

true purpose, so the *Thunder* is happy to do it for them. If there is anything "Red" about this episode, it is the red-handed attempt to scapegoat a rival. This is the kind of propaganda that produces class warfare, pogroms, lynchings, and in this ridiculously contrived mob outburst, the bullying of blameless newsboys and destruction of their wares. Such malicious instigation is the venom of hate throughout the worst of history. The antidote is truth, and here it is: the only revolution this newspaper advocates is the overthrow of Anaconda's unconfessed influence over the state of Montana's tax system.

In short, a person could survey every liars' club from here to Chicago and not find a bigger falsehood than that in the *Post*'s false diatribe of yesterday.

—Pluvius

"That ought to hold them awhile," Jared exulted, and the staff cheered as the press began to roll with our boldly headlined shot back at Cutthroat Cartwright and the higher snakes on the top floor of the Hennessy Building.

"My, aren't we glad Sandy had books by all those Russians," Grace said.

"Maybe you're learning your trade, Morgan," Sandison granted. "That Chicago gibe was a nice touch. Heh, heh."

True to Jared's prediction, the *Thunder*'s retaliatory blast did give the *Post* cause for pause. Its editorials for the next some days were confined to topics such as streetlights and stray dogs—and to our relief, the corner bonfires of *Thunders* were quenched when Cutlass wasn't furnishing the matches.

Our own philippics, in Jared's choice word, kept up the drumbeat on taxes, taxes, taxes, though I

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gibe

Comment [JA81]: Please confirm space breaks here; original ms has "My, aren't we" and "Maybe you're learning" and "True to Jared's" each starting a new section; or okay as done here?

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Each of the 3 passages after "That ought to hold them a while" starts a new section, indicating time has passed, so Sandison's needs space break between it and Grace's, and flush ~~right~~ left.

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section



was exceedingly careful not to give Cutthroat Cartwright another opening; the "Red menace" episode had been too narrow an escape. Newspaper life seemed to have settled down to the usual journalistic rivalry, our reporters resorting to every wile to scoop theirs, our newsboys outshouting theirs with catchier headlines. Yet there was a feeling in the air, distinct as the ink-and-nicotine atmosphere in the *Thunder* newsroom, that in the ongoing struggle with Anaconda, it was our move next.

Rab precipitated it.

On Saturday furlough from the hoosegow school, she and Russian Famine accompanied Jared when he dropped by to brief Armbrister and me on that week's legislative progress toward the vital statewide vote on the tax commission matter. "It's slower than digging the Panama Canal, but we're getting there," he vouched. "The bill survived the committee hearings despite all the ~~company's~~ Ulcer Gulch stooges tried to do to it, and now it comes to the floor. We win there, and all it takes is the governor's signature."

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And many thousand voters' X's, I thought but didn't say. Jared was inhaling the smell of victory, Rab bright and keen at his side, and even Armbrister for once came out from under his cloud. Maybe we all caught exuberance from Famine, darting to the society desk, where Mary Margaret Houlihan, possessed of a sweet tooth, kept a jar of gumdrops free for the taking and helped himself to his customary handful. Back in high spirits myself—there is nothing like a close call to sharpen one's zest for life—I caught his eye and when the others were lost in conversation, I clinked the brass knuckles in my pocket as though I ~~were~~ jingling loose change. Grinning conspiratorially at the sound, the boy bounded off to the back room for his ~~newsboy~~ bag and bundle of *Thunders*.

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Comment [CE82]: Perhaps to avoid echo, change to read, "the newsboy bounded off to the back room for his bag and bundle of *Thunders*."

"He thinks you're the cat's meow, Mr. Morgan," Rab observed. "All I hear is how much he wants to be like you."

Touched by that, "He's one of a kind himself" was as much as I could say.

"Maybe the kid is getting us more readers than we are, bless his buttons." Armbrister really was in

yes



a sunny mood. "Circulation's up, day by day."

"That's the stuff," I chortled.

"The more the merrier," Jared exulted.

"All well and good," the feminine voice of reason abridged us, "but aren't you just preaching to the choir?"

We three men buttoned our lips like caught schoolboys taking our scolding and reluctantly faced around to its authority. It was up to Jared to ask warily, "How so, Rab?"

She poised for a moment before settling to the corner of the editor's desk, in the attitude of a canny abbess revealing the Gospel. "You're selling papers like mad here in town, but what does that prove? Butte people mostly have their minds already made up about Anaconda and the miners, they've had to for years, haven't they." She was not waiting to hear the male view of things. "What about other places? Every voter in the state is going to have a say on the tax issue, but how many of them have any chance to read Mr. Morgan's editorials, unless they pick them up out of the tumbleweeds?" Having made her point, she crossed her arms on her bosom and looked at us sternly.

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Jared recovered first. "As much as I hate to admit it, she's right. I practically wallpaper the legislature with the *Thunder* when I can, but go downtown in Helena and there's Anaconda's local propaganda sheet being sold on every corner."

"We've looked at this up, down, and sideways," Armbrister protested. "Shipping bundles of papers around the state by train costs a fortune—the Anaconda bastards see to that with the railroads, you can just bet. And it's slower than the Second Coming, anyway." He shrugged fatalistically. "We're putting out a Butte newspaper, Jared, we can't snap our fingers and change that."

Maybe we couldn't, but someone could. In spite of myself, the phrase What is to be done? again raised a clamor in my brain, demanding answer. To quiet it, I entered the discussion Jared and Armbrister were having. "If, as the Braille salesman said to the cyclops, you'll turn a blind eye, I

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believe I can arrange to have truckloads distributed to other towns.”

“At how much per delivery?” Armbrister demanded.

“As low as it goes. Don’t ask me more.”

“Truckloads?” exclaimed Jared. “How?”

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“Blind eye, remember? Have the bundles waiting under a tarpaulin on the loading dock tonight.”

“There, see?” Rab said as if it had all been foretold.

Armbrister was dubiously doing arithmetic on a sheaf of copy paper. “We’d need to double our press run.”

Jared looked at me, then at the pleased pussycat that was Rab, then at me again. He set his jaw and said, “Let’s go for broke.”

“Hsst. Over here, Smitty.”

“Boss! Almost didn’t see you there in the shadows.” The thickset bootlegger veered off from entering the warehouse and joined me in the dark alley. “I thought you wasn’t coming back until next week.”

“Change of plans,” I intoned in what I hoped was a passable Highliner voice.

“I bet I know. You don’t want them dumb duck hunters catching on to your comings and goings.” He peeked around the corner until satisfied there was no sign of an ambush vehicle and someone riding shotgun, literally. “Coast’s clear. Ain’t you coming in to tell the boys what’s what, like always?”

“I’m in a hurry, I have to leave it to you.” Smitty swelled in importance. “The trucks on the Whiskey Gap run—”

“Boy, that works so slick, boss, you’d think it was a regular highway out there in nowhere.”

“—the trucks are empty on the way north, am I right?”

“Sure they are, so we can load them to the gills when they get to Canada.”



"Tell the boys here's what I want done on the trips from now on." I recited it as he listened closely.

When I was through, he wore a puzzled expression.

"Just plain old newspapers, is this?"

"Hardly plain." I thought fast. "More like an extra, only they can't call it that every day. You know how people snap those up to see what has happened. Think how many more drinks that will add up to while customers sit there taking in the news."

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"Oh, I get it." Smitty brushed the shoulder of my overcoat in case any speck had dared to light on it. "You bet, we'll drop papers at every speakeasy from here to Canada. What a humdinger of an idea, boss."

Fresh from that unblemished performance as the Highliner and riding high in the newsroom on account of the *Thunder's* miraculously doubled circulation, I hummed my way up the front walk after work the next day. Even Ajax on the door\_knocker looked less forbidding than usual. "Grace," I called cheerily as I stepped in, for once unconcerned about whatever mischief the house had wreaked on itself during my hours away. "I'm home, darling. Yoo-hoo."

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No answer. Or did I hear a low moan somewhere?

"Grace?" With growing apprehension I headed for the kitchen, the silence at that end of the long hallway now more ominous than any sound.

I burst in, then stepped back at the sight of her, seated at the kitchen table as if dumped there. Her face was smeared white. The calamine lotion she was slathering on her arms barely covered the red welts from wrist to elbow. Stopping to scratch like fury, she looked at me woefully through her tragic white mask.

"Morrie," she said in an awful tone, "you're giving me hives."

"I just got here," I said in confusion.



"You know what I'm talking about." She strenuously banged the bottom of the calamine bottle with the palm of her hand for more of the soothing lotion, which unfortunately for me could not be taken internally.

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"Grace"—I circled in as close as I dared, knowing better than to touch her—"I have no idea what brought this on."

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"Your, your past history," she half-whispered as if in agony. I blanched. She went on miserably, "There was a knock on the door after you left for work this morning. Who else but the railroad drayman, saying our trunk had turned up finally. Hurrah, I thought, but when he brought it in, I saw it wasn't ours"—she gritted her teeth and dug at both elbows before going on—"and figured it had to be the one you'd lost when you first came to Butte."

I had lamented the loss of that trunk, with all my earthly belongings in it, for a year and a half, but right then I wished it had vanished forever.

"Then I thought," Grace was struggling to tell the rest, "I don't know what I thought, but I peeked in the trunk and there were some clothes and things but mostly books. I picked up the one on top, wanting to surprise you with it when you came home—it was something or other in Latin—"

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"Julius Caesar's *Gallic Wars*," I said numbly, knowing what was coming.

"—and when I opened it out of curiosity, there it was on the flyleaf, wasn't it. 'To Morgan. Merry Christmas 1908 in any language. Forever yours, Rose.'" She looked at me furiously. "Another wife, have we here?" She scratched at herself so hard it hurt to watch. "And that wasn't all."

"No, but I can expl—"

"Newspaper clippings of a prizefighter. Who looked for all the world like a younger you, but with some name I never heard of." This woman I so loved, the mending spirit of my life, gazed at me through her wretched mask of lotion and asked the question I had hoped would never come. "Who are you, if you're not Morris Morgan?"



Morgan Llewellyn, of course. Although for someone left as much in the dark about my past as Grace, there was no “of course” to it, unfortunately. More like a plaintive owl hoot “Who?”

In desperation I set out to explain that the prizefighter was not me but my late brother Casper “the Capper” Llewellyn, onetime ~~lightweight~~ ~~heavyweight~~ champion of the world, and Rose was not my wife but his, and therefore merely my sister-in-law—“You must believe me, Rose is the sort who would sign ‘Forever Yours’ on a Montgomery Ward catalog order”—and that certain unforeseen circumstances back in Chicago had made it imperative for me to change my name. With interruptions accompanied by Grace’s furious scratching, the story came out in fits and starts. Even so, she soon enough grasped that a fixed championship fight, the gambling mob’s wrath that did in Casper, and the necessity for Rose and me to flee together to Montana were involved.

When I was finished, or at least out of words, the woman I had never wanted to hurt looked at me in a heartbreaking way. “Morrie, you are a magnet for trouble,” she despaired. “If all this happened a dozen years ago, why are the gamblers still after you?”

“Long memories and short tempers.” I thought it best not to add that a suspicious World Series bet worth a junior fortune was enough to stir both of those.

My hopes went up while she deliberated as if to herself. “I can understand that much, I suppose.” Butte as well as Chicago certainly held examples of such behavior, after all. Then, though, she spoke with more agitation than even hives could bring about. “But to marry me under”—was I imagining, or did the red of her eyes increase like the glow of coals as she sought the most damning phrase—“false

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**Comment [CE84]:** Author/editor: Is there such a thing as a lightweight heavyweight? On p. 154, it says Casper was only a lightweight. See also p. 233.

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pretenses! Who am I supposed to be, let alone you, with a phony name that I'm not even sure I can spell?"

"I, ah, apologize for the discrepancy," I gingerly tried soothing her. "But people alter names all the time."

"Oh, really? Since when, impostor?"

"Since, well, let's say Mark Twain. It is well known he was born Samuel Langhorne Clemens, and if that doesn't constitute an alteration—"

"Morrie, he was a writer," she said through her teeth, "of course he made things up. I'm talking about honest citizens."

"Then what about a vice president of the United States?"

"Now you're telling me that pickle-puss Calvin Coolidge is not actually Calvin Coolidge?"

"I'm not prepared to speak to that," I backed off markedly. "I refer to an earlier officeholder—Henry Wilson, who served under the presidency of Ulysses S. Grant, 1873 to 1875, I believe the dates were. The poor man began life as Jeremiah Jones Colbath. So, you see, there is precedent for improving on one's given na—"

"I see, all right. And I don't care what some forgotten mucky-muck back in the time of Useless Grant called himself, what matters to me is the husband I thought was Morrie Morgan but who turns out to be Morgan Llewellyn, if he is even telling the truth about that, and with a price on his hide besides." Tear tracks glistened on the calamine mask of her face. "I never expected life with you to be all strawberries and cream. I went through enough with Arthur to know a marriage isn't like that. But to find out that you're not at all who I thought you were—" Her voice trembled and broke. "Why couldn't you have told me before now?"

"Because I was afraid of something like this."

"Did you think I wouldn't forgive you?"



Below, a space and a new section styling is needed to give Grace time to gather her things and then depart.

Sweet Thunder 159

✓  
"You could start now," I said hopefully.

"Ooh, you. Morrie, I can't take it," she moaned. "I cannot live with someone who goes through life like, like"—she scratched more furiously than ever—"a chameleon on a barber pole." As ominously as I could hear them coming, her next words hit me worse than blows. "I'm going back to the boardinghouse. You can have your mansion and your shenanigans and your names, and see if I care."

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← The door-banging commotion of her departure drew Sandison out of his book-lined stronghold, the drumbeat of boots preceding the familiar bulk and beard into the drawing room where I waited despondently for the next round I was bound to lose. Before he had time to do more than scowl at me, Griff and Hoop appeared behind him, suitcases in hand.

"Um, uh," Griff stammered, and could manage no further utterance.

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Hoop croaked out: "What he means is—"

"I know," I acknowledged the valises they were holding as guiltily as robbers making a getaway.

"It's nothing against you, Morrie," they practically chorused.

"That's welcome news."

"We're sort of attached to Mrs. Morgan, is all."

"Understood."

"We aren't taking sides, you know."

"Of course not."

"It's not for us to judge whose fault it is when a woman walks out on a man or anything."

"Just go."

"Righto."

They shuffled to the door. "It's been nice, Mr. Sandison." He grunted in response as they limped out to join Grace at the boardinghouse.

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"The last two rats on the ghost ship, are we?" Sandison rumbled in the oppressive silence of the

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house. "What did you do to the poor woman, Morgan?"

"Nothing that can be corrected without going back in history, I fear," I said in agitation, pacing back and forth on the Turkish rug.

