in their basement. Usually it was a father and his sons, or a few guys who were all equally dependent on alcohol and a little short on money. I was content with my job. I felt that I was doing good in the world, I wasn't in any immediate danger, and it wasn't too stressful. I liked it. However, I was given an assignment.

"Come into my office, Ness." My boss, Hank Williams.

"What can I do for you, sir?"

"You've got a new assignment. It'll be tougher than your last few."

I was excited. I liked new challenges.

"We want you to get Al Capone."

I was no longer so excited. I had heard enough about Al Capone in the papers to know that he wasn't to be trifled with. He'd had people killed for a lot less than what I was being asked to do.

That *would* put me in immediate danger, and that *would* be stressful. I didn't really think I was up to the task, either. There were other employees who had been working there for far longer than I had, and they would probably be more willing than me.

"Sir--"

"Look, Ness. I know this is going to be dangerous. I know it's going to be tough going. But I know you can do it."

"Mr. Williams, I'm not so sure I can. I haven't even worked here for very long."

He chuckled. "I know that. That's why I want you running this. The longer someone's been here, the longer they've been exposed to the corruption, the more chances they've had to be bribed."

That made a bit of sense to me, but I was still unsure. I think he could tell.

"Ness, I know a little bit about Capone. Some of my buddies on the force have had run-ins with him. He's slippery. It's going to be hard to pin anything on him, but you can make it happen. He'll probably try to pay you off. It's going to be hard to refuse. But you need to refuse."

My assignment to catch Al Capone was one of my first assignments and was handed down, indirectly, from the President, Herbert Hoover. We were trying to get Capone on his bootlegging and tax evasion. I chose my squad of men carefully. I couldn't risk taking anybody who was already on Capone's payroll, so I was very selective. I chose nine men, all in all. I

chose some for their intelligence, some for their physical prowess, but I chose all of them for their desire to bring down Capone's empire. At first, we tried the same tactics on him as we did with any other bootlegger, but Capone was simply too well-connected and powerful. He was bribing a lot of people and paying for protection, which made it extremely difficult to get close to him, to get anything on him. As long as he had money, we couldn't touch him. So we took his money.

Al Capone brought in an estimated \$75,000,000 annually. A disgusting amount of money. A lot of that came from his distilleries and breweries, so we went after those. In the first six months, we shut down 19 of his distilleries and 6 large-scale breweries. We estimated that that cost him about \$1 million. That's when he sent somebody in to bribe me.

I would be given \$2,000 a week if I simply stopped trying so hard to take him down. Of course, I didn't take the bribe. But I thought about it. \$2,000 a week was a lot of money back then. It still is, but back then, it was even more. I would never have to work again. I could live like a celebrity. I could move to Spain. I could buy a car for everybody I knew. But I didn't. I heard my boss's voice ringing in my ears. I told Capone's henchman to get out of my office.

After we were given the nickname "The Untouchables," a lot of people argued that we'd get too much recognition and it'd be nearly impossible for us to operate covertly. We did get a lot of recognition, but we still managed to get work done without being noticed. The problem was, Capone had ten men paid to follow us around and wire-tap our phones, so they were always one step ahead of us. At one point, I saw Capone's men outside of my parents' home. That just made me even angrier. After that, we shut down the biggest brewery that we'd encountered, which cost him about \$200,000.

Soon after shutting down that brewery, a friend of mine was murdered. Can you guess who killed him? It wasn't Al Capone. Not directly, at least, he was too smart for that. But it was obviously somebody on his payroll. I was devastated, of course. I kept questioning myself: was it my fault? Was it even worth it? But I realized that it was. If I gave up on my assignment and let Capone run free, he'd win. He would continue to win. Nobody would stand up to him if The Untouchables couldn't. So I retaliated.

I called him one day and told him to look out his window at 11 o'clock. At that time, we drove all of Capone's cars that we'd seized in our raids right past his building. Now, I have no way of knowing whether or not he actually looked out his window and saw them, but I'm pretty sure he did. I say that because he tried to kill me.

It isn't much of a story, really. It was a simple assassination attempt. Somebody showed up with a gun, shot at me and missed. Most people would have been terrified after an assassination attempt, and I admit that I was quite scared, but I was relieved in a strange way. I knew that the fact that he had tried to kill me meant a couple things, the first being that he knew who I was. If my men and I weren't making an impact on his life, he wouldn't have cared to assassinate me or even know my name. The second being that the fact that he felt the need to assassinate me meant that I was getting close. He was getting nervous. Knowing that I was getting close motivated me even more. I told my squad that we had to work harder. We were close. We couldn't let Capone get away.

We worked around the clock for weeks. Now, you're probably thinking we stumbled upon some specific piece of evidence that would guarantee his conviction, or we got into a car

chase, or some equally storybook ending, but none of that happened. The real ending to this story is somewhat anticlimactic.

We managed to scrape together nearly 5,000 indictments of bootlegging against Al Capone. We presented them to the U.S. Attorney, George E.Q. Johnson, but, unfortunately, he didn't take them. He wanted to get Capone on his tax evasion instead of bootlegging, as the Internal Revenue Service had been investigating Capone as well, and had even more evidence than we did. It was probably the right move. Jurors love to drink, but nobody likes a cheapskate.

Although it was the right move, my men and I were naturally quite disappointed. But Capone was found guilty, which we celebrated. He was given 11 years, which is more than we expected, but we weren't about to complain. He spent most of his time in Alcatraz, isolated a few kilometers off the coast of San Francisco. He died not long after they released him.

I, on the other hand, did quite well for myself. I moved back to Cleveland. I became the head of public safety, in charge of about 2,000 cops and firefighters. I ended up making some changes to the city.

The biggest change I made was hiring some "city employees," who were actually undercover cops, to investigate those who we thought were on the take. I knew what it was like on the inside of a corrupt police-force, seeing as I'd spent so long in Chicago. Honestly, I'm a little surprised that none of the cops in Cleveland tried to pay me off, so that I wouldn't investigate them. But that would have been stupid. They all knew that I was untouchable.