

asking about its name when some fortunate tic of memory suggested that the splotch of white from the horse's nostrils up to its languid ears was the sort called blaze_face. "I'll try this one," I took the plunge.

"Let's go, buckaroos," said Sandison, swinging onto the sorrel with a painful groan before my foot even found the stirrup. Climbing as much as mounting, I scrambled into the saddle atop Blaze with the James brothers and Tinsley watching impassively, and we joined the ranks of blue-shirted Rough Riders prancing to where the parade was forming up at the west edge of the business district.

Half of Butte seemed to be there, milling into place to march down Broadway, the other half of the populace already lining the blocks ahead in joyous anticipation. The American Legionnaires at the very front in their doughboy outfits and earlier uniforms looked a bit staggered at the long, long line of marchers filling in behind them. American flags were everywhere, the air undulating with red, white, and blue. Right in with the unit of children in Uncle Sam and Miss Liberty costumes, I spotted Rab in command of our roughneck newsboys from the detention school; their newspaper bags were innocently turned inside out so the *Thunder* logotype could not be seen, and at their front, holding high the banner YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH AND THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE, was Russian Famine on one end, giving his restlessness something to do, and on the other the angelic urchin Punky, doubtless to keep his hands out of people's pockets.

Since horseback troupes best brought up the rear of the parade—"the manure matter," Sandison gave all the explanation needed—we rode past innumerable contingents on the way to our position, the Daughters of the American Revolution in dowager ranks and the Grand Army of the Republic veterans lame but game beneath battle flags from Gettysburg and Antietam and other hallowed fields of conflict, and then the Hill began to make its showing, the Miners Band glorious in the green of its uniforms and the gold and silver of its instruments, the blocks-long files of miners who had served their country headed by Jared, more leaderly than ever in his Army uniform, giving me a wink of confidence as Blaze and I passed, succeeded shortly by ear-to-ear grins from Griff and Hoop in the Welsh honor guard. But

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then a sight I could have done without, as we passed the Irish and Cornish and kilted Scots and approached the Italian segment of miners. The flag-bearer of their red, white, and green alongside the Stars and Stripes was none other than the damnable dynamiter, Giorgio Mazzini, doubtless chosen for height, might, and proud bearing. Why oh why couldn't Grace's current boarder have been some ordinary Mustache Pete instead of a Roman god?

Fortunately or not, I had little time to brood on that. "Fall in!" came the call from the gray-bearded captain of the Rough Riders, and we accordingly turned our horses and waited for the Miners Band to strike up first ~~"The Star-Spangled Banner"~~ and then the union anthem. Impelled by a certain kind of frown from Sandison, I managed to squeeze Blaze and me between the Jameses' mounts, the better to interview the brothers—or at least the one capable of speech—while we rode. At last came the first stirring notes of "The Song of the Hill," the long line of marchers accorded into motion, and we were under way.

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It took me a block or so to figure out how best to handle reins, pencil, and notepad all at the same time, but finally I felt ready and, turning to Leonard, casually asked over the ~~clop-clop~~ of our horses' hooves: "How is Buffalo Bill these days?"

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"Still dead."

I mentally kicked myself; the name of P.T. Barnum, long deceased, was on a circus apparently for eternity, wasn't it. ~~"His, ah, showmanship cannot be interred with him, of course,"~~ I hastily accorded promotional immortality to William F. Cody as well. "I meant, how is the Wild West ~~Show and—~~" I peeked at my earlier notation "—Congress of Rough Riders of the World faring?"

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About the same as practically forever, Leonard allowed as how. "Can't print tickets fast enough." As I listened to this slow testimonial, it dawned on me how veteran he and the other two were, in all senses of the word. Up close, the seamed faces of Sandison's "young scamps" were a reminder that more than two decades had passed since Teddy Roosevelt rallied men like these in the conquest of

Cuba. Surreptitiously I wrote down *crow's-feet around the eyes* while trying to think what a mounted correspondent ought to ask next. "Mmm, what is the most memorable place you've ever been with the Buffalo Bill show?"

Leonard considered the matter for so long I wondered if he had forgotten he was expected to answer. At last, though, he drawled, "St. Pete was a humdinger. Wouldn't you say, Claude?" The other James brother inclined his head a fraction.

"St. Petersburg? What a coincidence! I remember it fondly myself." My confidence as a roving reporter went up a peg, with my interview subject and me in concord about that burgeoning but oh so pleasant Florida city, where during our travel year Grace first dipped a toe into an ocean, the tropical breeze through the palms like a murmur of benediction on newlyweds. My sigh holding volumes about those balmy days and nights, I put the next question: "In the winter, I hope?"

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"As wintry as it gets in St. Pete," came the taciturn response. "Right, Claude?"

"Isn't that climate something." Thinking of the proximity to Cuba and the heroics of the Rough Riders in the so-called splendid little war, I asked, "Did performing there have a different feel to you, with that sort of audience?"

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"You said a mouthful. People about went crazy," the talker of the James brothers rationed out.

"The big cheese hisself was there, gave ol' Bill a toad-stabber of some kind to welcome us to town."

Before I could ask the exact nature of the ceremonial sword, presumably presented by the mayor, the tale picked up speed.

"We put on the show like we usually done, riding and whooping and shooting in the air and making that San Juan Hill charge. Do that right at the audience, hell for leather, and it gets their attention, for sure. But those St. Peterkins, as we called 'em, was standing on their seats and yelling their heads off at every little thing we did. Never saw nothing like it, hey, Claude?"

"It must have been quite an experience," I furnished as encouragement to keep him talking and his

silent sibling nodding, ~~meanwhile~~ writing furiously on my pad and somehow manipulating the reins enough to remind drowsy Blaze that I still was a passenger, ~~all the while~~ ^{and also} trying to keep a concerned eye on Sandison where he rode, favoring his wounded side by leaning so sharply in the saddle, it looked like his horse was tipping over. When he wasn't wincing with pain, he seemed to be thoroughly enjoying himself, patting his gun butt meaningfully whenever some old-timer in the crowd yelled out, "String 'em up, Sam!" or some other tribute. And the Rough Riders proved to be a popular feature as well, frequent shouts of the chant that first greeted their 1898 military triumph, "The boys in blue always come through!" as we progressed. Somewhere in back of us, a Rough Rider regularly sounded the blood-stirring bugle call that echoed the famous charge up San Juan Hill. The role of ~~mounted correspondent~~ beginning to fit me, I brightly posed a next question to my interviewee: "So, was there anything else particularly memorable about St. Petersburg?"

Leonard thought back some more, glancing to Claude for help, evidently the telepathic sort. "Well, yeah, there was. Before we pulled out of town, people was dancing the kickapoo, right and left."

"Excuse me? The—?"

"The Indians we had with us in the show at the time was Kickapoos, from back east around Chicago. They'd do their war dance, and the St. Peterkins had never seen nothing like it, had they. So next thing, people was dancing something like it in the nightclubs. Called it the kickapoo."

The vision of Floridians cavorting like savages was mildly entertaining but I couldn't see how to use it, and moved on to other questions about taking the Wild West et cetera from city to city. Before long, however, the parade was winding through the heart of the business district and I hadn't yet interviewed Tinsley, so I turned Blaze to one side to let the James brothers pass, profusely thanking Leonard for his observations. He shrugged as though it had been nothing. It was the other one, Claude, who half turned in his saddle and laconically said over his shoulder:

"Like they say in St. Pete, *da svidanya*."

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Comment [CE111]: Author/editor:
To avoid redundancy, change this to
"and"?

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Cursing myself up and down and Armbrister for good measure, I frantically flipped through my notepad and began trying to recast my supposed reportorial notes from an imagined setting of sand beaches and whispering palms to the snowy clime of Cossacks and ~~czar~~⁹. With my haphazard grip on the reins during this, Blaze came close to joining the crowd on the sidewalk, before Sandison reached over to catch the bridle and steer us back into the parade. He gave me The Look. "I hate to interrupt genius at work, but you can't turn things over to the horse, Morgan."

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Protesting weakly that I had merely been collecting my thoughts, I was stopped in midsentence by what lay ahead, past the lopsided outline of Sandison. We were approaching the public library, closed for the day, its ~~sun-washed~~ gray granite edifice a composition of light and shadow, with a wash of ~~sunshine~~ on the magnificent entranceway and Gothic tower and accompanying balcony. There, alone on the balcony, ~~was~~^{was poised} Grace watching the parade like a solitary queen.

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Comment [CE112]: Can either "sun-washed" or "a wash of sunshine" be deleted to avoid redundancy?

"What—why—how did she get up there?"

"Eh?" Spotting her, Sandison tipped his slouch hat as though gallantry were his middle name, and she waved back while somehow managing not to acknowledge my existence. "The poor woman needed a place to watch from, on her own the way she is. Just because you and she are on the outs, you can't expect her to live under a rock, can you?"

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That fairly closely described how I envisioned her existence without me, matching mine without her. Swallowing hard, I made no answer but tried to keep my eyes from meeting her watching ones, there on the snug balcony where the pair of us had ~~spectated~~ the parade two years before.

Comment [CE113]: Author/editor: According to Webster's 11th, *spectate* is an intransitive verb. Okay as used here?

"Back to work," I croaked to Sandison as my estranged wife, stately as a ship's figurehead, passed from view behind us. Mustering myself, I managed to navigate my drifty animal into position alongside Tinsley and his mount.

"I hope ol' Leonard and Claude didn't fill you too full of hooey afore I get a chance to," he greeted me with a radiant smile. As wiry and talkative as the James boys were long on height and short on

words, Tinsley had the nonchalant ease of a veteran interviewee. First name, Alonzo. Originally a buffalo soldier, which was to say, he explained at some length, a member of the colored cavalry formed after the Civil War and sent to the Southwest "to fight Apaches and Comanches and whatnot." I wrote as steadily as he volunteered information. "Soldiering is what brung me to Montana, see. Afore I latched on riding for the boss there at the Triple S, I finished out my Tenth Cavalry 'listment as a corporal at Fort Assiniboine, up by Canada. Company C, that was," he leaned back in his saddle reminiscently, "under ol' Lieutenant Pishing."

Conscientious reporter that I was trying to will myself into, I requested, "Would you spell that, please?"

"A-s-s—"

"No, your commanding officer's name."

"Lemme think. P . . . e . . . r . . . s-h-i-n-g."

I stared at those letters as written down. "I don't suppose his first name and middle initial could possibly be John J."

"Yup, that's the gentleman. Ol' Black Jack, he was known as, from officering with us dark-complexioned troopers."

I felt light-headed, and not just from the elevation of being horseback. "Corporal Tinsley. Alonzo. Are you telling me you have ridden with both a president of the United States and the supreme commander of the American forces in the Great War?"

Gold teeth flashed. "That's about what it comes down to. Don't know why I'm such an attraction."

My elation at this newsworthy element of his life in the saddle was about to receive another boost. Just then we happened to be approaching the *Daily Post* building, a virtual front-row seat for watching the parade, and up there in a second-floor window, unmistakable among the spectating heads, was the Cutlass himself. Big as life, Cutthroat Cartwright was surveying the parade scene with that superior air

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of a predator looking over the pickings. My eye caught his, and he stared unremittingly as I cantered past with the Rough Riders. I could tell, he knew perfectly well what I was up to. I resisted the impulse to rub it in by tipping my Stetson to him, but my canary-swallowing smile probably did the job.

Activated anew by the smell of competition, I got busy probing Tinsley's memory of his famous cavalry commanders. Pershing as a prairie hussar, for instance? Cool under combat as his famous icy demeanor would imply, was he? "Can't rightly speak to that," my buffalo soldier informant surprised me. "Combat is stretching it some, as to what Fort Assiniboine duty amounted to. It was more like herding Indians. See, 'bout all we did was scoop some loose Crees over the line into Canada. They'd get kicked out of there, we'd round 'em up, mostly women and kids, get 'em in a line ⁺ on march and scoop 'em back across the border. Anyways, that happened just a number of times. Wasn't none of it what you would call real cavalry fighting." Chuckling, he waved his hat to cheering onlookers high in the Finlen Hotel. "Course, San Juan wasn't, either."

My pencil jabbed through the paper. "Wha—what did you say?"

Blandly he recited that the San Juan battle had been no kind of a cavalry charge and he ought to know, he was there.

"But"—I twitched the reins so agitatedly that Blaze turned his head to see what my trouble was—"I was under the impression—"

"—the Rough Riders made some kind of yippy-yi-yay cavalry charge up San Juan Hill?" Tinsley gave an amused snort. "It beats me, but I guess there must've been newspapers somewhere that wrote it up that way—the ones Buffalo Bill read, at least." He smiled slyly about the fake charge that thrilled audiences of the Wild West Show, then sobered. "Nothing against your line of work, unnerstand, but reporters was a dime a dozen in the Cuba campaign, and some of 'em worth about that, too. The one tagging along with us colored troops was so drunk most of the time, he didn't know if we was afoot or horseback." Would that it could have happened to Cecil Cartwright, I despaired, instead of his career-

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making dispatch under fire.

Dropping his voice, Tinsley glanced across to where Sandison was holding forth to the James brothers about something. "Anyways, Claude and Leonard don't much like being teased about it, but we was all dismounts in Cuba. Yup, that's right," he responded to my jaw dropping further, "on foot in spite of being the First Volunteer Cavalry—I guess the higher-ups figgered the volunteer part was all was needed." He wagged his head at the ways of the military. "Nobody much had a horse except Colonel Teddy."