"That bad, hmm?" He crooked a finger for me to follow him into the library. "What a shame. I liked that Grace," his words kept after me as the desk chair groaned under his bulk. "Reminded me of Dora. Had a mind of her own. Not every woman does." No, mainly the ones who repeatedly tossed me in the reject bin. Rose and Grace. Womanhood unbridled, when it came to my efforts to be a reliable mate in life. ~~Caught up in self-misery~~ <sup>pity</sup> as I was, ~~it took~~ <sup>was saying</sup> a moment for Sandison's change of tone to register and stop me in my tracks. "Tell me," he ~~said~~ <sup>was saying</sup> quietly, "the whole thing."

**Comment [CE85]:** Editor/author: Dangler; as is, the sentence would read that "it" was "caught up in self-misery." Consider rephrasing as "Caught up . . . I needed a moment"? Also, delete "self," as "misery" can stand on its own? Or change to "self-pity," perhaps?

I did. My true name. The fixed-fight scheme, when Casper yielded his lightweight championship of the world—"Just parking it until the return bout," he reasoned—that worked all too well. The unabated fury of the Chicago gambling mob after it figured out we had won a fortune betting on the opponent. My beloved brother's long walk off a short pier into Lake Michigan, as the gamblers took their revenge and looked around for more. The pose of Rose and myself as sister and brother in our Marias Coulee concealment, her as a housekeeper and me as teacher in the one-room school. My impulsive return to Montana after nearly ten years' absence, only to become emmeshed in the 1919 chapter of struggle between the miners and Anaconda and thence shadowed incessantly by company goons suspicious of my identity. Even I had to admit, it added up to quite a story. If confession was good for the soul, mine should now have been so freshly scrubbed it shone.

Stroking his beard like a pet, my listener said not a word until I was done. "Gamblers. Bad company," he ~~tch-tched~~ <sup>ched</sup> the man who had sent people swinging from the end of a rope for looking sideways at his cows. He heaved himself around in his chair to face me directly. "Back there in '19, I wondered why you rated goons trailing you around more than anyone else in this demented town."

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"Yes, well, at least that pair of imbeciles long since departed Montana for the sake of their health.



As prescribed by the Wobblies, whom they were managing to annoy when they weren't after me like bloodhounds."

Sandison eyed me thoughtfully while I awaited whatever wise counsel he could offer to a wifeless, overworked, underpaid editorialist operating under an alias beyond an assumed name. Instead, what I received was:

"Morgan? 'Twixt thee and me, you don't happen to be this Highliner character, by any chance?"



I have to admit it: the iambic beat of “Twixt thee and me, you don’t happen to be” as uttered by Sandison came like the opening of a new chapter of myself. As if some turn of plot had sprung loose from the most imaginative of his books there in their wise ranks surrounding us in the circular room and, in the surprise coil of a sterling tale, captured the story\_line of my existence. Imagine what that would mean. My telling of the episode in the booze warehouse is shown to be a charade, and I stand revealed as the bootlegging mastermind I was taken for. Possessor of a daring secret existence such as that of the Scarlet Pimpernel during the French Revolution. Avenger in the mask of a people’s hero who causes chaos in the despotic haciendas of the rich and mighty, as per Zorro. Dual personality with an interchangeable identity in the manner of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde—no, that goes much too far. In this doffing of disguise, I simply emerge in my own telling as the Highliner whose appearance I already shared, with access to a safe crammed with cash, a legion of willing henchmen, and a ready-made legend. What a wonder the human chronicle is, how one’s character can be rewritten so thrillingly in the space of a page.

“What,” I parried Sandison’s all too poetic inquiry, “makes you ask?”

His gaze never veered from me in the least. “Let’s review. Back in Chicago you were Morgan Llewellyn, then you show up out here miraculously transformed into Morris Morgan, and you’re also Pluvius along the way. I just thought I’d check to see if I’m staying current.”

I held the moment. Then slipped back to the plain print of reality. “I am irremediably me, Sandy. Morgan Llewellyn, from birth on. A fallible being like any other. With a few too many names to my



name, perhaps," I joked feebly.

"Hmmp." The man whose own tags included String 'em Up Sam and the Earl of Hell frowned at me. "Too bad if you're not this notorious bootlegger. It'd give you a reliable livelihood." Sighing heavily, he folded his hands on his stomach and sat back in the ringing silence of a house empty except for the two of us. "What's for supper?"

Dual identity divides a person in more ways than one. I'd had long practice at being Morris Morgan, with Morgan Llewellyn put aside like an uncomfortable memory, and while that rearrangement of myself always took some toll on the nervous system, my assumed role in life was a safe bet as long as no one knew I was acting, so to speak, under an alias. Now the two individuals who meant most to me were aware of my change of name and the unflattering reason behind it, and while their reactions were worlds apart, the result was the same. Still volcanic as she flung things into her suitcase to leave, Grace erupted as <sup>had</sup> I tried one last time to assuage her. "You can call yourself Confucius for all I care, I am having no part of it. I refuse to look like a silly goose for marrying someone whose right name I had no least idea of. And if you know what's good for you, you won't tell anyone either." In his turn, Sandison merely drawled, "I suppose what you call yourself is your own business. Just remember what happened to Billy the Kid."

So, unexposed except to the bleakness of existence without Grace—and the challenges of bachelor life with Sandison—all I knew to do was to keep on as before at the *Thunder*. One thing about a newspaper office, behavior that would get you thrown out on your ear elsewhere in society is winked at as long as your fingers can still find the right typewriter keys. "Something happen to your dog,

Morgie?" was the extent of Armbrister's fellow feeling. I felt an actual sense of relief when the *Post's* editorials sharpened again with Cutlass calling my anti-Anaconda diatribes warmed-over cabbage in a cracked dish while I called his contributions the antics of an organ grinder's monkey on a copper chain.

toward me in my low mood.

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That kind of contest seemed safer than the domestic gauntlet I had just been put through.

Life had no more tricks up its sleeve until the day Sandison announced he would be late for supper—"The library trustees got it into their fool heads to have a meeting; bad habit of theirs"—and rather than face the empty house alone, I stayed on at work, thinking up Pluvius stratagems and losing track of the time. <sup>#</sup> Dusk had given way to the lit windows of storefronts when I belatedly set out for home, into the teeth of a squall. Maneuvering through the sidewalk traffic of pedestrians ducking their heads as they hurried out of the weather, what popped to my mind was Edward Bulwer-Lytton's hackneyed phrase in a justly obscure novel, "It was a dark and stormy night . . ." Well, it was. Energized by the wind, rain streaked the darkness, and as I climbed the street toward the Ajax end of town, each corner streetlamp was a silver cone of raindrops. <sup>#</sup> By then, the only other storm-adrift soul in sight was a delivery van driver who had pulled to the curb and was bent over at a fender, apparently checking a tire. Slogging past with my head down against the chilly wind and rain, I suddenly felt something much, much colder at the back of my neck, unmistakably the business end of a gun. An authoritative voice ordered, "Get in the back of the truck. Fast."

Rather than have my head blown off, I clambered up the bumper step and stumbled into the blackness of the van. My captor followed swiftly, yanking the door shut behind him. "Sit down," he snapped, "and don't try any monkey business while I get a light going." Managing to grope my way to a crate of some sort to sink onto, I tried to formulate a plan of action, not easy to do with the memory of that shotgun blast from indiscriminating bootleggers filling my mind. Mistaken identity could be a mortal error, a trigger squeeze away, if I made the wrong move. Meanwhile this assailant, kidnapper, whatever he proved to be, lit a carbide lamp such as was used in the mines. With the aid of its glow, my eyes adjusted to the dim interior of the van. Stacked around me were egg crates, sans eggs. In the full light of the lamp, I found myself looking at a near replica of myself.



"You're"—I swallowed—"him."

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"And you're not," said the Highliner, keeping the pistol casually but steadily aimed straight at me.

"Although there seems to be some confusion about that."

"Please understand," I tried to keep a quaver out of my voice, "I did not set out to pose as you. It just happened."

"Right out of the blue, I suppose."

"Absolutely."

"Isn't that something," He whistled through his teeth. "You're just strolling along innocent as a lamb, two or three times, when all of a sudden Smitty and the boys, not to mention certain others, somehow get the notion you are me, eh?"

With a flick of the gun, he cut off my protestation that such was exactly the case, and in the abrupt silence we sat studying each other. This was unnervingly like confronting myself in a full-length mirror. Upon close inspection, and mine of him was nearly microscopic in intensity, the Highliner was more solidly built than I was, but the pounds I had put on in the traveling year with Grace enforced the resemblance. My beard was <sup>dark</sup>chestnut to his cinnamon brown, but again, similar enough that it took more than a casual look to tell the difference. Our taste in clothes was not identical—tweed for me, serge evidently his preference—but overcoats concealed that. And as if we shared a forehead like Siamese twins, both of us chose snappy fedoras that pulled down low over the brow, a rakish effect I had liked until now.

"Interesting how close we are in looks, isn't it," he broke my trance.

"Breathtaking."

"Morris Morgan," he tried the name on his tongue. "Easy one to remember, if you're forgetful."

This was risky territory, but since we were there anyway, I tried: "Inasmuch as you know mine, this might go more easily if I had a name to call you."



He responded coolly, "Not in this life, friend." Maybe it was my imagination, but his trigger finger seemed to twitch with those words. Oh, how I wished Chekhov had shot a toe off in a hunting accident, so he'd not been so eager to proclaim the theatrical dictum that when a gun appears onstage, it must ultimately be fired. The weapon I was facing, however this scene played out, plainly was in the hand of someone with a dramatic enough reason to use it, ridding himself of a troublesome double. One who was in no way bulletproof. To delay that outcome, I stammered, "How did you know I'm ~~me~~?"

"It didn't take any stroke of genius," he scoffed. "That stunt of loading the trucks with newspapers got me to thinking about who a brainstorm like that would come from. This Pluvius character stands out as being pretty clever, wouldn't you say?"

"That depends," I said dispiritedly. "If he were as smart as he sometimes thinks he is, he would not right now be incarcerated in a Golden Eggs delivery van."

~~What may have been a fleeting smile moved in his beard. "Speaking of that kind of thing, how'd~~  
you like your taste of jail hospitality?"

No sooner had I blurted, "How did you find out—" than he shrugged as if there were nothing to it. "I have my ways of keeping track of what the cops are up to." I recalled the startled desk sergeant. "Anyway, better you than me in the slammer. They let you out. Me, they'd throw away the key."

Still unable to keep my eyes off the unwavering gun, I ventured, "I hope you appreciate the favor."

His gaze as steady as the weapon, the Highliner studied me, the moments ticking by. Out in the dark, the wind howled and the rain pounded as though we were in some stormy cell of ~~hell~~. Finally, he spoke. "You didn't spill about the warehouse. You could have, you know. Cut a deal. Given them the boys and the booze, to let you off."

I answered stiffly, "I am not a stool pigeon or whatever you call it."

"Canary, songbird," he reeled off, "fink, squealer, snitch—"

"I get the idea."

Yes

Comment [CE86]: Author/editor:  
Replace with three-point ellipses

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"You're not as enterprising as you could be, are you."

That stung. "All I want is to mind my own business."

"Which is putting a hornet up Anaconda's nose." He shook his head. "There are easier ways to make a living. Bootlegging, for one."

"*Suum cuique*," I said before I thought. The gun lifting by an inch indicated rapid translation would be a good idea. "To each his own."

Once more, his expression softened under the beard. "You're an odd duck, Morgan. And that probably makes us two of a kind, in more than looks." He fondled the gun. "Am I right that you won't try anything funny?"

"Nothing even close, I assure you."

The pistol disappeared into a handy pocket and I breathed easier. "Do you mind telling me how is it that you, or I, or we, are so recognizable to the world at large?"

The Highliner laughed, the dry kind with no mirth in it. "Don't you know? That propaganda sheet, the *Post*, ran a likeness of me and a big story, back 'round Thanksgiving. Anaconda doesn't like to see anybody make a dollar besides them. How'd you miss something like that?"

"I was, ah, traveling."

"That answers that." His voice even had a similar timbre to mine, and he had picked up the pattern of my diction with the ease of an actor; this person was a chameleon in his own right. "I kept trying to figure out why you showed up all of a sudden and Smitty and the boys couldn't get over what a whirlwind I am." He leaned forward and tapped my knee. "There at the warehouse—you passed up the chance to walk off with a bundle of money. How come? Some kind of Holy Joe, are you?"

"Not noticeably. The temptation was tempered, so to speak, by the prospect of you dogging my trail every step of the way."

His laugh this time was silky with danger. "You're not wrong about that." Another tap on my knee.



"Fill me in on something, so I look as smart around the warehouse as I'm supposed to be. Where'd that Whiskey Gap <sup>idea</sup>~~brainstorm~~ come from?"

"Ocular logic."

"That or a lucky guess?" The Highliner sat back, tipping his fedora up a fraction in a minor salute.

"Either way, it's been perfect for us—we run trucks through there day and night. I ought to thank you some way." He gestured royally to what was stacked around us. "Would you like a crate of hooch?"

"No, I would not. But if you really want to do me a favor—"

"Yes? What?"

"Shave."

He chuckled. "Nothing doing. The boys would think I chickened out, gotten scared of the other gangs."

I despaired. "Then you won't part with a beard, and I can't. Tweedledum and Tweedledee."

"Can't?" That quick, he was gazing at me as if through a <sup>gun</sup>~~gun~~sight. "There's something more on your mind than barbering. Spill it."

I drew in breath. This slick bootlegging operative had granted me reprieve, and in all conscience, I had to do the same for him. "While we're in the trading mode, I should warn you—you're not the only one with people on the lookout for you."

"Is that a fact," he let out with a world-weary sigh. "It must be our irresistible good looks."

"If only it were than simple." I told him my own twofold story, the Chicago gambling mob's ire over the long-ago prizefight ready to be fanned anew if the big World Series bet was traced to me.

When I was done, the Highliner whistled through his teeth again. "Man, you're a case. I thought bootlegging was complicated. Thanks for tipping me off, I'll put the boys on the lookout for stray hoodlums." I felt better on that score, for the first time since Cutthroat Cartwright arrived. That lasted until the next words I heard. "What are you going to do to keep breathing? Don't you carry?"

**STET**

Logically and colloquially, this is better as one word, like gunstock.



"Carry—? Oh. A gun. No." How much better off humankind would be had gunpowder never been invented and combat was waged with more civilized weapons. Such as brass knuckles. "Chicago pinkie rings," I tried to sound tough but had to pat hard through my layers of clothing to make the telltale jingle.

The Highliner rolled his eyes. "Sure, those are really great up against some gink armed to the teeth and more than arm's length from you. But if that's how you want to plan your funeral, it's your choice."

With that decided, he leaned toward me, authority in every whisker as he made the terms of our mutual existence clear. "Here's the deal, Morgan. I'm not saying anything to the boys about you. Nothing to be gained from that. Just don't abuse the privilege of being a spitting image." I shook my head. "And you'll keep your trap shut about the warehouse and these trucks and so on." I nodded my head. The Highliner gave me a last keen look, then winked roguishly as if at himself in a mirror. Reaching into one of the crates, he pulled out a bottle of Canadian rye and uncorked it with a flourish. Offering a swig, he said with that silky laugh: "After you. We have to make a toast—Confusion to our enemies, eh?"



The boardinghouse looked a bit worse for wear, Butte weather to blame, but otherwise the hillside residence with its distinctive sign—CUTLETS AND COVERLETS—OR IF YOU'RE NOT WELSH: BOARD AND ROOM—appeared much the same as when I first arrived ~~into~~ Butte, in need of food and shelter. I had led what I thought was an eventful life before coming to this address, but what an amount more had been squeezed in between that first knock on the blue-painted door and mine now.

Comment [CE87]: Okay as is, or "arrived in Butte"?

"Yes?" Grace's pleasant lilt came first as she answered the door. That immediately changed to "Oh, no, you don't," as soon as she saw it was me, along with the taxi driver who was laboring up the sidewalk with the trunk. "You can't come crawling back here with all your belongings and think you can kiss and make up and everything will be like it was before." Pushing me aside, she called to the driver struggling with his load. "Put that back in the taxi."

"Grace, that's not my trunk, it's *our* trunk. From our trip. The railroad evidently ran out of places to sidetrack it."

"Why didn't you say so." She called to the taxi driver again. "Leave it and take him with you."

"But I need my things from it."

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Grace puffed her cheeks, bottling up stronger language before she said, "Morrie, you have turned into the most exasperating human being. Why couldn't you get your junk out of there ahead of time?"

"It's locked. The key is on your Portuguese charm bracelet, remember?"

"So it is."

"Aren't you going to go get it?"



"I'm debating."

The hackie spoke up from where he stood puffing. "Could you folks have this fight inside on your own time, maybe?"

Between us, he and I wrestled the trunk into the boardinghouse with Grace hovering over our every move. I gave him some money and told him to come back in half an hour. Fifteen minutes, Grace truncated that. Off she stormed, her golden braid bouncing, to fetch the key. Hoop and Griff edged out of the parlor where they had been listening, chorused "How you doing, Morrie?" and "What do you know for sure, Morrie?" and fled to the far reaches of the house.

In no time, Grace flew back, unlocked the trunk, and flung open the lid. She snapped a glance at me where I stood watching her with yearning. "Well? What are you waiting for?"

"You look recovered. From the hives, I mean."

"No thanks to you. Get busy on your stuff."

What stood open in front of us was more than a trunkful of mingled belongings, it was every memory of our glorious honeymoon year. With my throat tight, I began sorting out my clothing and the other contents—books to me, trinkets to her, we agreed on at least that much—until I came across a creamy souvenir program from a performance of the Lipizzaner riding academy. "Remember Vienna? Those magnificent horses white as ermine?"

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"Don't start that kind of thing, please." Her violet eyes were shiny with near tears. It was all I could do not to take her in my arms and—

Suddenly there were footsteps on the stairs, and the stairwell practically filled with a rangy figure who had a Roman nose and a centurion chin and a full head of black wavy hair. Pausing midway down, he scrutinized the two of us and the strew of belongings on the parlor floor. In an Italian baritone, he asked: "Is he bother you, mizzus?"

"Nothing to worry about, Giorgio, thank you."



Giving me a sharp look that took inches off my height, he turned back up the stairwell. "At your service."

I stared at the broad back disappearing at the top of the stairs. "Who in the world is that?"

"Who do you think? The new boarder. Giorgio Mazzini. He's a powderman on the graveyard shift at the Neversweat."

An Adonis on the premises; another arrow into my heart. Glumly I added opera formal\_wear to my stack. Time was running out on me and I had to speak my piece. "Grace, you must listen. I've reached an understanding with the Highliner. He'll see to it that the police won't pick me up at random and his men will be on the lookout for thugs from out of town—that's a help, wouldn't you say?"

"Oh, my, yes," she said too sweetly. "Now you're in with bootleggers, but still on the outs with gamblers and this Cutthroat menace and whatever goons Anaconda may decide to sic on you. You're practically a walking insurance policy, Morrie."

"You don't sound very reassured."

"Imagine that." Drawing a breath through her teeth, she steeled herself for what she was about to say. "Now it's your turn to listen. If"—she doggedly erased that—"when I take you to court, as I'll need to because of the properties"—her arm-flung gesture somehow took in territory from the parlor to Horse Thief Row; the fact caught up with me that I was half owner of the boardinghouse, as she was of the mansion—"and everything, it will all have to come out about you. About," she faltered, but went on in a low voice, "Morgan Llewellyn and so on. You have to be ready for some rough treatment from any judge."

"The one in front of me now counts the most," I said humbly.

Her eyes glistening again, she turned her face away from me to the clock. "You'd better get busy on the trunk. Your time is about up."

It was my turn to draw a determined breath. "There's something else that has to be sorted out, now

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or never. My position at the *Thunder*. Jared and Armbrister can't keep me on if I'm being dragged through a scandal in court; the *Post* will shout it from every street corner. I have to ask you to wait a little while, before starting legal proceedings." I hurried the rest as she started to protest. "We're not that far from turning the tide against Anaconda—I swear to you, we're not."

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There was a third presence with us now. In the spot of honor on the sideboard was propped the wedding photograph of the ever so young Grace and her Arthur. My predecessor, foursquare in his roomy suit and expansive mustache; even on that matrimonial day, doomed to leave her a widow, when the unsafe conditions in the mines produced the Speculator conflagration. Now Grace rested her gaze on that fateful photo, as did I. Finally, she nodded, all the agreement I needed. She said again, "Go get them, the snakes. Now you'd better hurry, I hear your taxi."

Each with an armful of my clothes and books, the driver and I loaded into the flivver for a silent ride up the slope to Ajax Avenue. Leaving behind half my heart, the put-upon woman who was still my wife until divorce or annulment or some other form of dissolution caught up with me, and one Giorgio Mazzini, powder man, which was to say dynamiter. Without intelligence enough to blow his nose, if I was any judge of humanity, but built like a stallion and with that Mediterranean name full of lip-puckering vowels. Worse yet, it no doubt was his legitimate one.

STET

"What are you going to do with yourself now that you're an involuntary bachelor, join a Lonely Hearts Club?"

"Not funny, Sandy. I'm still a married man." Conscious of his stern gaze, I roamed uneasily around the library tower. Conversation with Sandison in his lair somehow could cause the prickling sensation that pages were mysteriously turning in some certain book on the surrounding shelves, with the escaping spirit of the printed tale suffusing the atmosphere of the cylindrical room. In this case, alas for me, the literary presence seemed to be the inexorable Grand Inquisitor from *The Brothers Karamazov*.



Facing the judgmental figure leaning back in his desk chair with his arms folded and his beard resting on his chest, I tried not to sink into Russian fatalism while telling him Grace and I, for the time being, had reached an understanding that there would be no legal separation.

"An understanding? That must have been some reach." He lurched up straight in his chair, sighing a mighty sigh. "I don't know about you, but I miss having a woman around. They're good for a lot of things. Look at us now," he glumly continued this train of thought, "a pair of wild cards, with no queens in the deck. I tell you, Morgan, or Llewellyn, I should say, poor representatives of the human race as we've been, what would I have amounted to without Dora and you without Grace?" He shuddered.

To cut the gloom before it became as thick as borscht, I protested that he was being overly hard on himself, implying myself as well, and chided, "*There's a fascination frantic / in a ruin that's romantic.*"

He bared his teeth at the jingle from *The Mikado*, as I figured he would, but it worked in distracting him from lugubrious memorializing. Dora Sandison had been a force to be reckoned with when I'd had to schedule the Gilbert and Sullivan Libretto Study Group around other bebies of enthusiasts that met in the public library basement, *besieging* both of us with queenly demands on behalf of her musical idols. Thinking back on that, Sandison now looked almost contrite. "I probably shouldn't have called it the Giblet and Mulligan Society."

That pretty much ended that, as he turned with a grunt to the latest fine edition waiting in the package from a rare book dealer and I to the encyclopedic demands of the house. The manse was balky with only the pair of us as residents. It sorely missed the ministrations of Hoop and Griff, not to mention the presiding influence of Grace. Fortunately the kitchen was not hostile territory to me—I had picked up certain culinary skills in the course of life and I was a whiz at washing dishes—but the grocery shopping and a dozen other unaccustomed chores kept me hopping. As for the rest of the domicile, he and I truly were like captain and mate trying to keep the hulk afloat after the crew had abandoned ship. Samuel Sandison had not spent his life as boss of cowboys and librarians for nothing;

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his approach to upkeep consisted of pointing out to me things that I was then expected to fix. And so I was not as surprised as I might have been to hear an explosive "Damn, what next?" from the hall bathroom on a not untypical day when I was about to leave for the newspaper office.

He materialized in the hallway in suspenders and flapping shirttail, looking aggrieved. "The sink is plugged. Better tend to it or the place will turn into a swamp."

I groaned and went to find the rubber-cupped plunger called a plumber's friend. When I returned, Sandison was still circulating, dressed now and gathering a book here and a ~~scarf~~ <sup>hat</sup> there, grumbling all the while—"It's a hell of a note when a man can't even wash his face"—before heading out to the public library. Consequently I was at the nasty task of suctioning out whatever had clogged the drain, idly mulling whether the appropriate verb was *plunging* or *plungering*, when the door knocker banged urgently. "I'll get it," Sandison growled as he passed, "you keep at the damnable plumbing."

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"Package," an unfamiliar voice was heard over the sink sounds. "Are you Morgan?"

"Ha. Not by a long shot. You're not our regular postman—where's O'Malley?"

"He's down with the croup."

"Sturdy lad like him? This country is going soft. Are you sure the name on that parcel isn't Sandison?"

"Sure I'm sure. I have to give it to somebody named Morgan."

"If you're going to be silly about it." Sandison called to me, and I abandoned the plunger and started for the front doorway where he hadn't budged, still incredulous that the postman did not have somewhere on his person a package containing a valuable book as usual. Shaking his head and agonizing for me to come, the postman jumpily clutched what appeared to be a wrapped box, about the size of a cracker tin. All I could think was that Grace must have mailed something of mine overlooked in the trunk. As I approached, the man in postal uniform yanked a pistol from the open back of the box and hissed, "This is for you, Bolshie pig!"



The first bullet nearly parted my hair, Sandison having batted the gun as if annoyed with a fly. The shooter fired wildly again and again, into the floor and ceiling, while the two of them grappled like wrestlers and I ducked and dodged from one side of their mad struggle to the next, trying vainly to get my hands on the weapon. They knocked the hat rack over, coats sent flying, and shattered the hall mirror as they reeled from wall to wall in the narrow confines. Sandison had the weight advantage but was twice the other's age, and the assailant possessed the determination of a bug-eyed fanatic. Somehow he momentarily twisted loose and spun to point the gun at me, this time at close range. A split second became eternity as I could see death coming. But as the shooter yelped, "Take that, pinko!" and pulled the trigger, Sandison lurched onto him like a falling tree and intercepted the bullet meant for me.

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"Sandy!" I cried as I at last wrenched the revolver free, with him gasping in pain but still upright and wrestling the cursing gunman. In a supreme surge of strength, he grabbed the man in a headlock and with a supreme effort of his powerful arms, wrenched his neck until it snapped. The two of them crashed to the floor together.

Tossing the gun out of reach, I frantically did what I could to staunch the blood turning one entire side of Sandison's torso red. Neighbors who had heard the shots and called the police were by now poking cautiously through the doorway to assess the body-strewn scene. "Help is on its way, Sandy, don't give up, please don't," I babbled as he lay on his back, laboring to breathe.

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Chest heaving, Sandison turned his shaggy head to the dead man beside him. "That'll teach you," he wheezed. Then he lost consciousness.

It took extra stretcher bearers to transport Sandison from the ambulance into St. Jude's Hospital and immediately the operating room. For what seemed ages, I paced the waiting room, nuns in white gliding by me with faces as composed as plaster saints. Half-sick from the medicinal atmosphere, I questioned myself over and over. Had I cavalierly brought this on? Put Sandison's life at gravest risk by rash words



common wisdom about this roiling cauldron of a place,  
on a sheet of newsprint? Shouldn't I have listened to the ~~warning~~, "They play rough in Butte"?

**Comment [CE88]:** Editor/author:  
Unable to locate any previous quote in  
the book.

Impervious fool, me. Yet, how can you outguess fate, if it walks up your front steps gripping a pistol? My thoughts twisted and turned as the waiting dragged on. At last, a gray-haired doctor wearing half-moon glasses appeared in the corridor.

I nearly collapsed in relief when he told me Sandison would pull through. "He's already awake and complaining to the nursing sisters—that's a good sign. But," the professional tone went to the next level, "we need to keep him for the next some days, whether or not it's popular with him." Pausing, the medical man peered at me over his specs. "Ready for the story element?"

"I'm sorry, the—?"

"There is one every time someone survives a shooting, you know. 'An inch the other way,'" the doctor mimicked, "'and the bullet would have killed him dead as a doornail.'" He chuckled mirthlessly. "In this case, it happens to be true. The shot just missed his heart, by some miracle. But then"—he glanced down the corridor, where a white flock of nurses ~~was~~ wheeling in someone groaning on a gurney—"I could have given that diagnosis as soon as I saw who the patient was, couldn't I." Another dry chuckle. ~~"Strangling Sam"~~ <sup>String 'em Up</sup> isn't going to be done in by one chunk of lead. Excuse me, I have to go back to work."

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**Comment [CE89]:** Earlier, the  
nickname given for Sam was "the  
Strangler." See pp. 4, 16, 216;  
"Strangling Sam" okay?

And I had to recount to the police the entire shooting episode. The gunman turned out to be a minor hooligan, known more for his lack of smarts than anything else. Not inclined to investigate now that the criminal was a cadaver, the police wrote him off as a political crackpot who saw Red where I and my editorials were concerned. To which I could only say a silent *Maybe*. He might have been some maddened newspaper reader or he might have been in the hire of Anaconda to act like one. Either way, it came to the same. The worse equation was that now I had been shot at by two out of three, the out-of-town bootleggers and the local foes of the *Thunder*. In the shooting gallery that my life was threatening to become, that left only the Chicago gambling mobsters, who had yet to try their aim.