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Groaning inwardly, I rebuked myself again for leaping to conclusions. Just because a military unit formed as the Rough Riders had charged the heights of San Juan did not automatically mean they had done so on horseback, sabers flashing and guidon flying, as my imagination would have it. No wonder Cutthroat Cartwright was not down here with the blue-shirted procession; he knew all the rough riding they had done was in a Wild West Show. Off the top of his head, he could write a piece about old parading cavalrymen, such as they were, that would leave mine in the figurative dust.

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Swallowing my disappointment, I thanked Tinsley for his time and nudged Blaze off to one side of our clopping contingent to try to think. How did I get into this fix? Why couldn't I be sitting comfortably at a typewriter tapping out invective about copper bosses, instead of trapped in a saddle as a mounted correspondent with no thrilling horseback tale to cap off my article? Time was running out, too. The parade had turned onto Granite Street and would soon be passing the Hennessy Building, where the *Thunder* photographer was set up to shoot me, as the phrasing was. Not one I liked, the less so as Sandison now rode across to where I was, leaning his wounded side in my direction, discomfort and stubbornness vying in his expression, as he wanted to know, "Getting it all down like Tennyson with the charge of the Light Brigade?"

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"The plot of this is somewhat harder to follow," I said faintly.

"Eh? Buck up, Morgan. You've had a good ride with the boys, you're about to have your picture in

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the paper, people will read whatever folderol you come up with. What are you complaining about?"

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Satisfied that he had put things in perspective, Sandison stayed stirrup to stirrup with me as, down the block in front of us, cohort after cohort of defiantly singing miners marched past the lofty headquarters of the Anaconda Copper Mining Company. What a scene that moment of the parade was as a thousand voices lifted in the verse, "*Down there deep we're all one kind, / All one blood, all of one mind / I back you and you back me, / All one song in unity.*" Flags waved, pinwheels spun on sticks children held like lollipops, the sun shone bright on a Butte free of strife for the course of a day. And tomorrow, I knew even without the sage glint in Sandison's eye, the civil war of labor and capital would resume, I would shed my temporary mantle of mounted correspondent and resume editorial battle with the *Post*, the calendar page would be turned, with each of us one day nearer our destiny.

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But right now, my role in life was to look as presentable as possible astride a clip-clopping horse while portraiture occurred. Catercorner from the Hennessy Building, the photographer Sammy waited beside his big box camera on a tripod, gesturing urgently to make sure I saw him and was ready. Gruffly saying he didn't want to break the camera, Sandison dropped back out of range. "Don't forget to smile at the birdie, Morgan."

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A smile became out of the question, however, as I spotted a number of bruisers strung out along the entire front of the Hennessy Building, positioned against the wall and the display windows with their hands over their private parts in the manner of museum guards and other functionaries who stand around for hours on end. Unquestionably, these had to be the extra goons making good on Anaconda's threat to station guards at all company property, in this case merely for show around the infamous top- floor headquarters. Of a type I would not like to meet in a dark alley, the Anaconda operatives favored gabardine suits; as Hill lore had it, blood was more easily sponged off that than softer fabrics. In the holiday crowd, they stood out like gray wolves.

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After my initial alarm, I realized the scene was actually peaceful, no guns on display or evident

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inclination toward any, and with the long file of miners having marched past without incident, apt to stay that way. Blind Heinie's newsstand was situated right across the sidewalk from where the most prominent of the goons had made their presence known alongside the department store's big windows, and as the sightless old news vendor entertained himself by slapping his thighs in rhythm with the Miners Band's distant rendition of "When You and I Were Young, Maggie," the nearest gabardined thugs were idly nodding along. Breathing a sigh of relief, I sat up tall as I could in the saddle to be ready for Sammy's camera. The throng lining the sidewalk *oo*hed and *ah*hed at the prospect of being in the picture, meanwhile making guesses about my importance. "I bet he's some relative of Buffalo Bill's. Look at that set of whiskers on him." Trying to live up to all the attention, I patted Blaze's neck, fiddled with the reins, straightened my hat. At least some of Armbrister's hunch was paying off as, goons notwithstanding, the main display window with HENNESSY'S DEPARTMENT STORE in large golden lettering made a fetching backdrop, mannequins in cloche hats and flapper dresses indolently holding teacups, the mischievous implication there that since Prohibition had come in, "tea shops" served gin that way. Bobbing in and out from behind his viewfinder, Sammy called across the street to me, "Slow down a little, Morgie. I want to get the shot just as you pass the window."

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Blaze and I never made it past. As if in a strange dream, I still see the individual who looked like a drunken bum, appearing from the far side of Blind Heinie's newsstand, suddenly plunge through the other onlookers and come stumbling out of the crowd to intercept us with something held like a bouquet. But no, too late I saw it was a rolled newspaper he had lit with a match, and with it flaming like a torch, he made a last running lurch and thrust the burning paper under Blaze's tail.

Put yourself in the poor horse's place. Driven wild by its singed hind part, my steed left the earth, and came down frantically swapping ends, bucking and kicking. His gyrations whirled us onto the sidewalk, scattering onlookers and goons alike. My panicky cries of "Whoa! *Whoa!*" fell on deaf horse ears. As if we were in a steeplechase, Blaze's next jump aimed straight for the maidenly tea or gin party,

as the case may have been, crashing us through the big display window.

Flappers flew, teacups sailed. Ducking falling glass, I was low as a jockey, clamping to the saddle for all I was worth. Now that we were in the store, in the ladies' wear department to be exact, Blaze seemed not to know where to go next, very much like a baffled shopper. My repeated chorus of *whoas* finally having some effect, he halted in the aisle of the lingerie section, still snorting and quivering and his ears up like sharp flanges, but no longer determined to buck us both off the face of the earth. Holding the reins taut just in case, I cautiously felt around on myself and could find nothing broken. Remarkably, my hat still was on my head.

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"Ride him on out! C'mon, the horse knows the way now!" The commotion in back of me was from Leonard and Claude and Tinsley, their own horses' heads curiously poking through what had been the window. In truth, I didn't know what else to do, and at my urging, Blaze rather delicately picked his way through fallen flappers and other window-dressing and rejoined the street as if hopping a ditch.

The scene outside the store was a shambles I gradually made sense of. What had been the parade was a blue knot of Rough Riders, whooping to one another as they caught up with what had happened. Nearer, leaning more precariously yet in his saddle, Sandison had the culprit at gunpoint, the six-shooter aimed squarely between the man's eyes as he babbled that somebody he had never seen before paid him to play a prank, was all. The squad of goons had backed off to a discreet distance, evidently wanting no part of any trouble they hadn't started. Policemen belatedly elbowed through the crowd. The more familiar blue uniforms of my riding companions surrounded me. "You all right, pard? Man, we've seen some stunt riding, but that one takes the cake." Tinsley and Leonard were singing my praises—and Blaze's—while Claude mutely slapped me on the back. More to the point, I realized, was the remark from Sammy hustling past with his camera and tripod. "Got a good one of you flying through that window. Better come on, if we're gonna make deadline."

Somewhat worse for wear when I showed up at the *Thunder* office on foot—Blaze being restored

with high honors to the Wild West ~~Show string~~—I was fussed over by Armbrister, but meanwhile
steered to my typewriter. I did my best to concentrate, to make sense of my notes, to think straight like a
good reporter should, but it felt hopeless; my mind was a blur. Thank heavens my fingers seemed to
know what they were doing.

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Armbrister nearly wore out the floor, pacing as he waited to grab each page. After the last tap of a
typewriter key, I fell back in my chair, exhausted, awaiting his verdict. Eyeshade aimed down into my
story like the beak of a clucking bird, he mumbled the sentences rapidly to himself until finally swatting
me with the sheaf of pages. "Terrific lede. 'I rode with the James brothers—up to the point where my
horse and I went into Hennessy's department store.' Let that bastard Cartwright top that! And the bit
about Russians dancing the kickapoo, ~~priceless~~ ^{great stuff}. That's what a hunch can do for you, Morgie.
Copyboy!"

In no time, the newsroom trembled with the start-up of the press, and we along with the rest of the
Thunder staff could hardly bear the wait to see what a similar rumble of machinery was producing
across town. At last our contraband early copy of the *Post* was rushed in. Armbrister speedily scanned
the pages as only a journalist could, then, with an odd expression, he passed the paper to me to do the
same.

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There was not one word in the *Post* about the Rough Riders.

"I still can't believe it. It isn't like Cutthroat Cartwright to miss out that way. He ought to have snapped up the Rough Riders story like a wolf licking his chops."

"Are you going to natter about that all night?" None the worse for wear—unlike me—after the day's horseback adventures, Sandison was heartily tucking into his plateload of scalloped potatoes and veal parmigiana; stiff and sore as I was, cooking had to be done. Also for supper were the *Thunder* and the *Post* spread around on the table, more like a long wharf than ever with just the two of us docked at one end. "I don't know what's the matter with you. You achieve a whatchamacallit, swoop—"

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"Scoop, is the honored journalistic term."

"—and you sit around maundering about why the other fellow didn't get it instead of you. Can't stand good luck, eh? Pass the spuds."

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"I am only saying, Sandy, it's mysterious."

"Yes, yes, the dog that didn't bark, we've all read our Sherlock Holmes, never mind. It'll become clear or it won't." With that profundity, he turned back to the *Thunder* front page, with the splashy headline **Bronc Goes on Hennessy Shopping Spree** and accompanying photograph. I still had trouble

Comment [CE116]: Author/editor. See previous query about headline formatting, pp. 136, 203, and 206.

believing the evident daredevil in the saddle was me. ~~Not that I don't mean to criticize,~~ Sandison said, ~~pontificated~~ studying the photo, "but when the pony takes to the air like that, you really should hang on to the saddle horn instead of your hat."

Not that I mean to criticize,

"I must remember that the next time I mount up on Pegasus." That retort flew by him, as he returned to the newspaper while forking down his meal, even as he continued to fork down his meal and pore through the newspaper, sturdy as a Viking while I ached from returning to the newspaper while forking down his meal, sturdy as a Viking while I ached from

the bottom up. It occurred to me that in all the confusion and deadline rush, I had not managed to express my appreciation for his holding the flame-wielding culprit at gunpoint. "Sandy, ah, thank you for riding shotgun, so to speak."

"Hmm?" He barely glanced up. "Seemed like a good idea if you were anywhere in the vicinity."

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Favoring his side, he reached for his coffee cup with a wince. "What is it about you? I spent my whole ranch life around people armed to the teeth and never got shot."

"You would think," I said wearily, "guns should be as allergic to me as I am to them. Balance of nature, that sort of thing."

This drew me the observation that I was an optimist, which did not seem to qualify as a compliment in Sandison lexicon. Pushing his practically gleaming plate away and untucking his napkin, he leaned back with a groan and addressed the ceiling. "I know what I'd do, though, if a bunch of idiots was gunning for me and setting fire to my horse and so on."

You sit up and pay attention when the Earl of Hell offers advice on matters of that sort.

"I'd let it be known something nasty could happen to them as well as to me," he drawled, lowering his gaze as if sighting in on me. "Someone in particular, to get their attention."

"Threaten Cartwright, you mean."

"An eye for an eye. Right there in the Bible, heh."

I swallowed hard. "Sandy, I don't think I have it in me to even the score that way. Do I look remotely homicidal?" A sigh from across the table answered that. "Cutlass is unfortunately as sharp as that damnable pen name. He would know in a flash I was bluffing."

"Think straighter than that, man. All sorts of unpleasant things might happen to someone like him that aren't necessarily fatal." He steepled his fingers, evidently pondering the list. "Butte after dark can be a lively place," he plucked an example. "A person could accidentally get into an altercation with someone rowdy. A muscular miner or two, for instance." His gaze lofted off again. "I'm only saying,

that could be pointed out to the pertinent person."

Now I was the one pondering, deeply. The bearded old figure across the table had taken a bullet for me and similarly performed heroically in the horseback episode. He could hardly be blamed for wanting to head off any more such incidents. Even besides him, everyone else near and dear to me—Grace, Jared and Rab, Russian Famine, Hoop and Griff, the embattled *Thunder* staff—was bearing some kind of brunt of Anaconda's machinations. And there was always the ghost of Quin, the question mark hovering around his death.

The more I thought about it, the straighter the thinking became, as Sandison prescribed. Why should Cutthroat Cartwright waltz into town to do Anaconda's dirty work and be left spotless? My verdict did not come easily, but it came.

"I'll put the matter to Jared Evans—he no doubt has some way of getting the message across to Cartwright that he had better watch his step," I met Sandison's terms with all the determination I could muster. "I take your point, Sandy, about being on the receiving end of gunshots and equine high jinks and all. *Satis superque*."

For whatever reason—would I ever understand the outsize bearlike book-loving string-'em-up personality across from me?—the Latin tickled him into a ~~rollicking~~ belly laugh. "Enough and more than enough," he wheezed. "Well said, my boy Morgan. You have a touch when you half try."

~~high~~ In good humor now, he poured himself some more coffee and did the same for me, rather a stretch for his usual contribution to our mealtimes. "By the way, figure me into breakfast tomorrow. Bacon and three or four eggs and a stack of hotcakes will do."

Seeing my surprise at this departure from his routine of breakfasting only with his books, he said defensively, "Don't drop your teeth. A man has to stoke up a bit to get back on the job, doesn't he?"

"Back on the—? You don't mean downtown, surely."

"Unless it's been moved in my absence, that's where the public library is."

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"But you're still nursing your wound."

"Am not," he said crossly. He tried unsuccessfully to sit up straight without wincing. "Bit of a stitch in my side, is all."