I stood at the window of the hospital room with my hands clasped behind my back. Above the brooding horizon of grimy ~~ground~~ <sup>earth</sup> and stark headframes, smoke ribboned from the seven stacks of the Neversweat, the Hill's own cloud formation. As happened every eight hours, regular as the spin of the ~~earth~~, the gullied streets turned into glaciers of people as a shift changed at the mines, the Cornishmen flowing to the Centerville neighborhood, ~~the~~ Italians to Meaderville—oh, why couldn't the interloper Giorgio Mazzini have taken lodging there?—~~the~~ Irish cascading to Dublin Gulch, ~~the~~ Welsh and ~~Serbian~~s and Finns and Norwegians to their own enclaves. As clear as a historical diorama, they showed me the house of labor, these workingmen whose hard-rock toil had been a foundation of the union movement championed by Jared Evans and others like him. I knew, too, from his fraught experience as the mine workers' leader and the evidence of my own eyes and ears in my travels, that the timbers of that house, although still standing, had been cracking and crumbling under corporate and government pressure for nearly half a century. I'd have hazarded a bet that historians of the future would describe the American ~~Industrial Revolution~~ as more truly an industrial civil war, driven mainly by the management side determined to incorporate and rule. In the West, the battles on many fronts were disheartening. The Colorado conflicts at the mines in Ludlow and Cripple Creek ended in violence, deaths, and suppression. On the ~~coast~~, the Seattle general strike flared and went out, and in Everett a boatload of strikers, including suspected Wobblies, came under mortal gunfire from authorities on shore. The list went on, with this copper-rich, copper-cursed city inscribed in blood on it time and again. And my own efforts in the union cause, that of Jared and the men streaming to and from work on the Hill, had

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brought on the latest fusillade.

My mood spoke for me. "I should simply leave. The *Thunder* and Butte and Montana, maybe even America. Take passage for Tasmania. Trouble finds me too easily here."

Shifting in the high bed with a mighty groan—from the tone of it, caused as much by me as the pain of his wound—Sandison dismissed my plaint. "Don't talk nonsense. Running away won't make up for that pistol-packing moron."

"Maybe not, but—"

"Besides, you can't leave. I need you to pitch in so the Butte Public Library doesn't fall to pieces while I'm out of commission."

"You do? I mean, do you?"

"Use your head, man. You're the only one besides me who knows the ins and outs of the whole place. All you have to do is duck in there now and then and say I told you to tell the staff thus and such. They're a good bunch, they'll follow orders." Flat on his back, he still managed to give me a lofty look. "While you're at it, you might pack home the ledger that has the payroll and the book budget and so on in it. We could just as well tend to that at our own convenience."

"Mmm." To make sure what I was in for, I dropped my voice and inquired: "Sandy, by any chance, does that ledger perhaps need some mending? From the inside?"

The hospital bed shook. "Damn it, it hurts when I laugh." The fierce white eyebrows doing their work, he confronted my question. "I knew you were a ring-tailed wonder when I first hired you. Call it instinct. Or dumb luck."

Right then a nun appeared in the doorway, holding a bedpan. "The call of nature will have to wait," he impatiently instructed her. "I'm doing other business."

She vanished, and he resumed on me. "Anyhow, handling numbers like hot potatoes isn't my strong suit, never has been, and you've got a trick mind for it, so why not put it to use, eh?" He must

Comment [CE91]: tricky?

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have seen my own eyebrows hoisting. "Yes, of course, thickhead. If the idiot board of trustees happened to snoop into the ledger, they could get the wrong idea. You know how it is."

Did I ever. In my time as his assistant when one of my countless assignments was to balance the bookkeeping, I had no choice but to unravel the Samuel Sandison approach to library administration. The madness to his method, it might jocularly be called, if shunting funds from where they belonged to where he wanted them could be considered a joke. For it had become clear to me back then, bit by bit, that there never seemed to be quite as much library staff as was budgeted for, the shortfall ingeniously made up by shuttling someone from task to task—namely, me—so the unspent wages could gravitate down the ledger columns to entries called *Miscellaneous book purchases*. The migration did not stop there, I realized when I undertook an inventory of his trove on loan to the institution, those magnificent books that would still be around a century and more from now, that were the heart of the Butte Public Library's "finest collection west of Chicago." The old rogue was slipping "miscellaneous" purchases into his SSS-book-plated holdings; there was a paste pot on his office desk just as there was at home, after all.

Comment [CE92]: labeled?

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Well, how severely can you judge a person whose crime is a passion for the very best that literature has to offer? And who like a generous Midas sets out the timeless volumes on open shelves for the reading public to share? In my previous incarnation as the Butte Public Library's jack-of-all-trades, I had kept a wise silence about its librarian juggling the books, so to speak. But now I hesitated.

"Sandy, I already have a job. One that is perfectly aboveboard," I said pointedly, "and which keeps me so busy I meet myself coming and going. On top of that, there's the house threatening to fall down on our heads, and—" I broke off at the huge sigh heaved by the prone patient. "None of which counts, does it. You saved my life."

"In bad fiction, this is the point at which the one who saved the life says, 'Pshaw, it was nothing,'" Sandison drawled. "That's twaddle. Dime-novel stuff. Undying gratitude from you will suit me fine,

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Morgan. Now, get over there to the library. And don't forget the ledger."

I must concede, spending whatever time I could afford at the familiar old granite grandiosity with BUTTE PUBLIC LIBRARY proudly incised over one of its twin arches of entrance and LUX EX LIBRIS over the other was gratifying. The staff enthusiastically welcomed me back—always with the exception of Miss Runyon, the Medusa of the reference desk—and never questioned my grant of authority from Sandison. With my experience, whatever knotty matter of scheduling or personnel presented itself, I could resolve. And if I may say so, more quickly and decisively than Sandison customarily did, with his habit of tugging at his beard and muttering, "I'll let you know before doomsday." Still, adding that to my editorial exertions at the *Thunder*, plus regularly visiting Sandison in the hospital, where he now kept the ledger in a bedside drawer the way other people keep a Bible, lent credence to Grace's analogy of a chameleon on a barber pole. More often than not, I reached home late at night, ignored whatever complaint the manse had developed that day, and dropped straight to bed, too exhausted even to crack open a book.

Then came the morning when I was awakened by loud knocking, which I assumed was the furnace or a water boiler signaling disaster, and I moaned and turned over under the covers. As the commotion mounted, I realized the front door knocker was to blame.

Groggily checking at the window—there was just enough daylight to see—I looked down on the unmistakable heads of Hoop and Griff. Spotting me, one of them called out, "Don't worry none, Morrie. We're unarmed." The other one cackled.

Still in my pajamas and wondering what their reappearance portended, I met them at the door. Griff lost no time enlightening me, Hoop nodding along. "Mrs. Morgan figured you could stand a little help with the shack now and again." They had with them the bulging tool\_bag that showed hard use in the mines, much like themselves.



With alacrity I showed them in and told them to start anywhere. They shrugged off my gratitude as they clanked down the hallway, one of them saying over his shoulder, "We got nothing better to do anyway. Giorgio can take care of things at the boardinghouse." The other one cackled again.

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How I burned to ask just what the extent of his caretaking was.

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As usual, later that day I made time to go by St. Jude's and look in on Sandison. A visitor already stood posted by his bedside. Grace.

"Ah. Hello."

"The same to you, man of many names." In visiting clothes, she looked as fetching as she had on our honeymoon promenade around the world.

"Heh. Don't make me call in the sisters of mercy to form a cordon between you two." Sandison was sitting up in bed by now, still bandaged around his middle like a mummy. "Madam, this husband of yours—as I understand he still is—at least is not dull to be around, you have to grant him that."

Comment [CE93]: Capitalize, as name of order?

No

"Nice try, Samuel." Grace gave him a chilly smile, and to me simply the chill. "His thrilling approach to life includes marrying a woman under a false name. That kind of excitement I can do without."

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"Grace, I have explained the extenuating circumstance."

"It didn't extenuate by itself, Morrie."

Heaving himself higher on his stack of pillows, sultan holding court, Sandison mournfully came out with, "I wish Dora were here. She'd sort this out so quick your heads would swim."

The specter of Dora Sandison regulating our lives did give both of us pause. Grace recovered quicker than I. "I simply came to pay my respects," she turned to the patient, "I hope you're well soon. The wrong one of you is in for repairs." So saying, she marched out of the hospital room.

With just his eyes, Sandison told me to quit standing there like a fool and follow her.



"Grace, one minute, please." I caught up with her in the waiting room. "I wanted to thank you for the loan of Hoop and Griff."

"Charity begins at home." Halting, she took the opportunity to confront me again. Even the dimple that ordinarily was a beauty mark looked fierce. "Don't think that was any kind of a favor to you. The less upkeep you have to do, the faster you can finish the job at the newspaper and I can be rid of you as a husband, understand?"

"Implicitly. But—"

A nurse wearing a majestic wimple, evidently a senior nun, sailed past us like a resolute angel. In her wake, Grace unexpectedly giggled. "You and him among the holy. Life is too funny sometimes."

"There, see? We can agree on that much. And if you will just give me another chance—"

"Oh, no, you don't," she bristled again, enough that I backed up a step. This was like trying to pet a lioness. "With your record," she blazed, "what does another chance amount to but another headache? Ever since we came back to Butte, you've been up to your neck in fix after fix. Thrown in jail because you look like some other disreputable character. Then that stupid trunk of yours. Now it's gunplay, is it. What will you get yourself into next, Morrie?"

"A maniac brandishing a revolver wasn't my idea," I couldn't help pointing out.

"Fine, but it's just one more proof that trouble finds you like rain goes in a barrel, isn't it. No, stop, please, don't make sad eyes at me." Her own were blinking back something. "If you're worried I'm going to divorce you sooner than later, you needn't get yourself worked up like this." How could I help it, with a Giorgio tending the home fires that had been the hearth of my happiness? "I gave you my word," Grace flung at me as she stalked toward the hospital exit, "which is better than some I could mention."

Wifeless and without even the grumpy company of Sandison until the hospital ever discharged him, I



had only the silent, empty manse to see me off each gray morning and to come home to each long night. Something had changed in me; something in the weight of life. For more of my years than I cared to count, solitude seemed to be my full measure spooned out by fate. Ever since Casper. Ever since Rose. It was hard, alone, but I thought I had myself resolutely sorted out, reconciled to my own company in the experience of living, independence strapped firmly on me. Now, though, I longed for Grace as if part of myself were missing. I even yearned for Hoop and Griff making a racket in the precincts of the house. One's own footsteps, the only parlance in the emptiness between hyphens of carpet, are a sad stutter of existence hour upon hour.

The newspaper office saved me from myself, the rescue vessel moored within reach of the isle of Ajax, thanks be. What was it about being met daily by Armbrister's brisk number of column inches of editorial space I had to fill; hearing the staccato of typewriters start up, each as distinctive as a telegrapher's rhythm, as rewrite men and headline writers set to work on the night-side's stories; answering shouted queries such as "Morgie, is it Freud or Jung they call 'the mechanic of dreams'?"—what did I find in the din of deadlines and wisecracks and calamities and trivia and pronounced personalities on the page and off that captured me so?

Chapters of the earthly saga, I suppose, old as the alphabet. Humanity's never-ending tale of who did what to whom, when and where, and if told right, how and why. The *Thunder*, with Armbrister's bloodhound knowledge of Butte and Jared's foxy tactics against Anaconda, was set up as well as a newspaper could be to pursue that hallowed goal of journalism, to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. If I live into eternity, I shall still think daily news and opinion set in type for all to read is honorable work. Although that belief was severely tested by the example of Cutthroat Cartwright.

right?



Ever wondered where schemers come from? Do they breed in stagnant pools as mosquitoes do? That would explain the pestilential cloud of political agitation, reckless charges, and editorial sophistry hanging over the Thunder. Underneath all the buzz, the scheme is the same old one of stealthy attack on the American system of productivity, the envy of the world—at least those parts of it not colored in pink or red.

—Cutlass

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“Hoo hoo. Cartwright has a touch, you have to admit.”

“You bet. So does a skinning knife.”

“Sophistry, I don’t think we had that in school. Hey, Morgie! What’s this sophistry guff your opposite number is so worked up about?”

“Mmm, a style of argumentation that goes back to the Greeks. The root—”

“Yeah, yeah, always look to the root, we know.”

“—is the verb that means playing subtle tricks.”

“About like bluffing in poker, huh? Keep up the sophus-pocus, champ, you’ve got Cartwright looking at his hole card.”

If our high-spirited staff had a taste for no-holds-barred editorial brawling, our grimacing editor sometimes had a bellyful of being slandered.

“Damn it, can’t you come up with something that will shut that windbag’s yap for a while?”



Armbrister demanded of me, flinging Cutlass's latest into the wastebasket. "I'm sick of us being called every name under the sun."

Taking up the challenge at my typewriter, I soon placed on Armbrister's desk a sheet of paper he snatched up for a look, then put down as if it might bite him.

The *Post* having descended to entomological depths in its latest diatribe—if anyone's head is buzzing with buggy ideas, it is that of the ~~Anaconda~~-paid prattler who calls himself Cutlass—all that needs be said is consider the source and beware the frass.

—Pluvius

"Frass?" Armbrister reluctantly tried out the word. "Never heard of it. What monkey language is that in?"

"English." He gave me a sour look. "By way of German, naturally."

"Naturally. What the hell does it mean?"

"Insect excrement."

For a space of several seconds, Armbrister found nothing to say. At length, he let out: "I had a hunch it was something like that." He ground his teeth, the way editors will, picked up the sheet of paper in a gingerly fashion that had it hovering over the wastebasket where Cutlass's invective ended up, ~~and~~ <sup>then</sup> thrust it at me. "Run it."

Thank heavens, my barbs could drive Cartwright into wounded silence for short periods, while he and his invisible bosses on the top floor of the Hennessy Building contrived some new attack. More than a few of my *Thunder* colleagues celebrated each such absence of Cutlass's slash and thrust—"Guess who's gone fishing today"—in ~~tried-and-true~~ journalistic fashion, by going out for a drink after work.

"C'mon, Morgie, join us," Cavaretta all but took me by the arm on one such occasion, while Sibley of

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the city hall beat and several others up to and including kittenish Mary Margaret Houlihan of the society page energetically beckoned as they formed up at the doorway. I was half out of my typing chair before I remembered. For me to show up in a speakeasy, dead ringer for the Highliner that I seemed forever doomed, destined, fated to be, was to invite complications not even I could imagine. "Really, I can't," I said lamely. "I'm expected at the house."

"Okeydoke, pal." Cavaretta slapped my shoulder and went to join the others. "But the invitation stands, anytime."

The happy mob of them went out, while I did meaningless things such as squaring paper and pencils on my desk until they were clear of the building. Quiet descended so completely I could feel it on my skin, the newspaper office deserted except for the night editor and a couple of rewrite men silently editing copy at the far end of the room. In my trance of solitude, I hadn't seen the overcoated figure standing by the door.

"You have a cat these days, Professor?"

Sharply coming to, I told Jared I didn't know what he meant, although I did. What business was it of anybody, if the human race and for that matter the feline held nothing for me these nights?

Keeping his voice low, the publisher here strangely after hours came over to me, purpose in his gaze. "I saw that kind of stare on men in the trenches, my friend. Come on, get your things on. I'll walk you at least partway to that house that's expecting you so wonderfully much."

Side by side, the two of us joined the downtown flock of other home-goers, secretaries from the tall buildings and clerks from the storefronts, Welsh miners coming off shift and singing the way to their neighborhood near Grace's boardinghouse, messengers and delivery boys hopping trolleys now that their day on foot was done. Summer had found Butte at last, but there was still a mild nip in the air on clear evenings such as this, a new moon free of clouds standing over the work-lit Hill. Walking with Jared Evans was just short of a march, this man who had led other men under killing conditions and

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since had added the political weight of the state. Was the ghost of Teddy Roosevelt watching from somewhere? We had not gone a block before the soldier-senator beside me spoke his mind.

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"You and the missus are on the outs, I gather."

I suppressed a groan. "Does it show on me that much?"

He tapped the side of his nose significantly. "Rab smelled it in the air. Don't ask me how, I'm only a male."

"As am I, so all I can tell you is, Grace has moved out."

"And Sandison's not healed up yet, so you're all by your lonesome in that moose of a house."

"That is the case," I conceded.

We waited for a spate of Model Ts to putt-putt through the next intersection, then as we crossed, he brought out: "It's not much of a guess you have time on your hands these evenings, so I wondered—"

"Jared, no." This time I did groan; I could not face day and night jeopardy, even for him. "I dare not get involved any more deeply in union matters. One lead-coated message from Anaconda"—at that, he winced as if dodging a bullet himself—"if that's what it was, is enough."

Jared looked at me levelly, frank as the moon. "That's not what I was thinking, believe it or not." He lowered his voice as he had done in the newspaper office. "Rab and I need your help. With Russian Famine."

I blurted, "Is he in some kind of trouble?"

"The worst," he said whimsically. "He's growing up. Remember what a holy mess that was, for any of us?" Looking off ahead to where the street started to climb, Jared continued: "He's not really ours to raise as if our word is law, worse luck. Can't adopt him because he's still legally the ward of that uncle of his who used to go round with a pushcart sharpening knives, remember him?" A rueful shake of the head. "The old devil was pretty sharp himself, scooting back to Poland when he saw that Rab and I would look out for the boy. But never mind that, we just want to do the best we can for Famine, and



that's where you come in." Jared marched the words out of himself at a pace as determined as his strides. "He's at that restless age. Not saying much, but you can tell there's more going on in him than he knows what to do with. So, we wondered if you might pitch in and find something to keep him occupied." I was listening hard, but still had trouble believing my ears at Jared's next words. "Say, boxing lessons."

I stopped short, under a streetlamp casting a cone of light like a net. "Wh-what makes you think I'm capable?"

Jared turned to me in surprise. "Rab again. She picked up the notion, back when you were her schoolteacher, that you knew a little something about boxing. Said you could square away with the eighth-grade galoots smartly enough, it kept them in order."

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I breathed again.

Man to man, Jared confided: "She'd rather you gave him Latin lessons, wherever she got that from." He grinned ever so slightly. "I had to point out to her, Russian Famine has trouble sitting still for English." Then, more soberly: "That's a tough bunch he's around at the detention school, and then there are the *Post* newsboys. We just want him to be able to stick up for himself if push comes to shove, as it generally does in this town."

"All well and good," I sighed. "And I happen to know a right cross from a left hook. But honestly, I am no pugilist myself. I don't see what good I can—"

"You're a teacher. You can do anything."

The blunt force of that statement took my words away. Jared Evans reached out a hand and shook mine, a pact beneath the moon as old as brotherhood between men.

"It's settled then, Professor. You'll show Famine how to handle his dukes." And he strode away at that marching pace, into the night.



Cautious as I was in answering the door since the postal gunman, Russian Famine was shuffling his feet like a nervous suitor by the time I let him in the following evening. "Hiya, sir," he said with a swallow, stepping in as if across hot coals. "Some house," his voice sounded shrunken. "You live here all by yourself?"

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"For the time being," I put the best face on that.

"I'd be spooked." That hit home, in more ways than one. The manse yawned around us, growing bigger with the night. What does it say about the human nervous system that one of us had been more at ease springing around atop bookshelves at the public library, and the other of us thought less of cajoling a hundred people into a dance called America, than either of us felt at the prospect of spending time in a lonely house?

While I was hanging up Famine's jacket and cap, he turned so fidgety that I expected he was about to ask the way to the bathroom, but no. "Where'd the old fella get plugged?"

Uncomfortably, I indicated on my rib\_cage the approximate spot of Sandison's wound.

Famine shook his head, hair flopping. "Unh-uh, where was he at? Is there bloodstains?"

"As much as I hate to disappoint you, it happened right where we're standing."

"Aw."

Taking pity, I pointed to the bullet holes overhead. He brightened. "That's better!" After counting the ceiling perforations to himself, he gave me an awkward glance. "You didn't get a lick in on the guy with your brassies or nothing?"

That question in other forms had circled me ever since, but it took a boy to ask it. With a tight throat, I related that I was down the hall when the shooting started, but Sandison managed to land a blow.

"The Earl of Hell bashed him one? Awright!" I could see in his eyes he was imagining the scene down to the last detail, then the frown coming. "So how'd he get plugged?"



Truth can be such a difficult master. "He stepped in front of a bullet. Meant for me."

"No kidding?" The boy looked at me a new way. "You're a lucky duck."

"I suppose I am," I said huskily. "Let's get on with the boxing lesson, shall we?" He trailed me into the drawing room, where I had shoved the furniture back for us to maneuver. When I produced boxing gloves for us both, he shuffled uncertainly again. "I dunno," he mumbled, eyeing the mitts, each larger than his head. "How'm I supposed to wallop anybody with them things?"

"That's what we're about to work on, how to wallop without being walloped. These are the tools of the trade in learning that."

"If you say so," he said dubiously.

I had him strip off his shirt, as I did mine, true to ring tradition, and at once regretted it. In his undershirt, he was the definition of skinny; no more meat on him than a sprat, in the old saying. But Jared was right, he was growing, his legs and arms ahead of the rest of him. Where there's reach, there's hope.

As I was tying his gloves on, my fingers knowing how almost without me, he gnawed his lip before looking up at me and saying making it known "I better own up—I got my doubts about this boxing stuff."

"Now's the time to voice them," I said, as if I hadn't just bypassed my own. "Such as?"

"Sure it isn't a fancy way of getting beaten up?"

I sucked in a breath. "Famine, we want to keep that from happening. That's why I am going to have to teach very carefully and you are going to have to learn very thoroughly."

He twisted and turned before coming out with it. "See, what I like to do when a scrap comes up is run."

He made sure I understood. "'Stead of a fight. I'm awful good at running."

That was not so far from the philosophy that had governed certain chapters of my own life. Run away and live to fight another day; not for nothing is that the most poetic of strategies. And I had seen

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him bolt off at full speed, swift as a zephyr. What was I doing, what were his supposed protectors Jared and Rab doing, in upsetting the defense nature had given him?

"Sometimes the circumstances are such," I tried to sound convincing to both of us, "that you simply can't get away. Or choose not to. You don't want the *Post* newsies to take away your corner, you said."

"Yeah, that's the trouble," he said darkly. "Can't run and be there too."

"And in the oldest story there is, that's why hands are sometimes made into fists," I said as I pulled on boxing gloves for the first time in a dozen years. "And ultimately why we're at this. The first thing is to guard against having your block knocked off, as I believe the hoosegow school approach is, hmm? Here, watch me protect my head. Elbows in, forearms up, see how my gloves shield my face?" Gloved hands dangling almost to his knees during my demonstration, Famine studied the matter before reluctantly nodding. "All right, now it's your turn," I encouraged. "As they say in the funny papers, put 'em up."

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He did so in a way that made me drop my guard as though I'd seen a ghost.

"What's the matter?" he asked, peering at me over the leather moons of his gloves. "Ain't this the same as you done it?"

"You're left-handed."

"Person's gotta be one or the other, don't he?"

"It's an advantage," I somehow found the words, overtaken as I was by the flood of memory. "Be sinister to be dextrous."

"Huh?"

"Merely a saying in Latin about the left and right hands, never mind," I murmured, still hurtled back to a boxing ring where the young fighter facing me was nearly my mirror image, except for his cocky grin and the bit of footwork he was practicing. Casper and his left hook, as I sparred with him to

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develop that surprise punch. "I got it down pat, Morrie. Squash the bug"—the ball of his left foot digging in—"give a hug"—the left arm and shoulder coming around as if in sudden embrace—"hit the lug"—whapping me half across the ring as his fist connected. Casper's little rhyme and sinister hand, the left, put away opponent after opponent who literally did not know what hit them. As if at the sound of the bell at the start of a round, I came out of my trance, back in the company of a scrawny boy whom life was apt to rain blows on if I did not do something about it. "Famine, we are going to concentrate on one particular maneuver. Here, watch."

Time after time I put him through the motions, footwork, shoulder and arm and fist working as one, until we were both panting and could hardly hold our gloves up. Even so, he was reluctant when I called a halt and began to strip off our mitts. "When am I ever gonna get a real punch in?"

"Tomorrow night."

"Oof!"

"Sorry. Didn't mean to bust you one when you wasn't ready."

"No, no, surprise is a permissible tactic, within limits. I was thinking when I should have been ducking. Always dangerous. Let's work on that left hook some more. The last one was more of a haymaker, which is why I wasn't looking for it."

"Here goes. Squash the bug—"

"That's correct."

"Give a hug—"

"Yes, good."

"Hit the lug." *Smack.*

"Yes, well, I felt that one on the jaw, definitely. You're showing progress."

"Better be. Running's easier."

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"All right, now, let's spar a little before you throw the next one. Gloves up, remember." Bobbing and weaving, I circled him as he pawed back, instinct of defending what I held dear gaining possession of me. Take that, Mazzini!

"Ouch!"

"Oops, sorry, Famine. I got carried away."

"Ain't it about my turn to whack back?"

"Arguably. Give it a try. Keep that foot planted, good, good, shoulder and arm and fist ready, now! Ow! Casper would be proud."

"Huh? Who?"

"Someone familiar with a left hook, is all. Let's call it a night."

Sparring partners that we were, one of us sharpening reflexes long dormant and the other learning moves of a past champion, Russian Famine and I took on our foes.

"Nailed 'im," he reported proudly when the next *Post* newsboy tried to hijack his corner. "Right in the kisser."

I must have scored similarly with some editorial blow, judging by what transpired one evening after Famine had shed his gloves and gone home. The house now silent, I was doing a bit of bookkeeping in Sandison's ledger—the Butte Public Library budget was a miracle of levitation in his design, and if I did not keep things in balance to his satisfaction I was sure to hear about it—when the door\_knocker banged like a shot in the night.

Thinking it wise to put on brass knuckles first, I opened the door the barest crack and peeped out.

Sleek as a sheikh, there stood a personage who could only be Cutthroat Cartwright.

"Moe sent me," he parodied the speakeasy "Open, Sesame," which had practically become the national password since Prohibition. Dressed in the brazen elegance that announced Chicago—snappy

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hat, tailored pinstripe suit, and two-tone perforated oxfords, reading from top to bottom—he gazed cavalierly in at me through the narrow opening as though I were the wiseacre in the matter. “Come on, buddy, where’s your western hospitality? We need to have a chitchat.”

The horns of a dilemma can come at a person, as that limited but effective poet Cheyne put it, *as hooked and blood-bright / as surprise in a bullfight*. And at the moment I had a paralyzing case of surprise. Which to do? Close the door on the importunate face, brassy as Ajax’s, with something like “You must have the wrong address, this isn’t the Fraternal Home for Character Assassins”? Or let the unwelcome visitor in as an opportunity to size up the opposition?

Falling in between is not at all a good course, yet that is what I ended up doing. Trying to deliver an austere “Sorry, I don’t speak snake language,” I let the door swing too wide. Or perhaps it opened of its own accord, under the influence of that forceful gaze and wardrobe. Before I could muster myself and almost before I could slip brass knuckles out of sight into my side pockets, in strode the journalistic slasher called Cutlass, handing me his hat to hang up. He had the sheen of a big fish among minnows. I knew I must be careful not to be swallowed.

Taking in everything at a glance, the acre of house and me, he launched right in. “Fancy digs. How do you rate a setup like this on a scribbler’s pay? Rich wife?”

“Providence of another sort,” I said stiffly.

“Good old Providence. What would we do without the old dame?” Looking every inch the John Held Jr. caricature that topped his famous column in the *Chicago Herald*—cannonball head, pencil-line mustache, calculating eyes, and mouth set for the last word—the unwelcome visitor at once glimpsed the floor-to-ceiling books in Sandison’s lair and went and peered in. He gave a low whistle. “No wonder you were able to shoot down my try at nailing your *Thunder* bunch as a nest of pinkos, with all this ammunition. Nice job you did, incidentally.” A sardonic gleam as he turned to me. “Although I’ll bet a lot of those books are in Lenin’s library too, don’t you think?”

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I burst out, "If you're here to show off your bag of dirty tricks, Cartwright, you can just—"

"Call me Cutty," he insisted smoothly. "What do you go by?"

I drew up short at the sudden jeweler's squint he was giving me, as if trying to evaluate past my beard. "Morgan will do."

"Be that way," he shrugged off my rebuff. He cocked an ear, then the other. "Quiet as a mausoleum in here, isn't it. No wife at all? Only you rattling around in this barn?"

Just that quick, he had me caught in a race with myself, fielding domestic questions to fend off worse ones. "She's away." All too much truth in that. "I have a boarder but he's incapacitated, as I'm sure you know."

"That's right!" exclaimed the journalistic cutthroat who was not going to hear a chummy "Cutty" out of me. "The leading citizen who got plunked instead of you. What did I hear the unlucky chump is in this two-bit town," he pondered, "the old gray mare?"

"He's not mayor," I immediately disparaged that. Too late realizing, with my heart fluttering, that I had just shown I was familiar with that flat Chicago pronunciation of it. And given myself away, that fast? If so, Cartwright showed no sign, blandly waiting for me to go on. Not quite through clenched teeth, I managed. "Samuel Sandison is the Butte public librarian, the best anywhere."

"How about that. From the sound of it, near immortal but not bulletproof," he toyed with that philosophically while my heart did a bigger skip at his employment of that last word. "That beats most of us, wouldn't you say?" Casually tilting his head back, he gandered at the bullet holes overhead as if beholding the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. "So here we are at the scene of the crime, hmm? They must be lousy shots in Butte." He laughed. Jocular he was not. That laugh would have soured milk.

Still stargazing, he confided, "You came out of it lucky in more ways than one, buddy. The *Post* was going to plaster that little ruckus on the front page, drag you through all the mud it could, and the *Thunder* along with it. I made them spike the story."