"Minutes ago you were describing that to me as a nearly lethal bullet."

"You're worse than Dora ever was for nagging," he grumbled. "Don't you see, I have to get down there and tend to the collection. There's a board of trustees meeting coming up and I need to have things patted into place."

I saw, all right, as if a veil had been lifted by a corner. He had to make sure the mingled budgetary funds that steadily nourished the finest book collection west of Chicago—and thanks to the judicious use of the paste pot in his office, grew the number of rare volumes with his SSS bookplate in them—did not show any loose ends. "It's time I picked up the reins again," he said smoothly. "Though I'm sure you did the best you could filling in for me."

Buried in that was the fact that he would go to any length for his beloved books, even entrusting their care to me. No matter how cantankerously he put it, I was deeply moved. So much so that I could no longer hold the secret in. With the help of seemingly casual sips of coffee, I began: "As long as we are unburdening ourselves about such matters—"

"Is that what we're doing? You could have fooled me."

"—I have a confession to make. That winning wager I made on the fixed World Series. I, ah, bet your book collection. The inventory I did for the public library, I mean. Butte bookies are used to strange collateral."

"Of course you did, nitwit. How else were you going to put up a stake like that?"

My coffee nearly went into my beard. I sputtered, "You knew? All along?"

he waved away my soul-baring disclosure.

"That's the trouble with you bunkhouse geniuses. You think nobody else has a clue about what's going on."

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"You—you're not angry?"

"If I lost my temper every time you did something, I'd be going off like Old Faithful, wouldn't I."

He heaved himself to his feet. "Better get your beauty rest, bronc_buster. You don't get to show off in a parade every day. Tomorrow you have to get down to business and give that Chicago scissorbill something to think about. Heh, heh."

Despite its name, the Purity Cafeteria seemed to me the apt spot to inaugurate playing dirty with Cutthroat Cartwright, in council with Jared and, of course, Rab, amid the hurly-burly of food fetching and wholesale dining where we would not be suspected of anything except runaway appetites. Sandison informed me he would be putting in late hours at the public library for some time to come, ~~to a purpose~~

~~I could guess but did not ask about~~, so I was furloughed from supper duty at the manse anyway.

Perfectly free to follow the edict of the Earldom of Hell, if I had the courage. I was nervous, not to say a novice, at plotting of this sort. Threatening harm to another human being, even an Anaconda hired gun—I had to regard Cutlass as such, just as much as if he were blazing away at me, so to speak, with pistol and torch—did not come naturally to me. A show of brass knuckles when danger stared at me ~~face-to-face~~ had always been as far as I was prepared to go. Now, though, the Highliner's authoritative, "If that's how you want to plan your funeral, it's your choice" rang in me like the opening bell of a boxing match. Wasn't I merely counterpunching, in the effective style of a certain lightweight champion of the world? Casper never shrank from hitting back, and he won nearly every time. Nearly.

Beaming, the plump bow_tied proprietor greeted me as an old customer the moment I entered the Purity. "I hope you brought your appetite. You're in luck, tonight's special is Dublin Gulch filet," by which he meant corned beef and cabbage. He knew his business in more ways than one, having made peace with the fact that Butte was a union town by posting prominent notices that the enterprise hired only members of the Cooks and Dishwashers Brotherhood, and always welcoming Jared and other

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union leaders as though he were an honorary member of their number. Accordingly, the cafeteria was where the Hill ate when it went downtown for an evening out, and it took me a minute to spy Jared and Rab in the crowded room, she naturally spotting me first and waving like a student who knew the answer. I could certainly have used one.

I waited until the three of us had been through the serving line and were seated with heaped plates of corned beef and cabbage, before broaching the topic of Cutthroat ~~Cartwright~~. Rab listened sharply as if she were at a keyhole, while Jared chewed on his Irish filet mignon as well as what I was saying in roundabout fashion. When I was done citing Sandison and counterpunching and otherwise trying to put the best appearance on the topic, he asked, poker-faced, "So what is it you and ~~Strangling~~ ~~the Strangler~~ Sam want us to do, Professor? Drop Cartwright down a glory hole some dark night?"

"Mr. Morgan!" Thrilled as a schoolgirl but trying to stay proper as a teacher, Rab examined me with fresh eyes. "You really want"—detention school language came to the fore at a time like this—"his block knocked clean off?"

"No, no, I didn't say that," I protested guiltily. This conversation was veering uncomfortably close to the memory of my brother's long walk off a short pier. "I'm merely suggesting giving Cutthroat a taste of what might happen to him if he keeps trying to live up to his nickname at my expense. It would be good for him." Not to mention, for me.

Veteran of life-and-death battles far beyond my experience, Jared considered the mission. "Tempting to give him the works, though, isn't it. Twice now ~~he's~~ ^{he fronts} ~~the ones he works for have~~ tried to put you where you'd be pushing up daisies. That's asking for it." When Rab, her conspiratorial nature notwithstanding, had to exclaim at that, he winked it away. "Trench talk, is all. You should have heard us sit around in the mud all the time and discuss what we'd like to do to the Kaiser, too." ⁹ Glancing ~~casually~~ around one more time to make sure we were not being overheard, he got down to business. "It sounds to me, Professor, that you're prescribing a dose of muscle for our friend Cartwright."

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"Uhm, within reason. A taste."

"*Tsk*," he pulled that ~~oh-so~~ straight face again, "where ~~ever~~ will I find lugs of that kind in Butte?"

I'll have to look long and hard, don't you think? Especially in Dublin Gulch around Quin's old neighborhood." He brushed his hands. "It's settled. He wants to play tough, we'll show that conniving—"

"No army language now that you're a senator, remember," Rab sweetly admonished.

"Chicago scissorbill," I filled the blank for him.

"—that, too," Jared blithely added the term to the military pile, "that he can't use you for target practice." He leaned across the table toward me, reaching aside for Rab's wrist as he did so to hold her attention in more ways than one. "Professor, we're going to need you and your editorials more than ever," his words were quiet and stronger for that. "Hard times are coming fast now. People did themselves proud thumbing their nose at the lockout yesterday, but it won't be long until kids start going hungry and women are scavenging coal down by the tracks and the men start to get antsy about no work and no pay." I thought he could not have summed up the gamble any better: "Anaconda holds the cards—we have to stay in the game any way we can until they fold."

"Or there's a draw," Rab ~~anted~~ her two bits in. "Rome was not won in a day, a wise teacher I once had used to say."

Sudden interest in my corned beef and cabbage let me duck that, while Jared sighed mightily. "Up against the cardsharp I'm married to and some earful in Latin, am I. Lucky thing Russian Famine is on my side—throw that left hook until it makes them dizzy, isn't that the ticket, Professor?"

"By the way," curiosity was getting the better of me, "where is our star athlete? Surely he hasn't lost his appetite?"

With a little crimp of concern between her eyes, Rab checked the large wall clock with PURITY IS SURETY FOR GOOD FOOD! across its face. "Selling his papers down to the last scrap, I expect. But

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it's not like him to miss a mea—"

Just then the proprietor came bustling toward us from the front of the cafeteria, and inasmuch as I was going to be a regular customer, I tried to get ready whatever compliment corned beef and cabbage was owed.

"Your boy!" he cried as he came up to our table. "He's outside, somebody worked him over!"

We rushed out, Rab in the lead. Sagging against the building as if on his last legs was Russian Famine, clothes torn, face bruised and nose running with a mix of blood and snot, and his *Thunder* newspaper bag showing dirty footprints where it had been stomped on.

Before we could even ask, he spat out through bloody lips the word *Posties*. Painfully he wiped his lips. "Bigger 'n me. Three of 'em run me off my corner. One of 'em held me and the other two whaled me." He did not quite meet the gaze of the furious Rab, freshly attacking him with a wetted handkerchief to dab away blood and such, or Jared's deep frown. "They didn't like it that we was in the parade."

I asked weakly, "The left hook didn't—?"

The beat-up boy shrugged thin shoulders. "Wasn't enough," he reported, trying to hold back tears. "I'd no sooner get one of 'em knocked down good than the other ^{two} ones'd pile in on me from the other side."

Three against one were simply too high odds, all right, yet I felt I had failed him. Rab was inveighing against the *Post*'s junior auxiliary of brutes and vowing to give the chief of police a piece of her mind about hoodlumism running wild in the streets, when Jared, hands on knees as he leaned down to the beating victim, spoke up.

"You did the best you could, we know that. Now it's time to get you out of the line of fire, trooper. We'll put you on the carriage route."

"That?"

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The boy's quick cry of despair was painful to hear, but Jared's reasoning was hard to argue with. The *Thunder* was most swiftly delivered to newsstands and cigar stores and similar vendors in the middle of downtown by way of a baby carriage stacked full of newspapers, a trick Armbrister had picked up on one of his journalistic stops. That safe route literally would save Famine's hide, with no bloody corners to be fought over. Wiping his nose with the back of his hand, the teary youngster mumbled something.

Rab was instantly attentive. "What? Famine, tell us."

"Makes me feel like a sissy."

"Never mind." That came firmly from Jared. "The carriage route will keep you on the job, and that's what counts, right?" Famine mumbled, "Whatever you say, goes." Jared rewarded him with an encouraging grip on the shoulder, then decisively turned to me. "And we'll move on that other matter *prontissimo*, Professor," he said grimly. "It's time the other side licked a wound or two."

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Sick at heart over Russian Famine's beating, feeling I had let him down in the boxing lessons, I knew nothing to do but watch and wait for some better turn of fortune in the days that followed. It was a tense time, with the feel of something major about to happen, some storm about to break, but there was no telling when. After the mile-high, mile-deep amplitude of the Fourth of July parade, Butte fell as quiet as if it had temporarily lost its voice. The mute mines of the lockout stood as empty as ever, an apprehensive stillness blanketing the neighborhoods as foraging food for the table and scrounging coal for the stove became the daily challenges of households without paychecks. Even speakeasies were subdued, according to my newsroom colleagues, where clots of miners speculated in low tones what would befall them if the union could not withstand Anaconda's ruthless shutdown. Out in the prairie towns and tawny ranch lands, the standoff was being watched as a prelude to the statewide vote on Jared Evans's brainchild, the tax commission that at long last would fix a price tag onto Montana's

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copper collar. High stakes, great issues, which to my and Armbrister's surprise the *Post* continued to tiptoe past in the immediate days after the parade, an editorial quietus from Cutlass as baffling as his passing up the chance to ripely reminisce about Teddy Roosevelt and the Rough Riders' conquest of San Juan Hill.

At first I wondered whether my foe had indeed met his fate in a bottomless mine pit, but when I cautiously sounded out Jared on that, he only smiled mysteriously and said, "Don't concern yourself, the scissorbill is still in one piece." The battle of words had only paused, in short. Meanwhile, I actually had leisure to write AOT editorials about matters other than the eternal battle over ~~the Richest Hill on~~ Earth—"spitwads," Armbrister cackled over such offerings, just enough impact to them to annoy the opposition with our persistent presence.

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In this lull, Sandison alone seemed to thrive, resuming his post at the public library like a potentate returning from exile. "He's here at all hours," Smithers of the periodical desk confided to me when I stopped by to check on the impatient patient, "and not the least little thing anywhere in the building escapes him, I tell you." Imagining Miss Runyon like a rabbit under the gaze of a hawk, I tried to keep a straight face. Smithers, a lively sort, was in his element as confidant. ~~"And get this. When the janitor~~ left the other night, he heard our man Sandison in his office singing 'The Bluebells of Scotland.' Out loud! It's a changed place around here, Morrie."

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So was the manse, a changed place not necessarily for the better without my sole companion clomping around in old boots and pajamas early and late.

Often now it was near midnight when I would hear a taxi putt-putting up to the front door, and the sounds of someone more than sizable retiring for the night. At breakfast, Sandison would eat heartily as a cowboy, questioning me about any sign of Anaconda weakening on the lockout and grunting whenever I asked him the state of his health or that of the Butte Public Library, then off he went, still listing several degrees to his wounded side but as functioning as a locomotive. Leaving me with the

echoing house and its principality of unoccupied rooms, as if I were some fairy tale figure under a strange spell. Prince of an empty manse, with his princess fled.

"It's you, is it." Answering my knock, Grace peeped the door open as warily as if I were about to storm the boardinghouse. "The famous trick rider. What brings you to our humble neighborhood?"

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"I came to see if I can help out."

"I can't think how," the reply came swifter than swift. "We don't need any fights fixed or names fiddled with, thanks just the same."

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I flinched, but did not give up. "Grace, please. Couldn't a little money be put to use, perhaps?"

Her expression warmed one degree, from skepticism to suspicion. "I hate to ask, but is it honestly gotten?"

"Positively." I reached in my pocket and produced the thin fold of bills. "Sandy had a fit of conscience and upped his rent somewhat. That's where this comes from, I swear on a hill of Bibles."

Keeping one hand on the doorknob, Grace still eyed the money dubiously. "He opened his wallet, just like that? Tell me another."

"I prompted him a wee bit," I admitted. Which prompting, in truth, had been met by the Sandisonian grumble, "When I gave you this place, I didn't expect you to turn into a gouging landlord. Oh, well, leave it to you to get blood out of a Scotchman. Here."

Back and forth between being shrewd landlady and aggrieved spouse, Grace bit her underlip, but the next thing I knew, the cash had vanished into her apron pocket. "All right then. It will come in handy. Good day, Morrie."

"Wait. I wanted to ask—" What I wanted went beyond words, to the essence of man and woman and life altogether, the constellation of chance that draws us one to another out of the lonely depths of night. Try speaking that to an unwilling listener, especially one you are only nominally married to. I

instead pleaded: "Can I come in? Only for a minute? I feel like a leper, standing out here."

Wordlessly she swung the door open and pointed to the parlor. "Make it quick. What was it you wanted to ask?"

"If I can borrow Hoop and Griff. The kitchen drain is leaking again."

"I'll send them first thing in the morning." She looked at me questioningly. "Is that all, I hope?"

"Did you enjoy the parade?"

Grace closed her eyes as if seeking strength. "You. Can you not get it into your head, Morrie, that you can't come mooning around here and win me back with sweet nothings? Too much has happened." Blinking now, the violet of her gaze hazed a little with moisture, she said huskily, "Just go. Please."

"Grace, can't we—" Such a thumping broke out overhead, I feared for the ceiling. "What's making the awful racket?"

"Oh, that," she said as though the commotion were nothing. "Giorgio at his exercises. He does jumping jacks. Lifts a dumbbell."

I somehow held my tongue about the aptness of that word associated with the Mazzini creature. My turn to be highly suspicious.

"How is he paying his rent? There are no wages these days."

"On the cuff. You would let him do the same," she maintained entirely inaccurately. "He can catch up on the rent when the mines are running again."

"Not much of a provider until that day ever comes, is he," I took what little satisfaction jealousy would allow me.

The jumping or dumbbelling or whatever it was went on above us as we stood looking at each other helplessly. Grace was the first to say anything. "Morrie, what's going to happen? I don't mean with us. That's—" She washed her hands of the topic. "The lockout and all, what can make Anaconda ever back down?"

"Jared and I are putting every effort to it." Unspoken was the fact that our every effort so far had left the greatest copper mines in the world shut tight as a drum.

Tight-lipped, she nodded. From her expression, I could tell that there luckily was not more.

My mood weighed down by wife, lockout, Cutlass, manse, and anything else that came to mind, I retreated from the boardinghouse one more time. Deep in brooding as I started home without even Sandison to look forward to ~~when I reached there~~, I let traffic thoroughly pass so the next turn of events would not be, say, getting run over by a Golden Eggs truck.

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As I crossed the street thinking the coast was clear, traffic of an unanticipated sort emerged as a pram came trundling out of Venus Alley, simultaneous with a covey of streetwalkers sashaying to their posts for the night. Bent low behind the laden baby carriage, pushing for all he was worth on the uphill street while the ladies of the evening kidded the pants off him, ~~in a manner of speaking~~ ~~so to speak~~, was a ~~glum-looking~~ Russian ~~Famine~~ depressed. Misery famously loving company, on impulse I changed direction to accompany him as he distributed the *Thunder*.

"Hiya, sir," he greeted me disconsolately, his ears burning. "Come to hear the canaries sing?"

"Ooh la la, what's under that beard, hon?" a buxom redhead in minimum street apparel squealed at the sight of me. "I bet you been just waiting for the barbershop special."

Quite sure she did not mean a shave and a haircut, I declined the offer, to a round of catcalls from the Venus Alley sisterhood as they stationed themselves along the block. My ears now the red ones, I joined Famine in a concerted stint of pushing that propelled the buggy and us out of the red light district into a calmer neighborhood of speakeasies and funeral parlors.

As the street turned less precipitous, I let him commandeer the conveyance by himself again. Brushing my hands, I asked as cheerily as I could, "The daughters of Venus aside, how goes the carriage route? At least, you only have to drop the papers at each place and collect for them, am I right?"

"Yeah," he said grudgingly. "It's slow nickels instead of fast dimes, though," he gave the classic response of the frustrated earner.

I had to smile. "Sometimes something comes along and changes that. Luck, for a better word." He eyed me as if it had better hurry up. "Do you mind if I walk with you? I'd like the company."

"Nah. Help yourself." Strenuous as his task was, he managed to jounce along typically, every part of him on the move. I fell into step, and that seemed to loosen his mood. "You get that way, too, huh?"

I was startled. "Pardon?"

"Down in the dumps," he specified. "You sorta look like you lost your best friend."

An apt enough description of the situation with Grace. "Yes, well," I alibied, "I have some things on my mind and I suppose it shows." I shifted the conversation. "I've been meaning to ask, well, to offer, really." Guilty as I felt, this was hard to get out. "Wouldn't you like more boxing lessons? A left hook isn't the only weapon to be had."

"It sure ain't," he blurted, glancing sideways at me in apology. "Sir, sorry as all get out, but I'm gonna call it quits on the boxing." He added bitterly, "Least until I get some meat on my bones and any muscles."

"Famine, we've been through this," I tried to lift his spirits. "You're blessed with speed."

"So's jackrabbits, and all kinds of things get them," he said in the same dark mood.

"Mine isn't the only case of the dumps, hmm?" I jogged him lightly. "I'll tell you what, let's make a bargain to quit feeling sorry for ourselves the rest of your route. Then we can go back to being worrywarts. Agreed?"

That got a rise out of him. "I ain't no—" He caught himself. "Yeah, well, maybe I do have too much stuff on my mind, like you say you do. How we supposed to get rid of that?"

"Let's talk about something else. Tell me," I flipped my fedora off my head and held it the way a magician holds a hat full of magic, "if I could pull out Russian Famine, grown and muscled and with

Comment [CE119]: Author/editor:
According to Webster's, the word
worrywart didn't come into common
usage until 1936.

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meat on his bones, what more would you want to be?"

The old schoolhouse trick worked, the boy brightened, and in between dashes to deliver stacks of newspapers while I held the ^{buggy} from rolling half a mile downhill, he confided that his great dream in life was to be a trainman, on the famous silk trains that rushed the delicate cargo from the port of Seattle across the breadth of the country to the mills of New Jersey. "Run the locomotive, how about," he enthused during one scampering return, pushing the lightened carriage so fast I had to skip to keep up. "Highball ^{er} as fast as she'd go," his imagination was already up in the cab of a cannonball express, whistle screeching as the wheels pounded the rails, no other sound on earth like it. I had to concede it was a dream with a certain appeal. He confided out of the side of his mouth, "Them trains got the right of way all across the country, you know. Don't stop for crossings or nothing, just let 'er rip. Wouldn't that be something?"

I could agree with that. Yet the vision of another young dreamer with extraordinary physical skills would not leave me. Casper had wanted to be a street preacher in Chicago's Bughouse Square before awakening to his body's possibilities. "Don't take this wrong, my friend," experience spoke up in me, "but you are destined for higher things than that."

"Awful nice of you to say so, sir," he sobered, coming down to earth where the wheels of the baby carriage met the hard streets of Butte, "but that don't help getting chased off my corner and putting up with the hussies."

Before I could try to buck him up from that, we were at the last stop, Blind Heinie's newsstand outside the Hennessy Building. "I'm kinda late," Famine apologized, with a look at me as he hurriedly scooped newspapers from the bottom of the baby carriage and stacked them within practiced reach of the grizzled old man.

"*Alles* forgive, *Jungchen*," the news vendor assured him with a guttural chuckle. As I went on my way and Russian Famine trundled the carriage back on the same route we had come, the sweet words

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lingered in my ear, the benediction we all seek in the winding journey of life, young and old alike.

It is a measure of how low my domestic subsistence had sunk that a cafeteria became my salvation. Bachelor life soon drove me to regularly staying on late at the newspaper and then eating at the Purity before facing another evening alone at home, to call the manse that. Even with the city on hard times, there was definitely no lack of clientele because fetching a meal for oneself felt like a bargain whether or not it actually added up to one. I suppose it was not a good sign—bachelor habit setting deep—that every suppertime without fail I headed directly for the counter where pasties were stacked in a warming pan and fed myself as mindlessly as a dray horse going to a feedbag.

Thus came the evening when I was dishing up my favorite fare, a plump, crusty pasty and the Purity's tasty gravy, when I felt a presence. The way a shadow across your path can cause a sudden chill. Or a window man can be sensed rather than seen. I turned my head ever so slightly. ~~Practically~~ ⁴¹ next to me, there stood Cartwright, with a cutthroat smile that more than lived up to that nickname. Slick dresser that he was, he had on a pearl-gray suit and matching vest with a silken lavender tie that was more properly a cravat. Before I could react to his sudden presence, he slapped me on the shoulder and said in a louder voice than necessary, "How's the world treating you, buddy?"

Nudging his tray up to mine, he looked over the meal line offerings as if I weren't the real thing on his menu. "Pork chop sandwich?" he whistled in disbelief. "They eat anything in this burg, don't they?" Then ever so casually, he dropped all pretense. "You danced circles around me with that editorial today, I have to hand it to you. Sheer razzmatazz. You're one whiz at wordslinging, you are."

I made to move away, leaving him with the rebuff: "Really, we have nothing to say to each other except in print." But he plucked at my sleeve, smiling all the while.

"Oh, I think we do," his voice practically oozed fellowship. "Especially since this seems to be the only way at you." He flexed his upper parts, the cannonball head to one side then the other, as if

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working kinks out of his neck. "Boy oh boy, that Evans of yours knows his stuff. A couple of Irish miners, both of them pretty far above my weight class, pushed me around a little the other night. I was given the impression you're a privileged character, and if anything happened to you, I'd get plenty more of the same." He gave me another unwelcome pat on the shoulder. "There, see? We have a lot in common. We both want to keep breathing. And it'd surprise you how well that can pay."

His close presence was making me uncomfortable, as well as his gall in trying to bribe me in public. "You can save some of that breath. I told you before, I'm not for sale."

The damnable man laughed as if we were sharing the best joke. "You don't know your own worth, my friend. You can name your own price. What could be sweeter?"

"Strychnine."

I uttered that in spite of the vision of my satchel stuffed with money once more. The Anaconda Copper Mining Company had even more of it to spare than did Chicago gamblers.

Cartwright's eyes hardened, although he kept up the deadly geniality. "Butte rules take some getting used to," he lamented. "These miners don't know when they're licked. But you're not that kind of dumb cluck. Cash in while you can. Throw some moolah at that run-down monastery you live in. Go on a nice long trip somewhere." He cocked a look at me. "Morgan? You still with me? What the devil are you doing?"

"Merely humming 'Flight of the Bumblebee' while waiting for a nuisance to go away."

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He snickered. "Smarting off isn't going to help. Come on, get with it. People already think you sold out, so you might as well." I looked sharply at him. "Just the two of us palsy-walsy in public like this does the trick," he said almost sympathetically. "Word gets around, you know."

A rapid glance around the dining room verified that all too well; people were watching us, too many of them with the rough cut of miners. Up at the front, the proprietor was monitoring matters with a double-chinned frown. As sure as anything, even if the word did not spread some other way, he would

the sight of my brass knuckles. Rather, the flash of brass as I whipped them from my side pockets in immediate readiness stopped him cold, but then he simply stared as I held my stance. Instinctively I had dropped into the fighting pose practiced with Russian Famine. Casper's old pose.

As the Purity proprietor bustled toward us with a moonfaced grin, calling to the kitchen for someone to bring a mop, Cartwright backed off, but he was not the kind to give much ground. Still eyeing me, he said silkily, "Handy with your mitts, are you. You're full of surprises, Morgan. But round one isn't the whole fight, you know. Better wise up and think over my offer." Dabbing at his ruinously splotted suit with a napkin, he gave me one last smooth smile. "It still stands."

"I hear you had quite a chat with Cutlass." Jared was waiting when I next arrived at work, after the weekend, with Armbrister attentively on hand.

"He trapped me," I sighed. I explained that in true Cutthroat fashion he wanted to make it appear that the two of us were in cahoots, obviously bought off. The pursed expressions on my listeners caused me to pause. "Which I hope did not work whatsoever."

Jared faced me squarely. "Professor, I don't doubt your word. Besides, Rab would beat up on me if I did. You were caught in a bad situation, as you say, and you wiggled out of it, by all reports. Good enough." Now he paused. "Although you might have tossed that grub on him a little sooner."

He cut off my protest. "That's that, all right? We've got other things to worry about. I'm heading to Helena to hold the governor's hand, he's getting the heebie-jeebies about when the lockout is ever going to end. Can't really blame him, I'm having a few of those myself." He said it in droll enough fashion, for a man who had turned himself into a lightning rod under the menacing cloud of Anaconda. "Hold the fort, gents," he left us with, off to catch the train to Ulcer Gulch.

Armbrister still was looking sour about Cartwright. "Conniving bastard to do that to you," he gave the matter one last mutter. "All right, let's get back to making hay. I've been busy with Cavaretta, trying

close enough

Comment [CE120]: Author/editor: According to Webster's, the term *heebie-jeebies* first came into common usage in 1923.

to figure out new ways to say no progress on the lockout. Please tell your suffering editor you aren't stuck for editorial ammo, too."

~~Never~~ ^{Have no} fear." By staying late as much as I had, I'd managed to work ahead; there was at least that to be said for doldrums at the manse. "I have blasts of various velocity against Anaconda ready to go in overset, slugged for each day this week. I wanted to surprise you with some good news for a change."

Turning into Generalissimo Prontissimo, he shoed me off to fetch them for him immediately. "Morgie, nothing you do surprises me. Let's see the little wonders, so I can slap headlines on them and get them set. Damn," he said with relish, "it's going to be nice to get back to tearing the hide off the *Post*, no more spitwads."