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Dry-throated, I managed to respond: "I don't suppose your generosity comes at a price or anything like that."

He waved that off with just his fingers. "The little stuff comes free."

"Or maybe," it was time I pushed back, "that story would have raised a few too many questions about who might have hired the gunman."

"Conceivably," he nodded on every syllable, meanwhile giving me a lidded look. "Anyway, I made it known they shouldn't be trying to bump you off, if they were. You're worth more alive than dead, Morgan. Not everybody who takes on the Anaconda Copper Mining Company can say that."

However much of that was true, I managed to digest enough to say I supposed I should be flattered. "State your business, Cutthroat."

"All in good time," he passed that off in the manner of one man of the world to another. "We ought to get to know each other a little, don't you think? Journalistic blood brothers that we are." Parking his hands, thumbs sticking out, in the pockets of his expensively tailored suit, he did a perfect version of a Windy City alderman. "Back where I'm from, we gen'lly start things off wid a drink togedda."

Like the lord of the manor—well, I was—I responded, "If you don't mind Old Balleycleuch."

His surprise showed. "You must have one hell of a bootlegger." The Burns birthday libation from Sandison's bottom desk drawer to the rescue, I poured what I hoped were proper proportions to oil Cartwright's tongue and not mine. We sat down across from each other in the cavernous living room, like characters in a sketch, and he toasted, mock or not, "Remember the *Maine*!" I didn't like the way he kept looking at me. "Morgan," he tasted the name along with the scotch. "You don't wrap yourself around that glass like an Irishman and you're not snotty enough to be English. Welsh, right?"

"Unavoidably. Now, as to why you're—"

He sat forward suddenly. "The way you sling words, you must have had quite an education. Where?"

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"At my father's knee and other low joints," I resorted to the mossy joke as if running out of patience. "Are we going to keep on like this all night?"

"This is a nice scotch," he held up his glass admiringly. "And you're good with the razzmatazz."

My blood turned to hot water at Casper's old word for clever boxing. "I mean, that's a real talent, slugging away at Anaconda the way you do, day after day," said my caller in a knowing tone, while I took refuge behind my drink. Cartwright leaned toward me even more, as if about to spring. "I'll level with you. They're worried up there on the top floor of the Hennessy Building. They don't like the looks of that wild jackass Evans in the legislature and whatever you rabble-rousers are up to with the *Thunder*. You're in a position to call the shots," he smirked toward the bullet holes in the ceiling, "for a change."

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"Speak plain," I bluffed, "I'm still hard of hearing from the last guest."

"Quit."

That was plain enough. "Leave the *Thunder*? Just like that?"

"In the name of a higher wage, why not? Newspapermen have been doing it since Ben Franklin invented penny-pinching. You could move along to the *Post*, let's say, for the sake of argument. That long-eared editor of yours jumped like that, didn't he, just the other direction." I'd intended for my silence to make Cartwright talkative, but now it worked too well. Giving my beard the jeweler's squint again, he ~~said~~ <sup>was saying</sup> with a rough laugh, "I have to hand it to you, Morgan, you're hard to read behind that bush. It reminds me of those pushcart peddlers, whiskers all over them, we used to have on Maxwell Street when I was a cub reporter working that part of town." He curled a grin at mention of Chicago's toughest neighborhood, while I cringed inwardly. The West Side fight clubs there were where Casper learned his trade, the razzmatazz of the boxing ring. Where his likeness, so like my own, had appeared on prizefight posters on every brick wall. Where the Llewellyn countenance probably ~~was still on~~ <sup>was</sup> fading poster\_board up some alley or another. <sup>4</sup> Those old Maxies were hard to dicker with, too,"

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Cartwright was finishing his smirking reminiscence while I rigidly sat, trying not to look like myself.

"But they'd strike a bargain in the end."

I shook my head, mainly to unclog my voice\_box. Cartwright read an answer into that and heaved a sigh. "Okay, no go on packing your talents across town. But you could investigate retirement, better yet, hmm?" His eyes locked with mine.

"Maybe Providence would come around again, like Christmas." He drilled the point home.

"Brighten up, Morgan. All you have to do is nothing. You can be prosperously self-unemployed."

Now I had to say something. What came out was, "Drink up. The house limit is one."

The justly named Cutthroat sized me up one last time. "You *are* full of razzmatazz, aren'tcha."

Tossing down the rest of his drink in one swallow, he got to his feet. "Anyhoo, pard," now he was comradely, as if we were old campaigners bivouacked around a campfire, "the offer stands. Think it over." He didn't bother to wink, but might as well have. "By the light of day, I'll bet you see I'm right, buddy."

That echoed in me after he was gone and I was alone in the house. To some extent, he was right.

Journalistic blood brothers we inescapably were. Buddies we were not.

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"I see the bats and owls haven't moved in quite yet."

Even Sandison's growl about my less than inspired housekeeping was welcome, just to have him out of the hospital and back in the manse for companionship, such as it was. Whatever might be the fit description of a crabby wild-bearded shooting victim stalking through the place in cowboy boots, deafening silence was the farthest thing from it. His wound still nagged him, a fact he acknowledged only by grunting through set teeth whenever he sat down or stood up. The absence of Grace, and for that matter Hoop and Griff, told grievously on the pair of us as we went about domestic life only fractionally, the way bachelors do. I cooked as necessary, Sandison ate without comment. Nobody dusted, swept, or mopped on any regular basis; no offense to my dear wife, but never had I missed Rose and her housekeeping skills so much. <sup>At</sup> Say for Sandison, however, grumblesome and moody as he was, he was not unfair on larger matters. Try as he ~~would~~ <sup>might</sup>, he could find no fault with my juggling of the public library's ledger in his absence—"One thing about you, Morgan, you know the meaning of legerdemain, heh, heh"—or for the most part, my handling of scheduling and personnel matters. He nonetheless was chafing to get back to bossing the Butte Public Library from top to bottom himself, which I daily had to restrain him from. "Sister Magdalena"—she of the majestic wimple—"instructed me you are to take it easy until your side is completely healed, ~~Sandy~~ <sup>no</sup> exceptions."

"Sister Magdalena holds the firm belief men can't blow their noses without hurting themselves," he could only mutter to that, listing to one side as he sulked off to his book-lined lair down the hall. Fortunately I'd had the foresight to simply stack on his desk the book parcels that arrived while he was



hospitalized, and after heaving himself around in his chair until his side hurt least, he would settle in there like some Rip Van Winkle catching up on Christmases by opening the packages and turning the pages as carefully as a boy. Many a morning I left him engrossed in some fine edition of Turgenev or Blake or Balzac or Whitman, and would find him at the end of the day dozing in peace over the open book.

There was no such peacefulness in my working hours, as I grappled daily with what Cutthroat Cartwright threw at the *Thunder* and Jared and the tax commission plan, which the *Post* continued to imply—although not in so many words, since my desperate defusing of the “What Is ~~to~~ Be Done” imbroglio—was a union-conceived plan to undermine capitalism and cause the crash of America into Russia-like rubble. I am happy to say he equally had to fend with what I flung in Anaconda’s direction. Thank heaven Theodore Roosevelt’s unrestrained enthusiasms had included smiting his foes with that Latinate billy club, “malefactors of great wealth”; my typing fingers <sup>*continued to*</sup> played every tune I could think of that hit the notes of ~~*malus*~~, meaning “bad, ill, evil” and ~~*facere*~~, meaning “to do,” in keeping to the theme that the tax burden ~~was~~ maleficiently heaped on the honest citizens of the Treasure State while the copper colossus paid hardly pennies. Pluvius and Cutlass, we were hammer and tong, day after day as the newspaper war was shouted out in the streets of Butte by our newsboys and theirs.

Howsomever, as Griff would have said, the weak point, if there was one in Jared’s plan of attack, was the amount of time it was taking. The statewide vote could not be held until autumn, a special election set for the first Tuesday of September. Propitiously, the day after Labor Day, a conjunction that made Cutlass howl to high heaven in print, but Jared and his Ulcer Gulch allies had managed it somehow, perhaps by black magic. Pluvius didn’t ask. In any case, the showdown date was months off yet, an interval that made me uneasy. Caught up in the heat of competition, the *Thunder* staff gleefully produced news pages that shone with sharp writing and keen coverage and seemed exhilarated by the

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STET

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fight in which our typewriters and telephones served as artillery. But Armbrister and I, going over my editorials, which somehow had to keep up the barrage until election day, exchanged glances now and then that said, without ever daring to utter the word aloud, *stalemate*.

The one clear victory of this time was Russian Famine's. I jumped up when I saw him slip into the office from the back shop with his newspaper bag jauntily slung at his side, grinning despite another split lip. "Done it," he boasted, grabbing his daily allotment of gumdrops from the candy jar and popping one into his mouth. "A dumb Postie jumped me again. He got some licks in, but it ended up I cleaned his clock good." Seasoned pugilist though he now was, he could not help giggling at the next. "He never seen the left hook coming."

"Nicely done, Capper," I said without thinking, my tongue slipping back more than a dozen years.

"Huh?"

"I merely meant, I wish I had been there to watch you at it."

The giggles contending with his attempt at nonchalance, Famine imparted: "Jared says he's real proud of me, sticking up for myself like that. Mrs. Evans scolded me, you know how they do," now speaking man to man about the ways of women. "But I think she was kind of tickled, too."

"As are we all," I told him warmly, "when the side that deserves to wins."

"It happened out of the blue" is one of those phrases worn smooth to cliché, I realize, but a wording of that sort endures because there is no better way to say it.

Consequently, I was enjoying myself on the steps of the public library, having ducked out for a breath of air that agreeable June forenoon—by the calendar, the first day of summer—while filling in for Sandison on some minor directorial matter, when I noticed something odd taking place on the Hill, more precisely, in the otherwise clear blue sky above the dominant rise of ground. One after another, the

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plumes of smoke from the seven stacks of the Neversweat were diminishing to nothing as each drifted off and vanished. Along with that, as though the disappearing smoke were taking the usual machinery noise with it, the Hill quieted steadily down as I stood watching until it fell silent.

In that ominous moment, I strained to hear the dreaded whistles signaling for medical aid, but there was not even that sound. Puzzled, I pulled out my watch and checked. Right on schedule it was time for the change of shifts, but ordinarily that did not stop the throb of mining operations at all.

By now people in the street had stopped to look questioningly up at the earthen height humped on Butte's back and the silent headframes spearing the sky, and my feet had found their way down the library steps almost without my knowing it. As I hastened through the downtown streets, trolleys still clanged and automobiles yet honked, but there was a sense of the city slowing, like some great clock running down. Repeatedly asking storekeepers who had come out to stare or shoppers bolting for home what was happening, invariably such answer as I received was along the lines of "Something at the mines." But what, what? The last few blocks to the *Thunder* office, I broke into a mad dash.

I found the newsroom going crazy, half the staff shouting into telephones, the others typing madly, Cavaretta trying to handle two phones at once. Plainly the *Thunder* was putting out an extra, hitting the streets with the news behind the sudden silence of the Hill. I panted into Armbrister's office, where he and Jared stood together like men stricken.

"Another accident?" I asked, gasping for breath. "You called the men out?"

Ashen-faced, Jared shook his head. "Not a walkout. This is a lockout."

The news was worse than I could have imagined. In a ploy of its own, the Anaconda Company had declared an impasse in the wage negotiations and informed Quinlan's stunned successor at the bargaining table that from this day forward, mining operations were shut down until the union accepted a pay cut of more than 20 percent. At a stroke, the past two years' gain in ten thousand paychecks was

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gone, the tenaciously won "lost" dollar per day lost again. Quin must have been cursing in his grave.

howling curses

The rest of us—Jared, myself, Armbrister when he wasn't shouting to the news staff or the back room to hurry up with the extra; the *Thunder* had an entire city waiting for it—were flummoxed. "They can do that, without so much as a by-your-leave?" I struggled out of my daze. "Doesn't the government care whether half of the world's copper supply is choked off or not?"

**Deleted:** Extra

"Professor," Jared responded bleakly, "if the country was at war, Washington wouldn't let the company bigwigs—"

sunuvabitches

"The plutocrat ~~sons of bitches~~," Armbrister improved on one of my recent editorial epithets with his own.

**Comment [CE99]:** Author/editor: See query on p. 130: there, Armbrister refers to the people at Anaconda as “sunuvabitchs”; this was queried, due to previous spellings of “sonofabitch”; can this be made consistent, to read “sonofabitches,” or can page 130 be changed?

“—get away with it for one minute. But production regulations and the like were thrown out the window right away after the Armistice.” Jared’s tone was more bitter than I had ever heard it. “Now ‘normalcy’ is back, haven’t you heard, and its high priest is Harding.”

"Here in our parish, it's Cutlass, worse yet," Armbrister bluntly spoke what I was thinking. "And pardon my French, Morgie, but we're down the crapper and he's on the hole." That distressing analogy aside, the day's development did make it all the more evident why the powers that be in the Hennessy Building imported Cutthroat Cartwright. They had been preparing to escalate the battle with us from the very first volley over the taxation issue. I felt sick. ~~But~~ However, worse off by far was Jared, in his public role as the instigator in all this. He turned half away from Armbrister's words as though physically struck by them. "A strike is one thing; hell, Butte's been through those how many times and lived to tell the tale," the relentless editor went on even as he checked around and shouted, "Roll it, Charlie!" to the pressman waiting in the back room doorway. "But this is the same stunt the company pulled in '03, isn't it. and we all know how that turned out. Three weeks of shutdown until the only sign of life anywhere in the state was grass growing in the streets, and the copper bastards got everything they wanted."

"You want us to cave, just like that?" Jared rounded on him with a steely look. "Give up the dollar



in wages, and pull back on the tax vote, which is what is really behind this? I hired you for this because I thought you had guts, Jake."

"Guts, hell," Armbrister flared back, "brains are the shortage in this mess."

"Boys," I instinctively stepped between them as if breaking up a schoolyard fight, "if they could see this up in the Hennessy Building, they'd fall out of their chairs laughing."

"Right, right. Sorry, sorry," they muttered back and forth. The floor trembled under us as the press began to roll and the lockout ~~extra~~ literally began to thunder into existence. Sheepishly, Armbrister took off his eyeshade and rubbed his forehead. "At least we got the damn paper out."

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"And it's a good job well done," Jared told him. "The same as you and the ~~professor~~ do every day." He began pacing the narrow confines of the office, like a sentry on high alert at his post. "All right, my rod and my staff," he rallied the pair of us. "Let's put our thinking caps on, as Rab would say. We have to try to stick this out, and time is maybe on our side for once. Anaconda can't let the Hill stay shut too long, or some outfit in Arizona or Chile or somewhere will start digging copper like mad to meet market demand. The powers that be, up in the Hennessy and higher, have got to be looking over their shoulders at that, however pigheaded they are toward us."