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But when both newspapers rolled off the presses the next day, I was the one who felt as if I were missing some skin. I had written an editorial I quite liked, to the effect that the smokeless skies over the tight-shut Hill were a clear indication of Anaconda's undue power, concluding:

When one lordly company can turn the actual atmosphere of an entire city, of a whole state, on and off at will, it is the very reverse of heavenly. It is satanic.

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—Pluvius

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As if by divination, the *Post* trotted out an old argument in favor of the smudge of belching smokestacks, of course with a certain Chicago flourish:

There are certain starry-eyed types who seem to believe that the Hill will produce its copper just by wishing, instead of basic economics. We've said it before, we'll say it again, we'll repeat it until the daydreamers grow ears as long as the jackass variety: the scent of smoke from working factories, such as the Hill's when the costs of labor and the rewards of

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corporate investment are in economic balance, is the smell of money, wages, prosperity. You only have to be smart enough to sniff.

—Cutlass

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“The scissorbill seems to have looked out the window at the blue sky the same time you did,”

Sandison needlessly pointed out to me when I fumed to him over the sparring editorials, round one handily to Cartwright. “Either that or he’s reading your mind, heh.”

That began the longest week of my newspaper career. In humiliating Cutthroat Cartwright the way I did at the Purity, I apparently roused him to the peak of his not inconsiderable journalistic talents. Day after day, edition after edition, my carefully ~~thought-out~~ editorials looked lame in comparison to his masterpieces of anticipation; suddenly his were the thunderous dispatches to the readers of Butte. Talk about humiliation. I felt almost as if I had been called onstage by a sly magician, told to shuffle a deck of cards and cut them, and every time he named off my bottom card without looking. Razzmatazz had deserted me and found a home with him. I won’t say I was cowed by Cartwright’s supernatural show of ability, but for the first time I had to wonder if I belonged in the wordslinging profession.

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In that frame of mind, I came home from the newspaper one otherwise fine day to find the front-porch drainpipe being lustily repaired. “What do you know for sure, Morrie?” Griff called out heartily. Too heartily. “Isn’t this weather something?” Hoop followed that with, just as full of false cheer.

My mood sank farther toward my shoe_tops. If rheumatic old miners were feeling sorry for me, I had to be even worse off than I’d thought. Brooding my way past the pair of them, I stopped on impulse. “You’re regular readers of the *Thunder*, am I right?”

“Oh, yeah, sure. Most definitely,” came the chorus.

“And you’re familiar with the *Post* since the advent of Cutlass, yes?”

They cautiously admitted to looking at the Anaconda rag now and then.

new section

"So you've no doubt been following his most recent editorials."

They looked back and forth uneasily. "Been on kind of a tear, hasn't he," Hoop finally came up with. "Strutting his stuff, a person would have to say," Griff added.

"And mine, lately?"

"A little falling off, maybe," said Griff.

"Just a little. Got to read close to see it," said Hoop.

"So much for *vox populi*," I muttered, and went on up the steps. They glanced up as I passed, the last word coming from Griff:

"You asked."

At the *Thunder*, Armbrister wasn't saying anything, although the gloom evident beneath the green eyeshade bespoke plenty. When Jared returned from trying to settle down the governor, he looked unsettled himself by the *Thunder*'s recent editorial performance.

"We're gradually losing ground, Professor," an understatement if there ever was one. "I'm hearing mutters from the Hill that maybe we've pushed Anaconda too far. What's wrong with the company making enough money to pay people to work, even some of the miners who've stuck with the union through thick and thin are asking me." He rubbed his short ear as if such questioning had done the damage. "I'm sensing we don't have much time to turn this around," he said somberly. "Morrie"—his use of my actual name said volumes about how serious a fix we were in—"I don't have to tell you to do your best. But pull out all the stops in taking on this Cartwright hoodoo, all right?"

Sound advice, but I knew nothing to do but compile another several days' worth of my most imaginative efforts to be typeset, Armbrister outdoing himself with the flaming headlines he added. At the end of that awful week, though, I took home with me to Sandison, Ajax, and the manse the paralyzing sense that Cutlass could outguess, outmaneuver, outwrite me anytime he wanted. And that

Comment [CE121]: Featured in Webster's, so no need to italicize as foreign word.

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widow line

was not the worst.

Sunday morning, the plump weekend newspapers spread around Sandison and me at the breakfast table. Prominent of course was the editorial matchup, mine ^{yet} ~~another~~ ^{dogged} invocation of the spirit of Teddy Roosevelt against malefactors of great wealth, and Cutlass's, alas, mocking a certain unnamed critic of the American way of business who blew the same limited tune on the same tin whistle time after time. I brooded into my coffee while Sandison was sopping up syrup with the last of his hotcakes and squinting critically at the side-by-side editorials. "Foxed you again, it looks like," he unnecessarily announced. "He's on quite a streak." A prim eater for someone of his girth, he dabbed with his napkin lest any trace of breakfast find its way into his beard. "What's this Cutlass character look like?" Bitterly I described the Chicago sheen of the man, outdressing me as well as outguessing me.

"Hmm. Hmm." I looked at him curiously. "Think I spotted him in the Reading Room yesterday," Sandison drawled. "Took his hat off to read—didn't strike me as the Butte type who wanders in to kill time until the speakeasies open. After he left, I went down and asked Miss Runyon what he'd looked up. She didn't pay me any mind at first, claimed he was obviously a gentleman in town on business. Silly old bat." He snorted. "She thinks any male who gives her the time of day is Prince Charming. Had to tell her he looked to me like he might be a sniper. That sent her flying off to what he'd asked for, which turned out to be in the bound newspapers." His frosty eyebrows raised the dreaded question before he did. "The Chicago ^{Tribune} ~~Chronicle~~ for July 1909. Mean anything to you?"

My life, was all.

Comment [CE122]: According to this article from the New York Times, published on June 1, 1907, the Chicago Chronicle stopped publication only the day before. See: <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=FB0813FA385A15738DDD A80894DE405B878CF1D3>

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This turn of events hit me where it hurt most. Why oh why hadn't I seen it coming? Cartwright was blocked from causing me grievous harm himself, or Jared's men would do the same to him. But it became something terribly different if some third party—say, the Chicago gambling mob—were to target me. And the ~~Chicago~~ ^{Windy City} underworld style in these things was to make it perfectly plain who had done the target practice; it was a matter of bragging rights. No, Cartwright would be in the clear, and with twenty-twenty hindsight I saw how he was getting there. In the Purity when he squared off against me, the boxing stance I instinctively adopted not only set him back on his heels, it set him to thinking. It had taken him a while, but he figured out who that reminded him of, and a trip to the library refreshed his memory of a certain boxer who had been lightweight champion of the world and, worse, fitted me into the picture: the fixed fight, Casper's well-known fate at the hands of the gamblers, and the gossip in the sporting circles Cartwright drew on for his column, that the other Llewellyn brother had got away but if the mob ever caught up with him, it was curtains.

And that did not even include a notorious World Series bet that had fleeced the same gambling crowd a second time. I was a dead man twice over, if Cartwright tipped them off to my whereabouts.

"You look green around gills," observed Sandison. "Anything a poor librarian can do to help?"

"I'll—I'll let you know, Sandy." I got to my feet, trying not to totter. "I have to think."

I went straight upstairs and dropped flat on the bed. The prone position maybe did not promote thinking, but it at least kept me from acting on my first impulse, which was to get on the next train out of town. Not for the first time had I come to this point of decision. You would think self-preservation

made the choice definite, yet running was not the ready answer it had been too often in the past. Lying there, the ceiling of the manse over me like some blank plaster map, I thought of all I would be leaving behind for good. Grace. Sandison. Jared and Rab. Russian Famine. Armbrister and the newsroom. And Butte itself. This tortured, boastful, inventive, grudge-ridden, wisecracking city built not upon bedrock but copper ore was impossible to banish, like some wayward family member you can't help but keep in touch with. If Butte fairly often got under everyone's skin, including mine, the heart is located there as well as the spleen. Not to mention the red blood. No, there had to be some other answer than steel rails for the mortally tight spot I was in. If only I could come up with it.

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They were waiting for me when I reached the *Thunder* newsroom the next day. Through the cubbyhole office's pane of glass I could see Armbrister looking agitated, Jared determined, Rab tense as a cat.

"Are your ears burning?" Jared said the instant I stepped in, their eyes fixed on me. "We've been trying our double damnedest to figure something out." Union leader, publisher, senator, all his burdens of command weighed on his words. "Such as, how come you lost your touch at writing rings around Cartwright all of a sudden."

"I've spent a sleepless night on that myself," I replied tonelessly.

"Cutlass, pah," Rab said with contempt. "I'd call him something else."

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"~~Purple~~-prose bastard," Armbrister provided in the next breath. Even more wound up than usual, he paced behind his desk as if caged. "Not to excuse what he's been doing to Morgie lately, but the SOB has been a show-off right from the start. Christamighty, I was just a cub reporter in Denver when his Rough Riders dispatch came in, and I'll never forget it. 'Outlined against a tropical azure sky,' he parroted, "'they rode like horsemen of the Apocalypse, not four in number but a cavalry charging into history, wreaking destruction and defeat on the Cuban forces atop San Juan Hill.' It made every front page in America." He stopped short, green gaze leveled at the other three of us. "The hell of it is, I'd

have run the damn thing, too, that fast," he said with a snap of his fingers. "Anyway, that's what we're up against and we'd better quit beating around the bush and figure out—"

"Say that again," I blurted. "Back there at the start."

"What, purple ~~prose~~—"

"No, the other. The lede."

as per preceding page

Armbrister looked at me askance, but recited it again. "If you're trying to pick up some tricks from him, Morgie, it's a little late."

I let that pass. Jared stirred, patience at an end, Rab biting her lip against what was coming. "Let's get to the main thing. Go ahead, Jacob, you came up with it."

A picture of reluctance, Armbrister hesitated in facing around to me but said what he had to. "Cutlass outguesses your every move lately. If it were checkers, Morgie, you'd be cleaned off the board. Are you thinking what we are?"

"Inescapably," I sighed.

Veteran of journalistic shenanigans that he was, he spelled it out. "No one is that good a guesser, not even this Cutthroat bird. Somebody's tipping off the *Post*."

"Snitching, I'd call that," said Rab indignantly.

"Spying," Jared bleakly defined it.

Armbrister swore a short blue streak, then threw up his hands in frustration. "How can it be? I handpicked the entire ever-loving staff." Through the office window he scanned the newsroom, every man and woman head down at their tasks, trying to picture to himself who out there amid the busy typewriters and jangling phones of news_gathering could conceivably be the traitor. Very slowly he turned to Jared. "I ought to have my tongue scraped for saying this, but it needs to be said. Everyone but Morgie here."

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The Scarlet Pimpernel moment again. Myself rewritten. Only, this time the secret existence, the hidden identity, stands forth in a far different light. This time the chameleon on the barber pole, in Grace's unfortunately immortal phrase, is shown to be desperately trying to save his skin, as it were. How many pages back in the chronicle of time does such a mask, as dramatically alluring to don as those of tragedy and comedy, have to be put on? Merely to the chapter break after the episode in the Purity cafeteria, when quicker than the eye can follow on the page, the chameleon gets cold feet and turns a subdued color. Cartwright is contacted, a price is named, a deal done, and the *Thunder's* editorials take a dive, in boxing parlance. Always intriguing to see oneself cast in a new role.

Ah, well. Enough of make-believe. I faced my jury of three—Armbrister edgy, Jared alert, Rab frozen—and spoke from the heart. "I hope no one really thinks that I spend part of my time writing my soul out for the *Thunder*, and the other part slipping information that makes me look like a fool."

"There, see?" Rab couldn't contain herself. "Morris Morgan is a better man than that, I'd bet my life on it."

Jared did not go that far, but he was earnest in his verdict. "Relax, Professor. Even you aren't that much of a Houdini."

"I didn't mean to accuse you," Armbrister backtracked in a mutter, "it just drives me up the wall that anybody in this newsroom is in cahoots with Cartwright."

"Thank you for the votes of confidence," I said without irony. "Besides, I know who our informer is."

There was a moment of silent goggling at me, before Armbrister beat Jared and Rab to speech. "Why in the name of Pete didn't you say so? Just point the finger. I'll fire whoever it is so fast he won't know what hit him."

I drew the deepest breath possible. "Unfortunately, the solution isn't that simple."

Comment [CE123]: Okay to replace here with em-dashes?

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It fell to Jared to ask: "Why not?"

"Because . . . because . . ."—the words did not want to come—"the spy is Russian Famine."

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"Mr. Morgan, y-you"—Rab, stricken, shocked, next thing to speechless for once but not for long—"you have to be wrong. I can't believe it. I won't."

Jared, equally jolted, was more to the point. "Are you sure?"

"Unfortunately so," I spoke with the firm conviction that a sleepless night of thinking can lead to. "It has to be him. No one else comes and goes so readily, in time to tip off Cutlass to what I've written, day after day."

~~"But a milk-tooth kid like him?" Armbrister burst out. "How in hell does he do it?"~~

"That is yet to be determined. And if we simply accuse him, he may swear with all his heart it wasn't him. Rab, do you agree?" Governess of the boy empire of fibbers—to say the least—at the detention school, she could only nod mutely. "To put it in starkest terms," I said with reluctance, "we have to catch him at it." ⁹¹ The three of them glanced at one another, then read my face before the words came. "Let me."