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"That makes good sense," Armbrister agreed, as did I.

"It's not going to be easy, keeping spirits up," Jared calculated like the veteran of union battles he was, "since we couldn't prepare for this. But we've got one advantage ahead." Very much the publisher at this moment, he pointed to the calendar board, where potential stories ahead were marked in red. I still didn't follow, but Armbrister stirred as if about to be hit by a hunch. "That's right, Jake," Jared encouraged that response, "it's six weeks yet to Miners Day. That'll help the town hold out." A ghost of a smile visited him. "Show me any miner who isn't going to want to march this year to demonstrate to Anaconda we can't be pushed around."

How right he was, if past experience was any guide at all. Miners Day was Butte's version of New



*correct then both*

Orleans's Mardi Gras, Venice's Carnivale, Munich's Bierfest, of all such gala holidays from the daily strains of life, a civic celebration giving mineworkers a chance to march in their thousands under peaceable conditions, the various lodges and brotherhoods and sisterhoods to show off their regalia, businesses to build floats to wow and woo customers, on and on through the ranks of all those with local pride or some cause to flaunt. It was a spectacle, a declaration, a civic rite, a coming together of the nationalities of the Constantinople of the Rockies, all that and more. I oh so vividly remembered watching—no, there was not time for that memory now as Jared in his authoritative way was going on, “The Hennessy Building jaybirds think they’re so clever, how’d they overlook that? We’re one up on them until the big day, anyway.”

Comment [JA100]: Stet or correct to Carnevale?

Comment [CE101]: Oktoberfest? (or stet thought?)

“I shall remind them of it so incessantly they’ll hear it in their sleep,” I promised to do my editorial utmost.

“That’s the stuff.” What remained of the smile hovered another moment as he gave the mock instruction, “Give Cutlass a dose of bayonet.”

“It’s still going to be a ~~hell~~ <sup>damned hard</sup> slog from now till then, Jared,” Armbrister warned. “You know how things get when the mines aren’t running. Butte goes on its back like a beetle.”

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Jared knew that only too well, his face told, but he remained grimly resolved. “Every family on the Hill has lived on short rations before.” Under the weight of command in such circumstances, his voice went low and reflective. “One thing about it, Dublin Gulch and Finntown and the rest”—he solemnly named off his vital constituencies, as union leader and senator—“are used to misery. We’ll see how Wall Street likes the taste of it.”

At least the newsboys prospered as the lockout took hold, with headlines raging back and forth over the dead quiet of the Hill. My editorials were variations on a theme, practically operatic in orchestration, back and forth from characterizing Anaconda as the cold-blooded money-grubbing untrustworthy



reptilian corporate monster it behaved like—this was no time to spare the adjectives—and sounding every note of hope and defiance I could think of, for a citizenry under economic siege to hearken to. Or so we hoped. Jared and his union council were busy keeping the anger banked in the miners' neighborhoods, helped by the newspaper running pleas and pledges in various tongues that echoed those of "Voices of the Hill," only with much graver accents. And while the *Thunder* lived up to its name, Cutlass dueled with my offerings by employing every dirty trick known to journalism, from quotes out of context to implications that Pluvius was, of all things, a hired gun of the writing sort, bought and paid for so richly he lived in a mansion while posing as a tribune of the people. "He ought to have to live in this overgrown bunkhouse," Sandison said to that.

As Armbrister bleakly forecast, Butte did slow to a crawl without the rhythm of the mines in its daily life. Men whose hands knew nothing but work had to find time-killing pursuits. The public library was jammed daylong, I reported to Sandison, and I would have bet good money that Smitty and crew were telling the Highliner the same about speakeasies. Nor did it escape me that with everything shut down, a certain Neversweat powderman with a Roman profile now had nothing to do but idle around under the same boardinghouse roof as the attractive woman who was very much my wife, still. The animal.

Even in those first days, a widespread unease, something like the brink of fever before some terrible illness, could be sensed in the conversations in the streets and the way people glanced up at the stock-still equipment of the mines and quickly down again. The pinch of lost wages had been endured before by the families of the Hill during strikes, but, according to the oldest hands on the *Thunder*, Armbrister profanely included, there was a feeling in the air that this time was nothing like anything before. A strike was one thing, workers withholding their labor, the only real weapon they possessed. A lockout was chillingly different. The contrast, say, between a queue waiting at the doorstep for the right invitation to come in, and a slammed and barred door. Between negotiation and coercion; between

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calloused hand and merciless fist.

The one bright spot on the horizon remained Miners Day, and as vowed, in my editorials I drummed away at reminding our readership that, more than ever, Butte's own holiday was the occasion to celebrate the unity of the house of labor and show the copper bosses that the spirit of ten thousand mineworkers was not broken. Take *that*, Cutlass. I did my best to have my typewriter keys echo the sound of a mile of men on the march, Jared's confident goal for turnout on the great day.

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This was the hard going for my fingers, every mention of that midsummer high point of life in the proud mining community bringing such a surge of emotions in me. Two years before, watching the parade together from a private aerie and then a trolley ride to the attractions of the amusement park called Columbia Gardens had been Grace's and my first "date," to use that modern term for the onset of courtship, those first breathless hours of shy glances and modestly exchanged confidences. What a picture we made, I in my best suit and checked vest the least of it, Grace resplendently filling out an aquamarine dress with a sea shimmer to it, her hair done up in a circlet braid with a swooping ribbon-sprigged summer hat topping even the gold of that crown upon a crown—an enchanting vision time could not dim. Although it flickered the following day, when my newfound darling suffered an outbreak of second thoughts and hives. *I tossed and turned all night trying to figure out who am I with when I'm with you,* she wailed through her mask of calamine lotion *while trying* as she tried not to scratch. *Take yesterday. One minute I'm on the arm of someone I enjoy thoroughly, and the next, you're gambling away money like you're feeding the chickens.* Actually only a bet on Russian Famine in a footrace, which I pointed out in vain was a sure thing. Thank heavens, hives and much else had been overcome in the subsequent course of our romance, leading to matrimony and our year of wonder, of traveling the world on a cloud.

Descending from a cloud brings an awful jolt, however, and I already was not at my best while trying to compose yet another Miners Day piece, several days into the lockout, when Armbrister came by my typewriter stand and dropped a freshly inked *Post* with a plop. "Take a look at this, and then slit

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**Comment [CE102]:** Author/editor: This is treated as remembered dialogue, but I could not locate these quotes anywhere else in the novel; is that okay? Or perhaps repeat quote about "going through life like a chameleon on a barber pole"?

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it's from  
Work Song



my wrists for me.”

I stared down at the headline shrieking across the top of the front page.

### **Anaconda Takes Steps Against Miners Day Threats**

And below was worse.

The Anaconda Copper Mining Company, citing grave threats against life and property, today announced the hiring of extra guards to be deployed around company headquarters and other properties during next month's Miners Day observance. "We have reason to believe radical elements may use the parade as an occasion to incite violence," a company spokesman declared, "making necessary certain protective steps."

Questioned whether the guards would be armed, the company spokesman said: "All necessary measures will be taken."

It went on in the same sickening way. The mayor was quoted as calling on the miners to forgo the traditional parade in this time of tension. The chief of police was quoted as warning the public at large that he did not have enough men on the force to quell major trouble if it erupted. Anaconda and its *Post* lackeys had not missed a trick. ~~front-page~~ ~~front-page~~ Topping it off was a ~~page one~~ ~~page one~~ editorial by Cutlass piously expressing the hope that cooler heads would prevail on the union side, but if not, the consequences clearly would fall on those who instigated trouble. "Those who mistake the temple of prosperity for the Bastille," the fiend wrote.

"Cute, isn't it," Armbrister said dolefully over my shoulder. "Just nicely letting everybody know there'll be goons with guns if the union doesn't scrap the Miners Day parade."

The threat sent a chill cold as ice through me. "Has Jared seen—?"

"I called him at union headquarters. He'll be here as soon as he picks himself up off the floor."

It wasn't long before we were joined by our Sisyphus of a publisher, who indeed looked as if the

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Comment [CE103]: Set in full caps—or set previous extract heads upper/lowercase? See also pp. 123 and 130.

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Comment [JA104]: Copyediting: Body Text FL is okay per orig ms

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rock had rolled down the hill on him. Alert to trouble, the newsroom watched the three of us huddle over the flagrant *Post* front page spread on the desk in Armbrister's goldfish bowl of an office.

His voice tight, Jared began, "I'm afraid"—the first time I had ever heard that word from him, even in such a context—"they've got us. I can't put our people in a fix like that, where a hothead on either side can set off a shooting war." He looked ready to spit out something bitter, and did. "Anaconda doesn't mind that, it would just as soon live on blood as copper."

"What about troops," I reluctantly came up with, "to keep the peace?"

Jared shook his head. "This governor won't want to do that. He's too new in office, and while he's mostly with us against Anaconda, he won't stick his neck out farther than he already has on the tax vote." The other two of us followed his dispirited gaze back down to the threatening headline. "This raises absolute hell with us in trying to hold on against the lockout, but we've got to scrap the parade, I don't see any way around it."

"Conniving bastards," said Armbrister. "Bastard," he corrected himself, for this had Cutlass written ~~in his every feature,~~ all over it in more ways than one. Dread ~~written all over him,~~ he shook his head at the retreat the *Thunder* now had to lead. "Better get started putting the best face on it you can, Morgie, so—"

The editor broke off, scowling as he always did at unfamiliar faces in his newsroom. "Who the hell are these, the oldest living candidates for the Lonely Hearts Club?"

No, they were not lovelorn ancients come to place matrimonial ads, they were Hoop and Griff. Each wearing a suit and tie, like themselves a bit threadbare but serviceable, and clutching in both hands nice hats, homburgs I never would have suspected they possessed. Behaving as though they were in church, they gazed around the newsroom meekly as they padded past surprised reporters.

Coming up to us in the editor's office, they nodded a little greeting as if we were all in the same pew, and paused to consider, one to another.

"You better tell them. It's pretty much your idea."



"It's just as much yours. You go ahead."

"No, no, be my guest."

"Righto. What this is"—Griff addressing the blinking trio of us—"we couldn't help but hear the *Post* newsboys yelling their tonsils out about what the snakes are up to now." He shook his head at Anaconda's latest injustice, Hoop following suit. "We'd miss the Miners Day parade, something awful. Marching in that is the last thing we've got of our life on the Hill, if you know what I mean." The seamed old face, duplicated by the work-worn one next to it, spoke memorably to that. "So Hoop and me got to thinking, how about the Fourth of July?"

While I was a moment behind on that, Jared looked like he'd been hit by the Book of Revelation,

"The American Legion parade? Pull a fast one on Anaconda and the mayor?"

Armbrister's face lit up all the way to the green of his eyeshade. "Hell, yes, that's it! The Legion is ~~scrambling~~ always ~~looking~~ for bunches to march with them besides the DAR and the GAR and kiddies with sparklers."

He had scarcely finished before Jared let out a whoop that brought up heads all around the newsroom. "Not even Anaconda can let itself be known for a Fourth of July massacre," our tactician said with a smack of his fist in his palm. "I'll bet my bottom dollar they have to rein in any bloodthirsty goons if we're out there strutting our stuff like true Americans."

By then I could see it as plainly as reveille in some grand dream, the men of the Hill stepping forth as if from some monumental shift change to form the tighter ranks of comrades in arms. Montana always rallied to the colors, famously so, contributing more than its share of manpower in time of war—there was no doubt about it, every mining neighborhood of every nationality would have veterans who were in the Great War or served in the Philippines insurrection or in Mexico against Villa. What a sight it would be, the army of the Hill stretching behind the Legionnaires in their service caps and the ~~aged remnant~~ Grand Army of the Republic ~~veterans~~ in their Union blue and the Daughters of the American Revolution

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costumed as Betsy Ross in multiple. Carried away, I whapped Jared on the back hard enough to startle him. "And you, Sergeant Evans, must wear your uniform and be out front, like a good soldier."

Laughing, he said Rab might have to let it out a little for him, but, by God, he would wear it <sup>to</sup> ~~with~~ ~~the fullest~~ pride. Exuberance then got the best of him. "You old devils," he seized Griff and Hoop each by a shoulder, "are going to be right there in the front rank of the honor guard." Modest as church mice, they shuffled their feet and declared in duet that would sure take care of their wanting to march, all right.

As publisher and editor feverishly began trading further ideas about how to turn the Fourth of July into Miners Day come early—Armbrister already was envisioning a *Thunder* special section headlined **Butte Marches for Loyalty and Country**, "Let the readers catch on, loyalty to what," he chortled—Griff and Hoop edged toward the door, turning their hats in their hands. Before they could make their exit, I caught up with them to rid myself of the question tickling at the back of my mind. "Why are you dressed to the teeth?"

"Oh, this." Hoop looked down as if just noticing his suit and tie. "You explain, Griff."

"Sure thing. Giorgio is taking us to the matinee of the Eyetalian opera company that's in town."

I had an awful premonition. "Grace—Mrs. Morgan as well?"

"Well, yeah, sure. He's got to invite one and all, don't he, that's only manners."

"'Polly-atchy,' they're doing," Hoop chimed in. "Something about a clown who bawls a lot. Should be better than it sounds."

The despicable creature Mazzini, copying me culturally as the way to the heart of my wife? What next? With an effort I got hold of myself. "Please tell her for me I love—" Sudden emotion choked me. "Just say I miss her."

"We'll pass that along," they chorused heartily. Their expressions adding, for all the good it would do.

**Comment [CE106]:** Author/editor:  
See previous queries regarding formatting  
of emphatic newspaper headlines: should  
this be full caps/no bold?

ital, as if it  
was Pagliacci



At the end of that day when so much was happening, perhaps it was ordained that I would coincide at the front steps of the manse with O'Malley the postman, who'd had an abjectly apologetic air ever since the intrusion of his gun-wielding impostor. "I hope himself is on the mend," he said anxiously while handing over a package somewhat larger and lighter than the usual book box, and I assured him Sandison's recuperation was taking its course as well as its time.

When I duly took the parcel in to Sandison, he lifted it with a frown. "What the blazes is this, cotton batting? I was expecting the collected Burns with Rowlandson engravings."

After dubiously hoisting the package a few more times and giving it another grumble or two, he got around to slitting it open. Inside was a slouch hat, the kind with the brim rakishly turned all the way up on one side. I recognized the style at once, which was not the same as grasping its signifance.

"Sandy," I exclaimed, "you mean to tell me you were a Rough Rider?"

"Don't I wish," he intoned distantly, turning the hat over in his hands. "Dora wouldn't let me. 'Who's going to run the ranch if you trot off like a patriotic fool?' she said. Good enough question. But I gave some horses, and three of my top hands signed on with Roosevelt after he begged me for some good men to take to Cuba. That damned Teddy. Hard to say no to." Wincing, he managed to lift an arm enough to try the hat on. "Well? How's it look?"