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When the *Thunder* rolled off the press as usual that afternoon, Rab and Jared made themselves absent so as not to give away what we were up to, and Armbrister wasn't any more scowly than ever when Russian Famine beelined in from the back shop to the gumdrop jar, mumbling "Hiya" as he passed me, and like a wraith, he was gone again to load his baby carriage with newspapers. I slipped out of the newsroom immediately after, mentally mapping out his route. And down on the street, as the newsboys spilled out of the back shop with their shouldered bags bulging to head for their corners and one came

Comment [CE124]: Two words; see also pp. 133 and 197.

several pats of Mary Margaret Houlihan's face powder to gray my beard.

pushing his newspaper-laden pram, I turned myself into a window man.

My disguise, sudden as it was, couldn't be much; Armbrister's derby instead of my fedora, a casual jacket borrowed from a mystified Cavaretta instead of my customary suit coat. My hope was that from a distance I would blend into the downtown shopping crowd, should Famine catch a glimpse of me. That and ducking and dodging from store window to store window like a crazyhouse of mirrors.

Comment [CE125]: Perhaps you mean "fun house"?

From the *Thunder* building Famine dug hard to propel his load, the delivery route stretching literally up the Hill, the tilted streets that were the apron of the higher elevation where the black steel headframes stood silent above the shut mines. The course was also a rise through society, from the newspaper's disreputable neighborhood to that pinnacle of Butte majesty, the Hennessy Building, block by block. It kept me busy adjusting, bearing out all too well Grace's chameleon-on-a-barber-pole accusation. In Venus Alley, where Famine deposited *Thunders* on the stoop of each brothel—interesting that reading material was in such demand—I had to meld with some other lingerers, my hat on the back of my head as if out for a good time, giving the appearance of shopping the painted-up women smiling and whistling down from the windows. Next a slight step up in respectability, or not, the cigar stores—so-called—that essentially were speakeasies with a tobacco aroma. As Famine made his deliveries, setting the brake on the carriage and darting into each drinking establishment with papers under his arm, I followed him from across the street, keeping a careful distance and successfully loitering unseen until he reached the most notorious of the lot, the M&M. Just as the boy sped to the doorway, he ran smack into Smitty, exiting. I felt the shock of their collision in my every bone.

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"Hey, kiddo, what's the rush?" I heard the burly bootlegger ask genially as I spun to feign interest in the nearest shop window, which, to my horror, held the casket display of the C. R. Peterson Modern Mortuary and Funeral Home. And in there, scant feet away, long face pursed as he shined up the coffins with a rag and linseed oil, stood Peterson, "Creeping Pete" himself, my former employer. Foreboding hit me like lightning. When I moved on as quickly as possible from representing his funereal

establishment at wakes, he had practically wept in trying to persuade me to stay on and keep up the handholding and sympathetic imbibing at those ~~weepfests~~ in Dublin Gulch. "You're the best at it I've ever had, and there's never any end to the Irish kicking the bucket," he'd pleaded futilely. Now his back was mostly to me as he lugubriously polished his merchandise, but the second he turned around, I was caught there, framed full-face in the window, looking for all the world like an importuning job seeker, and I absolutely knew he would rush out with a glad cry. Meanwhile, stunned as I was, I overheard Smitty joshing the carrier of the *Thunder*, "News too hot to hold on to, that it?"

"Making my rounds, is all," Famine said with injured dignity.

That brought a belly laugh. "Know what? That's two of us." From the sound of it, Smitty must have been feeling flush after his day of collecting from speakeasies to add to the stash in the warehouse ~~dug into his pocket~~ and peeled off a banknote. Here, buy yourself a sody pop."

"A whole buck! Gee, thanks!"

There was the bang of a door as Famine rushed on into the M&M, which meant he would be right back out and I would be in his line of sight, while a whistled tune growing louder indicated Smitty was crossing the street in my direction. Creeping Pete had stepped back to scrutinize the sheen on a brass-handled casket, his eyes fixed on the accoutrements with undertakerly concern, but he had only to lift his head and there I was. In my paralyzed brain rang the prospective chorus of being discovered by not one, not two, but three sets of eyes:

"Sir! You been following me?"

"Boss! Boy, you're everywhere, huh?"

"Morgan! You've come back to work, thank heaven."

Instead, something miraculous occurred. I saw by the reflection in the funeral home window Russian Famine come charging out of the cigar store, stop short at what he saw, and shout, "Hey, mister! You dropped some bullets!"

Comment [CE126]: set as 1 word.

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"Hah?" Smitty turned back, recrossing the street with alacrity. "Oh, yeah, thanks, kid. Them are just some reloads—I mean, good luck charms I carry loose in my ~~watch~~ pocket."

Famine's yell straightened up Creeping Pete with a start, craning his neck and peering right over the top of me to see what the commotion up the street was.

And, head down and hunched over, I made myself scarce with the gait of a man who had just remembered an appointment around the corner.

There, breathing freely at last, much the wiser about the pitfalls that went with being a window man, I made myself think through the carriage route Famine was pursuing, from start to end. I was certain he hadn't delivered stolen information either at a brothel or one of the speakeasies, he zipped in and out of those places too fast to hold a conversation with anyone. Besides, those venues did not fit well with Cutthroat Cartwright's elegant manner of machinations. Ahead, as far as I knew, were only deliveries to the Negro doorman at the Hirbour ~~Apartment building~~ and the last stop, Blind Heinie's newsstand. Neither of those seemed a likely *Post* operative. Maybe I was flatly wrong and the youngster we all thought so highly of was not the culprit smuggling the inside skinny, as he'd have put it, to the other journalistic camp. Yet the fact stood that Cutlass was gleaned enough information from somewhere to rip me to pieces day by day. That thought spurred me on, sending me trotting up the alley that intersected the last leg of the carriage route.

The apartment building doorman, I saw by peeking around the alley corner, was kidding Russian Famine much as Smitty had, and the boy was grinning his ears off. No subversion there, surely. After a minute, he left a bundle of papers, and with the energy of a colt in the homestretch, began pushing the baby carriage up the last block at a rattling pace. Here I had a rapid calculation to do. Blind Heinie's newsstand was located around the corner of the Hennessy Building, its department store side, and so I shortcut through the store to where I knew I'd have a good view, unseen. Hurrying through the aisles past curious clerks, I quickly enough reached the ladies' wear section and all but sprinted to the very

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Comment [CE127]: Should this be Hirbour Tower? See article: <http://mtstandard.com/news/local/hirbour-tower-butte-s-first-skyscraper/article.74050636-63d6-54fe-91ed-9416172b148a.html>

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same display window—the cloche-hatted mannequins, a bit worse for wear, had resumed their teacup gin party—by which Blaze and I had unorthodoxly entered the store.

Luck was with me, I was in the nick of time to peek past the flapper dresses and see Famine park the buggy alongside the newsstand and heft out his remaining newspapers, quite a stack. Blind Heinie greeted him with something jolly I could not hear, and Famine grinned nervously. I watched him neatly arrange the pile of papers within the vendor's easy reach, then, something I hadn't remembered from the earlier time I accompanied him to the newsstand hutch, Famine bundled half a dozen *Thunders* with butcher's twine. His fingers were quick, but not quicker than the eye. And so I saw the deed done. Watched him slip the narrow folded pages of overset proofs into the middle of the bundle before knotting it.

Now I knew, and almost wished I didn't. Blind Heinie counted out some money by feel from the upturned hat he used as a cash register and handed it to Famine, then the boy spy of the *Thunder* and—this part hurt even worse—betrayer of my editorial efforts went off pushing the empty baby carriage with one hand. Tempting as it was to rush out and confront him, caught red-handed, on a further hunch I held to my post at the display window. But no longer alone.

"May we help you with something?" a stentorian voice addressed me from behind.

I glanced over my shoulder to the floorwalker, boutonniere and all, evidently summoned by an alarmed clerk. "I think not. I'm merely . . . window shopping."

"Most people do that from outside," he said down his nose. Suspicious but uncertain, he persisted: "Interested in dressing the little lady, are you?"

"I suppose, when the alternative isn't possible. I mean, no." Nothing was happening at the newsstand except Blind Heinie digging in his ear with a finger. Ominous silence behind me growing by the second, I could feel the stare of the floorwalker. My own gaze unremittingly at hem level past the soiree of shapely mannequins, I was desperate not to be thrown out of the store just yet. "Actually, what

I am interested in"—it was a reach, but I got there—"are the teacups."

"The cups, did you say?"

"Naturally. I'm the purchasing agent for the Purity Cafeteria and we're always on the lookout"—keeping my eyes fixed on the newsstand—"for appropriate **cupware**."

Comment [CE128]: Author/editor: No such word as "cupware"; consider replacing with "hollowware"? [it's dialogue]

"I see." Cautiously the floorwalker asked, "How many?"

"Five hundred. Saucers, too, of course."

The floorwalker was, well, floored. "That's a considerable order. I'd have to check our inventory, but if we don't have that many in stock, I'm sure we can order—"

While he was speaking, my hunch paid off. A shirtsleeved office worker in a celluloid collar tight enough to choke, an Anaconda minion if I had ever seen one, appeared at the newsstand, said a word or two to Blind Heinie as he dropped coins into the upturned hat, grabbed up the twine-tied little bundle of *Thunders*, and vanished. Upstairs to the top floor, where the contents of the overset proofs would be conveyed immediately to Cartwright at the *Post*.

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"I just remembered," I whirled so abruptly the floorwalker, startled, reeled back, "the Purity may also need demitasse cups. I must go check."

"But don't you want to put in your order for—" his voice faded plaintively behind me as I hustled down the aisle. By hotfooting through the department store and racing back down the alley from the apartment building, I had hope of cutting off Famine as he headed back to the *Thunder* building with the empty pram.

It worked too well. As I whirled around the corner nearest the C.R. Peterson Modern Mortuary and Funeral Home, boy and buggy were trundling down the street directly at me. Famine practically screeched to a stop, my face giving me away. I read his guilty expression as all the confession needed. Stunned, we both were further startled by an urgent tapping on the showroom window of the funeral home. Caskets forgotten, Creeping Pete was showing actual animation, gesturing vigorously for me to

stay where I was while he came out. I tried to wave him off and simultaneously deal with Russian Famine. The youngster wasn't waiting for what I had to say. I heard again the sentence I had fantasized, only this time, full of anguish, it was not a question.

"Sir! You been following me."

"I had to. Famine, listen—"

"Morgan!" Creeping Pete popped out of the funeral home with a glad cry, alighting between us on the sidewalk, rubbing his hands together in professional habit. "You're back! I knew you'd end up here. I have three wakes in need of a cryer and—"

Seeing his chance, Russian Famine turned tail and bolted. As he fled, the abandoned baby buggy rolled down the steep sidewalk, accelerating rapidly straight at a befuddled Creeping Pete. With an "Oof!" he caught the runaway pram squarely in his middle, long torso splayed across it and arms clutching around it protectively, unaware there was no baby in it. "I didn't know you were a family man, Morgan," he panted. "Is this some sort of domestic dispute?"

"I'll explain some other time," I said, taking off after the running boy. "Park it in the garage with the hearse, please, someone will be by for it." Dodging past honking automobiles, I raced after my quarry, already a block away. "Famine, wait!" I called as loudly as I could while running. "I only want to talk to you!"

He streaked out of sight.

Worse, I knew exactly where he was going.

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There may be a trek through a neighborhood of hell—I hope never to find out—similar to the abandoned part of the Hill. The dead zone, where the violated earth had yielded up all its treasure of copper. Gray waste heaps lay like nightmare dunes that knew no shifting sands, inert forever. Glory holes gaped at random in what bare ground remained on the steep hillside. Up top, the gallows frame of the Muckaroo mine reared against the sky, westernmost of the stark dozens of such headframes, silenced by the lockout, scattered across the crest of the Hill like strange spawn of Eiffel's Parisian tower. Luck willing, those might operate again, but the Muckaroo never would. "They shut the Muck, a while back," the boyish voice echoed in me as I puffed my way up the winding haul road. There had been no time to enlist Jared and Rab nor anyone else, I alone had been confided in by an acrobatic gremlin grinning down from atop high-standing bookshelves, that he climbed only dead headframes. My heart pounded with the knowledge of what a distraught and shattered youngster might do, scaling the steelwork tower girder by girder, handhold by foothold. He could fall. He could jump.

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The abandoned mine yard was fenced with sharp wire, high and formidable enough that at first I wondered whether Russian Famine had merely been bragging in saying the Muckaroo was his pick for climbing gymnastics. Wildly scanning around, I spied the narrow opening, boy size, where a gatepost had separated from the guardhouse. It was going to be the tightest of fits for me, but there was no choice. Alternately grunting and sucking in my breath to make myself as lean as possible, I squeezed sideways through the narrow gap, regretting the consequences to my suit.

"Famine!" I shouted as soon as I wriggled in. The sound echoed emptily off the silent mine works.

Bustling with hundreds of men who descended ~~thousands of feet~~ into the honeycomb of ore tunnels the last time I was unwillingly here, now the Muckaroo was a ghost town where no one had ever lived, only

labored. ~~The haunting last testament of this, I came face-to-face with as I rushed across the yard to the~~ mineshaft, passing the long building that housed the lamp room where the miners, and I among them

one unforgettable time, started each shift by equipping themselves with helmet lamps and other gear for working in the deepest mine tunnels on earth. Griff had been my guide in that adventure, and it was he who pointed out the markings as high as a person could reach on the outer wall of the building. "Them's the dead," he'd said simply and unmistakably. Chiseled into the brickwork were sharp but neat up-and-down strokes, one for each miner killed in the treacherous copper labyrinth below, with a diagonal slash completing each set of five. Every Butte mine with a fatal accident on its record, he told me, which was to say every Butte mine, displayed such gouges of death somewhere on the premises, tribute from the surviving miners to their fellow workers that no mine management dared touch. It raced through my mind that someone like Quin was doubly interred, in a cemetery grave and a groove chiseled as carefully as a jeweler's cut. By the raw toll on the wall, an even dozen lives had been sacrificed to the Muckaroo, and it had to be my mission to make sure there was no unlucky thirteenth.

Hastening around the corner from the lamp room, I ~~stopped short at the spectacle of the headframe~~ abruptly rearing over me, the spider-leg stanchions and the bracing girders at crazily ingenious angles thrusting like a colossal bridge truss with no roadway but the sky. Looking straight up to the top dizzied me, not a promising development. The steel-webbed tower stood perhaps no more than a hundred feet high, but with my apprehension of heights it appeared more like a thousand. Up there, where I could not see clearly past the crisscross of thick girders, the winding wheel that had lifted the elevator cages bearing men and copper ore was surrounded by a small platform, which could be reached by a steel ladder. But if I knew the climber involved, he spurned the ladder and was somewhere in the maze of steelwork supports, the better to defy gravity.

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Comment [CE129]: Author/editor: "Stopped short" and "abruptly" in the same sentence is redundant; delete one?

I cupped my hands and called, "Famine, I know you're up there. Come down, please, so we can talk this over. On firm ground."

Only the wind in the steel frame answered.

A feeling of extreme dread setting in, this time I hollered louder. "If you're afraid of what Jared and Mrs. Evans will do to you, don't be. I'll speak up for you. You won't be punished, I promise. We're all merely concerned for you. Shall I say it again? Come. On. Down."

Again, I was dickering with the wind.

"Very well," the shout I had desperately wanted not to make, "then I'm coming up."

That brought a strawy head of hair, startling against the black of the metal, into sight around a girder directly back under the platform. Good grief, he had climbed the entire vertical steel maze and tucked himself into an angle-iron support, to call it that, his back against the sloping strutwork and his feet idly braced against the nearest upright, like a sailor resting amid the stays and shrouds of a topmast. Open air was on every side of him, all the long way to the ground.

"Sir," he anxiously called down as though it were only good manners, "don't bother. I'm just gonna jump and kill myself anyhow."

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I put a shaky hand on the cold steel of a ladder barely wide enough to stand on, calling out as I did so, "Not until I come up and we have a talk."

The fair head shook vigorously at me not to. I hesitated with hand and foot still on the narrow ladder, but the threat to jump did not renew itself just yet.

"You trying to kill yourself, too, sir?" he scolded instead. "You told me you don't like high places, and ain't none in Butte higher than a gallus frame, everybody knows that."

There was all too much truth in what he said, my twanging nerves informed me. Even from ground level there at the Muckaroo mineshaft, the city sprawled below the Hill as if it had run out of breath trying to climb to our elevation. "What's the sense of you getting up here and falling off," Russian

Famine's maddening logic persisted, "just because I'm gonna?"

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Rather than answer that, I began to climb, each steel rung slick under my city shoes, telling myself over and over not to look down and carrying on aloud a one-sided conversation to the effect that neither of us needed to fall off—as if that were insurance against it—and we simply had to settle things face-to-face, the situation was not as bad as he thought, and so on. I was gambling that my precarious ascent would keep him watching rather than drive him to leaping, a theory that might hold until I was up even with him. Then something else would have to be devised, and I had no idea what.

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The wind worried me, for both our sakes. My hat sailed off, probably to downtown. As if that were an omen, a hint of what the forces of nature could idly do, I was nearly halfway up the spider-spin of ladder when the spasm hit, clamping me to the rung I was on. *Acro*, from the Greek for "high above or topmost," and *phobia*, which needs no definition other than "sheer fear." Holding to my resolve not to look down, instead I glanced upward, just the flick of an eye, to see how much farther it was to the top, and the void above loomed as a blue canyon impossible to climb. My hands clenched on the cold steel of the ladder and my feet would not lift. Clinging there, I would have been a victim of muscle failure and gravity, had it not been for the voice from on high.

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"You don't want to be stopping like that, sir, you'll tucker out from holding on. If you're gonna climb, you got to keep climbing."

"J-j-just resting," I hoarsely called back to the anxious onlooker somewhere overhead. Where I summoned the strength from, there is no knowing, but with an overwhelming effort of will I forced a hand free and pulled myself to the next rung, my feet shakily following.

Then another.

And another.

Counting to give my mind something to fasten onto, it was another thirty-three rungs before I finally drew level with the spot beneath the platform where the boy was squirreled away in the strut

braces, looking quite at home perched on a six-inch-wide girder. "Do you mind," I wheezed, hugging the ladder with both arms, "if I climb up on the platform and we can talk from there?"

Acrobat to acrophobe, Famine eyed me. "Looks like you better. Told you it was high up here."

Arms aching as if they were going to fall off, I pulled myself onto the planked platform belly-first and lay there like an exhausted swimmer reaching a raft. Squirming into position to peer over the lip of the platform at the boy tucked away in the angles of the supports, six or eight feet below, I managed to say, "You didn't have to run from me. There's nothing to be afraid of, I swear to you."

"That's you talking," he replied miserably, shifting on his steel beam in a way that made my heart lurch. "I seen that look on your face when you caught up with me from Heinie's. Jared and Mrs. are gonna be even worse. They won't raise me no more," he choked on that. "I'll be back to getting by on the street or else in the hoosegow school forever." Involuntary tears streaking his face, he shook his head decisively. ~~"Huh-uh, I might as well be dead."~~

slipsis
"Just—just listen, Famine, please, ~~if~~ if only I could keep him talking instead of leaping, falling—" "Mrs. Evans and Jared won't throw you out, I swear to you. The carriage route was not a good idea for you, that's our doing, not yours. We'll find something else for you to do, how about? Honestly, you can patch things up with everybody, starting now." Blood was rushing to my head as I hung my face over the edge of the platform and I was seeing spots before my eyes, but at least the youngster was hearing me out, however dubiously. "What we want to know is who put you up to it. That's the only person who needs to be dealt with."

"Huh. That's easy. The flashy guy with the cookie duster, who else?"

Cutthroat Cartwright never better defined.

"He told me there wasn't no harm to it," Famine unburdened himself. "All it was is whatchcallit, something like garbage—them long sheets of paper in the wastebasket."

The spoilage! Of course! The smeary proofs tossed away as the compositor adjusted inking on

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overset such as my editorials. Smeary but mainly legible. "People was gonna read 'em anyway in a couple of hours, he said."

"One person, anyway," I said grimly. "There's still something I don't understand. How did you get those out of the back shop without being caught?"

"Punky. He'll do anything for gumdrops."

The detention school cherub who could steal the puffball off a dandelion. Enough said.

"But why?" This was pressing him, but the question would not stay in me. "If you needed money so badly, you could have come to Jared or me."

"Wasn't the money itself," came the downcast answer.

"What, then?"

"You know."

"Famine, I swear I don't."

"Knuckies."

"Brass knuckles? What do those have to do with—" I broke off, remembering the beating he had taken from the posse of *Post* newsboys.

"I wanted to get my own," he said bleakly. "Stick up for myself and not get the stuffing beat out of me for a change." He glanced at me as if that required an apology. "A left hook's no good against a bunch."

My head swimming from altitude and revelation, the words jumped out of me without my needing to think. "Why didn't you say that's what you wanted so badly? If you promise not to jump, I'll share mine with you."

The boy shifted in surprise, not a movement I wanted to see on his perch with no inch to spare. "You're woofing me."

"No, I'll prove it." Awkward as it was while lying flat, I dug in my side pocket, the pair of brass

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knuckles clinking. I withdrew one and held it out over the platform edge for him to see.

Staring at the object of desire, Famine even so looked like he didn't trust the proposition. "You'd be short one knuckie, and those are 'spensive. How come you'd do that?"

"First of all, because you're worth it, and secondly, I need you to do a couple of things for me that only you can do." His expression was still dubious. I tried to sound as guttural as Blind Heinie. "All is forgive, young friend." It worked, to the extent he twitched at the touch of those words. I persisted, "Do we have a deal?"

It seemed an eternity before he nodded, then stipulated: "Toss me the knuckie first." Reading my face, he flashed me a challenging look. "For luck."

This I had not counted on; Russian Famine's street boy tenet, hard learned, that life would have to prove it still wanted him. I gulped, making myself swallow any argument to the contrary. If he was willing to trust luck, I would need to, too.

"All right, then. The moment it leaves my hand, it's yours, Famine. You have to catch it or—" We both were aware of the mineshaft directly under us, where the article could fall nearly a mile into the ground. "Ready, are you?"

He tensed on the narrow girder, looping an arm around the upright strutwork and holding a hand out toward me for the toss. Good grief, it was his right hand he was going to catch with. Luck did not dare make a slip with him. "You bet," his voice was high but determined. "Let 'er fly."

The metal weapon spun in the air, the brass glistening, before the boy stretched to a heart-stopping length and snatched it.

"There now," I burst out in relief. "With that on, you won't even need the left hook."

His arm grip holding him safe, almost shyly he tried on the brass knuckles. With his other hand he stroked the knobs as if feeling their magic power to change a life, then gazed squarely up at me. "Hunky

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and dory, sir. You kept your end of the deal. What's the couple of things on mine?"

"Carry a message. And find someone for me. We have to get started." Squirming toward the ladder to lower myself onto it, I caught a glimpse of the ground an awful distance below and my body refused to move. "Famine?" My voice worked, barely. "Make that three things. The truth of the matter is, I need help getting down."

"Awright. I'm coming over. Gimme your hand."

At the end of that longest day, the restless city settling for the night as much as it ever did, I approached the darkened boardinghouse. Immediately I was filled with longing, remorse, regret, all the shades of emotion that come with loss. Be that as it may. The next challenge had to be faced, then and there.

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Hearing me let myself in, Grace appeared at the top of the stairs in her rose-colored dressing gown, my favorite. Blinking against the light of the dining room chandelier I had switched on, she said as if my presence might bring on a fresh outbreak of hives: "That had to be you, nuisance. What now?"

My gaze up at her should have said it all, but just in case, I wreathed the words with all I could, spoken from the heart. "I am here to reclaim my beautiful bride."

A flush to match her gown arose in Grace's cheeks as my intention registered on her. She scratched an arm nervously. "Morrie, we've been through this and through this. You can't just dance in here in the middle of the night and expect us to go back to being"—she faltered for the term—"lovebirds."

"No, and we both knew a prime reason for that, don't we." I could hardly contain myself. Actually, I couldn't. "Where is the swine?"

Comment [CE133]: know?

"The which?"

I was as determined as I had ever been in my life. The Italian gigolo was about to get a taste of my brass knuckle if it came to that. Backing away from the stairwell to give myself sparring room, I roared, "Mazzini! Get down here now. We're going to have this out."

In the ringing silence, nothing ensued at first except Grace peering down at me in astonishment. Then came the sound of shuffling footsteps in the upstairs hallway behind her. Braced for battle, I

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motioned for Grace to stand aside, which she mutely did, as I waited for the wife-stealing cur to show himself. Only to be confronted by not one figure but two.

"Keeping kind of late hours, aren't you, Morrie?" said Griff.

"Not that we can't get back to sleep when you're done yelling at the top of your voice," said Hoop.

It was Grace's turn. "And you'll have to shout even louder to reach Mr. Mazzini. He's in Genoa.

His stay was up some time ago and he's gone home to his wife and five children."

"Ah." I cleared my throat in embarrassment. "Good place for him." The pair at the top of the stairs in underwear tops and pajama bottoms shook their heads in unison and shuffled back to bed, while the third member concentrated her frown at me. "Grace," I saw nothing to do but start over, "I have much to tell you."

"Do you. Who will be doing the talking, Morgan Llewellyn or Morrie Morgan or some deceiver yet to be invented?"

"Can you please come down, so I don't have to do all this with a crick in my neck?"

She hesitated, our fate as a married couple in the balance, and something in the air between us tipped it. Wordlessly she descended the stairs, her dressing gown swishing. Mesmerized, I could not help hearing in my head Robert Herrick's yearning poem, *Whenas in silks my Julia goes / Then, then (methinks) how sweetly flows / That liquefaction of her clothes*. Thoughts of that sort ended abruptly when my vision of liquefaction planted herself a safe distance from me, arms crossed and eyes snapping. "Well, I'm here."

With a pleading look, I ushered her to the dining room table, the electric chandelier overhead glowing gamely in the Butte night. Neither of us saying anything, we sat there as of old, she in her place nearest the kitchen, I in the star boarder's spot across from her, her Arthur watching eternally from the wedding photograph on the sideboard. I mustered myself. "There have been developments."

"My, my. There generally are with you."

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If ever there was a guarded listener, it was ~~her~~ ^{Grace}, but at least she was listening. Where to start? "It will be in the paper tomorrow," I plunged in, "the *Thunder* is putting out an extra. The lockout is over."

Yes
Comment [CE135]: replace "her" with "Grace"?

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Jared made the announcement, at my prompting after closeting himself in Armbrister's office for a significant phone call to the top floor of the Hennessy Building. The negotiation went on for some minutes, helped by the ammunition I had given him ~~about Cartwright's abandonment of the field of battle~~, and he emerged with the solemn look of a plenipotentiary who had settled for an armistice when victory was too costly for both sides. Dutifully he gave me a little salute and called the staff together.