"Dashing enough to conquer Cuba by itself," I replied, not terribly far off the truth. Indeed, with it on, Montana's Earl of Hell looked like the very manifestation of wild and woolly triumph in the Spanish-American War, the grizzled rider of the range who might have led the famous charge up San Juan Hill if Teddy Roosevelt had gotten out of the way.

"Hah." Trying to hide his pleasure, Sandison shucked open the envelope that had come with the apparent gift. Reading the accompanying letter, he began to laugh and gasp with pain at the same time.

"Get an eyeful of this, Morgan. You never know what'll come around the corner in this life, eh?"

With various loops and flourishes of phrase, the missive invited none other than Samuel S.

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Sandison, valued patron and old pard when mounted patriots were called to the colors, to join their presence on the occasion of the twenty-second annual gathering of the 1st United States Volunteer Cavalry—better known as the Rough Riders—this year to be held in Butte on the Fourth of July, to serve as an honorary member of their honor guard—a bit redundant, that—and thereby ride at the head of their mounted contingent in the parade.

“Now I do feel guilty,” I lamented after reading over his shoulder.

“Why? You been up to something?”

“Well, I mean, if it had not been for that shooting intended for me, you could ride with them.”

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“Where do you get your logic from, the bughouse?” he said peevishly. “I’m not an invalid, I’m merely laid up.” With a sharp grunt, he took the hat off, admired it, and clapped it back on. “Of course I’m going to ride with them. Heh. Watch and see.”

No amount of argument could budge him from that, and so I did the next best thing. Which was to turn it into news for the *Thunder*.

Jared was back in the office the next day plotting out the paper’s parade coverage with Armbrister, Rab along probably because she could not be kept away. When I joined them and reported that, thanks to Sandison, we knew the Rough Riders were coming to town, Armbrister swore mightily before catching himself and asking Rab to excuse him all to hell. “That’s just what Cutlass needs, an excuse to ramble on about his famous dispatch from San Juan Hill and his dear old friend, Teddy Roosevelt. Front-page feature, up top of the parade coverage. That’s where I’d play it, you can damn well bet.”

Thrown by his reaction, I lamely said, “If it helps any, Sandy was on a first-name basis with him, too. Theodore, that is.”

Jared’s eyebrows shot up at that, while Rab looked intrigued. “You know that for a fact? How’s he ever chums with Roosevelt?” Armbrister asked doubtfully. “The Earl of Hell has never seemed to me



the political type.”

“They were, ah, lynchers together, back in their cattleman days.”

“Oh, swell. What a perfect story peg—dishonoring a dead president on the Fourth of July. Got any more bright ideas, Morgie?”

“Actually, I do. Sandison is going to ride at the head of the Rough Riders color guard, at their invitation—what’s wrong with a story about that?

~~String 'em Up~~  
~~Strangling Sam~~ is going to lead the Rough Riders? That’s more like it.” Armbrister had that look of reading print in the air. “‘Vigilante Rides Again with the Rough Bunch.’ Sensational!”

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I coughed. “That is a word that does not sit well with him. Were that headline to appear, he would promptly be in here chastising you, perhaps physically.”

“Touchy about the old days of the Montana necktie, is he. All right, then—‘Pioneer Figure Saddles Up with the Rough Riders.’ We’ll run it as a parade sidebar.” The energized editor stopped suddenly.

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“I’ve got a better idea. Cross your fingers, everybody.” His already were, in that hex sign that signaled a hunch, and the other three of us guardedly waited for this latest brainstorm to strike.

“Here’s what we’ll do. Stick a reporter right in there with the Rough Riders. Horseback interviews, that’s the ticket.” Again, print in the air that only an editor could see: “‘By Our Mounted Correspondent.’ Can you beat that for a byline? We’ll scoop the sonofabitching *Post*, right out in plain sight, and Cartwright and his crew won’t be able to do a thing about it.”

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“Sounds good to me,” Jared immediately signed off on the idea, Rab clapping in approval.

“Very enterprising,” I approved heartily. I swept a look around the newsroom for anyone who looked fit for horsemanship. “One of the young ones, I suppose. Sibley, perhaps? Or Cavaretta? He’s the daring type—”

“Nope. You.”

My skin prickled. I suppose I was not allergic to horses in the strictly medical sense, but the



thought of parading through the city on the back of one had much the same ill effect. I tried to laugh.

"Jacob, sorry, but I am not an equestrian."

"Oh, but Mr. Morgan, you're much too modest!" Rab stuck her pretty nose in. "At Marias Coulee, you had to ride horseback to go anywhere, remember? We schoolgirls thought you had a very nice seat."

She giggled, all too innocently. "Of the horsemanship kind."

"Necessity is not the same as aptitude, Rab," I tried to evade that ambush.

Armbrister was not hearing anything but the gallop of story in his head. "It'll be a peach of a feature. I'll have Sammy set up his camera across from the Hennessy Building, so he gets a terrific shot of you riding right past Anaconda's doorstep. Let Cutlass try to top that."

"Jake, no, really, I—" My protest was drowned out by his shout for the photographer.

"Jared?" I was running out of names to plead to.

"I'm infantry, remember?" Poker-faced, he tugged at his short ear. "I leave the cavalry up to you, Professor." Wasn't that just like a politician, my aggrieved look told him, and words to that effect would have followed had not Armbrister got me by the arm and dragged me off to hatch his plan with the photographer. The two of them plotted his assignment out on the wall map of downtown Butte while I tried to blink out of my daze. ~~Easy one. See you at the Hennessy corner, Morgie,~~ the cameraman said, and went back to his poker game, as Armbrister impatiently overrode my last-ditch protests against becoming the *Thunder's* mounted correspondent. "You're buddy-buddy with Sandison, he'll be right in

the thick of the mounted bunch, that makes you the natural one to tag along with him and do the story.

~~What the hell,~~

All you have to do is get up on a horse—"

Deleted: Mounted

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—And ride through the downtown streets lined by a whooping crowd, with bands blaring and Fords backfiring and boys on bicycles wild as Cossacks, while simultaneously keeping track of Samuel Sandison and interviewing his Rough Rider cohorts, all of it without falling out of the saddle and killing myself, my hunch-playing editor might just as well have added to his instructions.

The Fourth of July began with the usual bangs, firecrackers going off in fusillades that added to my jumpy nerves. As parade time drew nearer, things got under way at the manse, with Sandison clomping around in his best cowboy boots, digging out his old leather chaps that shined from use and a pair of sharp-roweled spurs, and topping it all off with the Rough Rider hat. Thus assembled, he cocked a look to where I stood waiting on one foot and then the other, back and forth between dreading my horseback assignment and wanting to get it over with. “Am I seeing right? Are you going looking like an undertaker?”

Miffed, I protested that my blue serge suit, sober tie, and dove-gray vest marked me as a member of the press. “Besides, I bought a Stetson.”

“Bonnet on a rooster,” he wrote off my new hat, meanwhile lumbering to his library lair for what he said was the one last thing he needed.

He came out strapping on a gun\_belt with a six-shooter, the large old kind called a hog leg, in the holster.

I stared. “Where did that come from?”

“The Colt Firearms Company in Hartford, Connecticut, where do you think?”

**Comment [CE107]:** Okay to alter dialogue, actual co. name: <http://www.coltsmfg.com/Company/History.aspx>



"I meant—is that a good idea, ~~Sandy~~? With Anaconda's armed goons on hand? Isn't carrying a gun possibly giving them an excuse to—"

"Morgan"—he rolled his eyes toward the bullet holes in the ceiling—"I am the one who got shot merely for hanging around with you, remember? I don't want that to happen again. Nor," this came with a full serving of growl and scowl, "do I necessarily want it to happen to you for hanging around with me, if some idiot with an old grudge decides to take it out on me and my riders. Anaconda or anyone else, this is to give them second thoughts." The gun belt circling his girth like the equator, he rested his hand on the prominent handle of the Colt .45 as if it was a natural fit. "I have a reputation to uphold in this damn town," he said, with all the austere dignity expected of the Butte public librarian. Then came the gleam of the Earl of Hell, reflected from his vigilante days. "More than one."

Inasmuch as a good many of the Rough Riders shipped their own mounts in by boxcar, their encampment was down by the stockyards, where Sandison and I duly delivered ourselves by taxi before parade time. "You can ~~about~~ bet most of them slept in a feather bed somewhere uptown," he shrewdly guessed as we approached the camp, "then scuttled down here for a breakfast of beans around a campfire." The cluster of weather-beaten tents carried the tang of both a military bivouac and a cattle roundup, as did the Rough Riders themselves, actually. Hip-sprung men of a certain type stood around fire circles talking in slow cadences and, likely as not, spitting tobacco juice onto the sizzling embers. I was itching to pull out my notepad and jot down just how their slouch hats and loosely knotted neckerchiefs—bandannas, I mentally corrected myself—and blue flannel uniform shirts made them look like exhibits from an earlier age. "A Frederic Remington museum diorama come to life," was the phrase that suggested itself. But given the squints and odd looks aimed at Sandison and ~~me as we~~ passed through, him in his ranching getup of forty years ago and I in my city clothes and clean Stetson, I kept my reportorial materiel in my pocket.

*Yes*  
Comment [CE108]: just about?

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There was a similar gang of blue-shirted figures ahead at the stockyards, some fence-sitting, some peering between corral poles to where horses were being wrangled with considerable commotion and dust. Lanky and akimbo and in some drawling world of their own, these hardened military cowhands or ~~cowboy-soldiers did not look any friendlier than the set at the tents, so I felt compelled to ask Sandison~~ a little tentatively, "Who will be our, ah, riding companions?"

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"Who do you think," he grunted in answer, stepping up his stride, his chaps flapping, as we neared the corral. "The James brothers."

"Very funny, Sandy. I suppose Butch Cassidy and the Hole in the Wall Gang will be joining us later?"

"What's funny about it?" Sandison huffed, giving me a look. "Leonard James and his kid brother, Claude, both rode for me on the ranch from the time they were green saddle punks. Had to teach the young scamps every blasted thing about cowboying." He shook his head reminiscently. "Same with Tinsley, another pea in that pod."

"Related to them, is he?" I took the implication to be.

"For crying out loud, Morgan, where do you get these ideas? He's colored."

I surrendered to the situation, whatever it was going to be, and simply stuck as close as possible while Sandison surveyed the dusty scene in the corral. He was grumbling, "I got carried away with that silly little war. Should never have let the three of them off the ranch to go fight Spaniards. Lost the whole batch to that old humbug, Buffalo Bill, afterward."

My expression must have told him I was not keeping up with these particulars. "The Wild West ~~Show, dolt. After the charge up San Juan Hill and the tripe written by your colleague Cartwright~~"—he looked hard at me—"Bill Cody turned that cactus circus of his into Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World." Ducking behind a corral post, I busily scribbled this down while Sandison went back to scanning the ~~swirl of lasso-swirling~~ wranglers and dodgy mounts.

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Comment [CE109]: Author/editor: repetition okay in "swirl of lasso-swirling ...?"

lasso-swirling



"Heh." The tone of that made me look up, right into those eyes the blue of glacier ice. "I don't know about you," although it hardly took a guess in this regard, "but I haven't been on a horse since"—he gave me a complicit look—"that time with you."

I swallowed hard. That excursion, in my first Butte chapter of life, had been an unforgettable one, in the valley to the west where his ranch once stretched from horizon to horizon. Not knowing what his intentions were, I had ridden in a sweat of fear as he led me to the hanging tree where his reputation as the Strangler had been earned. Where rustlers were strung up, vigilante style, by him and doubtless the same ranch hands we were to meet with today. His anguished words echoed in me yet. "What gets into a man, Morgan, to set himself up as an executioner?" I am no stranger to redemption myself—possibly even a periodic visitor—but I had never witnessed a person turning his soul inside out as Samuel Sandison did that day. It all flooded back, overwhelming me again. And with that, my assignment, my presence, seemed out of place in his world of cowhands and cattle and horses and lasting consequences of decisions taken decades ago.

"Sandy," I breathed out, "this is beyond me. I really don't have any business intruding into your reunion with your riders, and I'll just go back uptown and watch the parade from some convenient—"

Sandison held up a stopping hand. Casting his eyes to the heavens, he intoned, "God of fools, here is a newspaperman with an opportunity to ride with the men who made Theodore Roosevelt president of the United States, and he's scared of a little thing like climbing on a horse. Take him now, his work on earth is done."

Wounded, I muttered, "You don't have to be like that about it. I'll stay."

"That's better. I knew you had it in you, somewhere."

Sandison grunted with satisfaction. "Here come our cowboys."

Indeed, out the corral gate and toward us came three riders, the ones on the outside of the triptych each leading a saddled horse, which, I realized with a tightening in the seat of my pants, must be the

Scanning

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Perusing the horse wrangling again.

Aha.



mounts for Sandison and myself.

"Good to see you again, boys," drawled Sandison as they rode up to us.

"Sam," the James brother introduced as Leonard acknowledged him, nodding an inch. The one called Claude, saving energy along with words, merely nodded half an inch. It was left to Tinsley, his smile a burst of enamel and gold in the dark face, to come out with, "How you been doing, boss?"

"Surviving," the answer came as a heavy sigh, together with a weighty glance at me.

"Packing a Peacemaker these days?" Tinsley expressed the curiosity showing on all three Rough Riders, at Sandison's prominent firearm. "Butte that tough a place?"

"You might be surprised," Sandison responded in the same weary tone before indicating me again.

"Morgan writes for the newspaper. He's going to ride along with us and talk to you boys about your heroic exploits, heh, heh."

Studying me for what seemed long moments, Leonard and Tinsley at last nodded; Claude did not make the effort. "Got horses for you," Leonard said as though we might not have noticed the large animals standing practically atop us. "Prince and Blaze, from the show string. One of the boys in camp was gonna take whichever one you didn't choose, Sam, but he'll have to bum one somewhere else, looks like."

"Pick a mount, Morgan." Sandison's booming generosity was no help. Other than the camels Grace and I posed on at the Sphinx to have our picture taken, I had not been astraddle an animal in ~~years~~ recent times and would gladly have continued that way. In this situation, however, I was stuck with the fact that horsemanship of some degree was required. All I thought I knew about horses was ears. If the ears stood straight up, I reasoned, the equine was probably spirited. Prince was a well-named sorrel, high-headed and regal, with erect ears that twitched as though batting away flies. Spirited I did not want. That left Blaze, a bay-colored steed that appeared sleepily disinterested in us and our doings. Since the animal did not appear to be any ball of fire—more as if its flame had gone out—I was at the point of foolishly

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Comment [CE110]: Cap? See:  
<http://www.coltsmfg.com/Catalog/ColtRevolvers/SingleActionArmy.aspx>

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