"Folks, here's the size of it. Anaconda has agreed to end the lockout, at the start of first shift tomorrow." At the first whoops and Armbrister's bray to the back shop to be ready for an extra, he held up his hands. "That's the good part, and then there's this. To get the men back to work, the union had to take a pay cut." The newsroom went quiet and tense as he mustered the rest. "Fifty cents an hour. I hate that like poison, but something had to be done to get the Hill working again. I promise you this," he pledged as if taking an oath of office, "we'll fight like hell to get the full dollar back in the next go-round."

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He paused, the strain showing. "So we didn't get all we wanted, but neither did Anaconda." In a corner of my mind, I could hear Rab, always wiser than her years, forecasting a draw. "They're gambling that they can defeat the tax commission measure," Jared forced the words out, "and it's about fifty-fifty that they may be right. What they don't know," his voice lifted, "is that if it goes down this time, the governor and I will tinker with it a little and get it back on the ballot at the regular election next year. We'll keep doing that over the long haul until we get something passed that reins in Anaconda, by damn."

Looking around at the intent faces surrounding him, that most unsentimental man choked up. "I want to thank every one of you for working your hearts and guts out the way you have. Sometimes it's

been a rough ride”—he managed to crack a thin grin in my direction—“but this is a different town because of you and the *Thunder*. And,” his voice rose and steadied, “we’re not done yet. This newspaper started from nowhere, and we’ve got this far.” He made the same vowing fist Quin showed the world of corporate rulers. “We’ll keep on, putting out the best damn paper Butte has ever seen.”

Armbrister clapped first, then the others, the entire newsroom in a thunder of ovation.

“That’s good news, of course,” Grace allowed, still cautious. “But you’re still up against that awful Cartwright.”

“Ah, him.”

Some hours before, the Purity was busying up with home-goers grabbing a quick bite at the end of the workday, the proprietor ringing up profits as if the cash register ~~were~~ a set of chimes, and watching worriedly when Cartwright made his appearance. The self-styled Cutlass sauntered to my table in his usual swanky manner, although I saw him cautiously eyeing the plate of spaghetti and meatballs in front of me; I was famished after the headframe experience. “So now you don’t mind being seen with me in this joint?” he said with bravado but staying just out of range. “Change of heart, pal?”

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“Let’s restrict ourselves to the cranium, shall we?” He looked at me speculatively. “Sit down, Cutthroat.”

“Do I need to wear a bib?”

“Not unless you burp haphazardly.”

He snickered and took a seat across from me. ~~I have to hand it to you, you’ve got more moves~~ than a weather vane, Morgan.” Lazily he let drop what I knew was coming. “If you don’t mind my using your first name.”

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“So you are capable of legwork when you’re not pandering in print for Anaconda. I suppose that’s

in your favor.”

“I must be slipping, though,” he shook his head at himself. “It took longer to click than it should have, who you reminded me of. But when it finally did, it was plain as day—you’re the ghost of your brother. Same build plus a little, same phiz somewhere under that beard, same way of putting up your dukes.” Confidently he leaned toward me, grinning in triumph. “Same razzmatazz. In certain circles back in civilization ~~he meant Chicago~~ they still talk about that fixed fight the Llewellyn brothers pulled off. And you know what?” He raised an index finger as though inspiration had just hit. “I’ve heard rumors, back there, of a pretty big bet somebody out in this direction snagged from the big boys, on the Sox World Series. Somebody who knows a fix when he sees one, would be my guess. Boy oh boy, Llewellyn,” he laughed, “you like to live dangerously, don’t you.”

“Actually, no.”

“Well, you sure give a good imitation of it.” He slapped the flat of his hand on the table. “Let’s get down to business. That scarecrow of a kid said you’re ready to make a deal. It’s about time. What’s your price for putting Pluvius to rest for good?”

“Nothing.”

Genuinely taken aback, Cartwright stared at me as though I were betraying the hired-gun brotherhood. “Don’t be a chump. Take the long green and go buy yourself a new life. Anaconda expects to pay, plenty.”

I speared a meatball and dabbed it in spaghetti sauce, just to further unnerve him, then set aside the morsel and fork on my plate. “You misinterpret. I have no payoff coming because I’m not going anywhere. It’s Cutlass who is. Yet tonight.”

“Have you gone nuts?” His voice rising in register, he slapped the table harder this time. “I’m calling the shots here. Sure, I can’t order up a funeral for you myself because of that damned Evans bunch. But if I drop word to the right people who got burned on the Sox series, they’ll be happy to do it

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for me. Get hold of yourself, wise guy, before—”

“I wonder, Cartwright,” I interrupted, “whether you know the story of the Laconians, from whom we get the word *laconic*. It goes like this. During the Peloponnesian Wars, the Macedonians threatened Laconia with an ultimatum to surrender. ‘If we prevail in battle, we will kill every man, woman, and child.’ The Laconians sent back a one-word message. ‘If.’”

“That’s cute,” he sneered. “But what makes you think you can get away with that answer?”

“Because, if you were to tip off my whereabouts to certain gambling interests in Chicago, I will provide documentation from a number of Rough Riders that your San Juan Hill dispatch was an utter fraud.”

To my satisfaction, I have to admit, the pencil-thin mustache twitched like cat whiskers finding danger.

“As you with me, there was something I couldn’t quite figure out,” I kept right on before he could say anything. “Why you shied away from the Rough Riders angle in the parade coverage. You didn’t dare make a peep while they were in town, did you, for fear they’d remember you and your famous dispatch all too well.” I watched to make sure this was having its effect on the suddenly less sleek figure across the table, and it was, every word.

“Roosevelt’s men won the battle on foot,” I went on remorselessly, “not galloping up the slope under an azure sky like horsemen of the Apocalypse, *tsk*. Which indicates, wouldn’t you say, that you weren’t even there. The only high ground you were on during the charge up San Juan Hill was the height of deceit.”

If looks could kill, he would have done me in then and there. “What happened, I wonder,” I went on. “A bit too much Cuban rum the night before, perhaps? It was easier to hang around the cable office and send in your supposed scoop when word that the Rough Riders had won trickled in? Am I getting the story right? Close enough, I see.”

Cartwright managed to find his voice. "You're bluffing."

"Care to try me?"

I saw him waver, then concede. "Casper was the best counterpuncher I ever saw," he said thinly. "You must have picked it up from him." He paused, by the look of him still tempted to remind me of my brother's fate.

"Just in case," I headed that off, "I have left instructions, should anything happen to me, that all the proof needed to ruin your career will be—"

"Skip it, Llewellyn, we've all read that in cheap novels." He cocked a resigned look at me. "Out with it. What do you want from me?"

"You should have read a little further, Cutthroat. Absence and silence, of course, in that order. Must I spell it out? You go back to Chicago, right now, and never mention me to the gambling mob."

Cartwright let out his breath in a soundless whistle. "You'd make a helluva poker player." Following that up, he made a gesture of throwing in his cards. "I fold. May I go now?"

"Nearly. First, I am going to threaten you with brass knuckles"—one hand's worth, anyway—"and loudly tell you to get out of Butte and never return. And you will comply."

"Theatrics, is it," he groaned, looking around the cafeteria at the audience of miners and others already watching us. "It figures." Turning back to me with a doleful expression, the most feared columnist in America shook his head regretfully. "You're ruining a good newspaper war, you know."

"I fervently hope so."

He couldn't resist. "Lapdog of the bolshies."

Nor could I. "Purveyor of puerile nonsense."

"Fancy-pants fabulist."

"Windy City windbag."

"There, see?" Cutlass to the last, he spread his hands persuasively. "We could have had a lot of fun

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Comment [CE136]: Per Webster's 11th, the word "fancy-pants" came into common usage only in 1945. Okay as is?

with each other yet." One glance at me dispelled that. "All right, all right. Put on your pinky ring, let's get this over with." He started up from his chair, but paused midway. "There's something I still don't get. You've got me bottled up. But what's to stop the right people in Chicago from stumbling onto you, like I did, and then it's your death warrant even if I didn't have anything to do with it?"

"Can't you tell?" I said, rising to my feet and slipping on the brass knuckles as Cuthroat Cartwright and I prepared to part for good. "I'm bulletproof."

"How can you be any such thing?" Grace ^{said} ~~in~~ disbelief now as I told her the same. "I hate to side with that Cartwright creature on anything, but why on earth can't the gamblers still come after you?"

"Not if they know what's good for them."

Beeping its horn once but that told enough, the Golden Eggs truck pulled up in front of the manse at dusk. The neighbors on Horse Thief Row may have wondered why, instead of a delivery from the van, I was delivering myself to it by climbing in the back.

The Highliner had vacated the driver's seat and awaited me there amid the egg cases concealing the bootleg load. No gun in sight this time, to my relief.

As ever, the pair of us took in each other's likeness, as if looking into a mirror with a slight waver in the glass. After some moments of this, he tipped his fedora up an inch and gave me a rogue's wink. "So, twinsy. I don't know how you do it, but that kid found me. Thank God he's not a cop."

"Never underestimate the abilities of newsboys," I said fervently.

"What's up?" His gaze locked with mine, as though reading my mind. "This is just a guess, but do you need somebody bumped off?"

"I appreciate the thought, but that's not quite it." No one could hear us, but I dropped my voice, the moment seemed to require it. "What I really want done"—I took a decisive breath—"is for you to

Comment [CE137]: Missing word?
Grace said in disbelief ...?"

become me. In certain quarters."

His head turned sharply to one side, the Highliner heard out my fuller explanation. When I finished, he made sure: "That's all you want? Just run a bluff on some boobs back in Chi?"

"It would be exceedingly helpful."

He stroked his beard while thinking the matter through. "Pretty sharp of you. That has its advantages for both of us, doesn't it. You get to be just plain Morris Morgan, and I get to be someone with a reputation attached, in case anybody gets nosy about my 'real' name, eh?"

"An identity switch, yes. That's precisely what I have in mind."

This ^{is} ~~That~~ moniker I'm supposed to take on," he checked, "how's that spelled?"

"Double L," I recited, "E, W, E, double L, Y, N. The Welsh are an inventive race."

"I'll try live up to that," he said drily. "So here's the deal, then." Leaning forward, he tapped my knee to signal mutual trust. "I'll have a few of the boys spread the word around Chicago that any mobster who sets foot into Montana for any reason will go back out in a box six feet long. Message signed, sealed, and delivered by Morgan Llewellyn, better known as the Highliner." The fleeting smile moved in his beard, no doubt reflecting my own. "That suit you, chum?"

"A perfect fit."

"There you have it," I concluded, Grace sitting spellbound, glued to her chair during every word of my tale. "Oh, except for one thing." I couldn't help a note of regret in letting her know, "Pluvius is no more, alas. It is time for me to move on from the newspaper. Cavaretta will take on the editorial writing, he's a good choice." I drew a difficult breath. "I shall miss the *Thunder*,"—the truest way to say it was also the hardest—"like a lost brother."

For hopeful spells during my telling of it all, she had been the Grace I so happily trotted the world with, bright eyed, thoroughly attuned, avid for what came next. Now her face fell. "I'd rather take a

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beating than have to say this, but that's always been the trouble, you. Something goes off in your head, and the next thing, there you are again, free as a bird and with about the same means of support."

"Grace, wait. Before we deal with moving on, there's something I must say. It matters more than anything." It welled out of me. "You are my all. I will love you until—I don't know what. The pyramids turn upside down. The stars lose their twinkle. The last breath is out of me. The—"

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"Stop! That'll do." She caught her breath. "You are a case, Morrie." She studied me fiercely, her expression a mask of exasperation until, at last, the dimple crept in. "That's not all bad, I suppose."

Before my hopes could soar, she too spoke her heart. "Well and good, everything you've told me. And you're such a temptation when you're not up to some shenanigan, there's nobody in the world I'd rather be with. But there's still the matter of"—she sorted a moment for the right name—"Morris Morgan's habits. If you've left the newspaper, how are you going to, you know." She bit her lip before saying it. "Provide."

I said humbly, "You are looking at the new city librarian of Butte."

Grace covered her mouth with her hand as if to slap down astonishment.

"Sandy," my own incredulity burst forth when the man himself announced that thunderclap, along with his casual gruff remark that he had the place shaped up enough by now that even I could not make a mess of the Butte Public Library and the finest book collection west of Chicago, so it was time for him to sit back and write his memoir, "I don't mean to accuse you of plotting, heaven knows. But did you plan this from the very start? With the manse and all?"

Here came The Look, the blue gaze over the cloud of beard. "Did you just now figure that out, dunce?" He shifted in his thronelike desk chair to fuss with the latest rare book arrival—Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson*, ripe for plucking for a certain kind of memoir, no doubt—all the while shaking his head and clucking to himself. "You're slowing down, Morgan. Heh, heh."

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"Sandison has some sway with the library board," I said innocently in response to Grace's flabbergasted look. Recovering, she warned me by manner and word: "Morrie, you're leaving something out, I can tell."

"Ah, that," I sighed. "Sandison has them over a barrel. It's either me in the job, or, as I believe he told the trustees in somewhat plainer terms, every book in the public library with his nameplate in it goes good-bye." I paused, leaving her practically teetering toward the next revelation. "The salary is such that we may actually be able to meet the demands of the manse." I threw up my hands to show her I had nothing up my sleeve. "So you see, I am gainfully employed in spite of myself."

At that bit of honesty, she started around the table to me, her eyes shining. Just as swiftly I was up and toward her. We met halfway.

Grace being Grace, she made doubly sure, scanning my face, beard, eyes, deeper than any of those. "You've really turned over a new leaf?"

"Better than that, Mrs. Morgan." I moved to take her in my arms. "Book upon book of them."

The End

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