

Then, like a broken note between the rhythm of the hammers, came an anguished cry from Griff. His hand had cramped, freezing onto the drill and pulling him, bent by the pain, toward the path of the sledgehammer. Grace gasped and started to her feet and I vaulted toward the scene along with several other men. Hoop with miraculous presence of mind buckled his back leg at the last second, driving the hammer head into the dirt instead of Griff. The two of them stayed hunched that way, gulping for air, to the sounds of the Finnish team driving its drill the last inch to victory.

In the aftermath, Grace and I consoled Hoop alone. Griff was avoiding everyone, staring at the hand that had betrayed him. I saw him wipe his eyes with his shirt tail. "We'll see you at breakfast," Hoop told us wearily as we watched Griff disappear, shoulders bowed, into the holidaying crowd. "He's gonna need some liquid refreshment to get over this. Me, too."

"I'm spent," Grace declared as we ended the day. And she hadn't even contended with a goon.

Contrary to her remark, though, she looked full of life when we departed the amusement park, sparked by the doings of the past hours. As for me, I still was trying to tote up Miners Day while the trolley back to town toddled down the tracks toward us.

We'd been jollyng each other about the memento photograph, she claiming that I looked like a scared preacher and I pondering aloud how Queen Marie of Rumania happened to be posing beside me. The mood of the moment could not have been better, which meant it could only go the other way.

"Morrie, there's something you should know," she said suddenly, as if the picture reminded her. She looked up at me, the violet eyes searching mine. "I can't

be in favor of gambling," she was saying as if we had been talking about this for hours. "Arthur would not have wagered on whether the sun was coming up, he was not a betting man." She was wrong there. He had rolled the dice in choosing a life with a woman this spirited. Amid that thought, I flinched from her poke in my ribs. "But the curiosity is killing me, you scamp. How did you come out on the day?"

"Even. More or less." Skepticism wore the most delicately dimpled expression possible beside me, but it still was skepticism. "Never fear, I still have enough to pay my rent."

"I wasn't worried about that. Well, some." A pinch of concern showed between her eyes. "But how are you ever going to get ahead?"

The trolley rattled to a halt in front of us and I provided my arm to help her up the step. "You have to understand, Grace," I said with as much smile as I had in me. "I have always been very good at getting rid of wrinkled money."

## 9

"Now we can get back to business," Sandison met me with lofty round tones as the staff reluctantly queued up on the library steps to be let in, the morning after. "I never have understood the meaning of holiday. Didn't have time for loafing of that sort on the ranch. Cows never took time off from eating."

"The nomenclature, Sandy, I think you'll find goes back to Middle English--the term recognizably became 'holy day,' and subsequent centuries of quickening pronunciation have given us--"

"Damn it, Morgan, did I ask for the history of the world? Didn't think so." His shaggy gray eyebrows knitted, he contemplated me in either amazement or extreme irritation, it was always hard to tell which. "You have the damndest brainbox ever created, I swear. Anyhow, get yourself caught up on the usual chores," by which he meant everything, "the next couple of days. I have something I want you to do. Tell you later."

Grace had been conspicuously quiet at breakfast--the bleary Hoop and blearier Griff seemed to have lost their tongues along with their pride on the field of contest--and I took her mood to be, like mine, a mixed reverie of Miners Day

outcomes. I was unprepared, then, when I came home from the library and heard the urgent stage-whisper from the kitchen: "Hsst. In here, Morrie."

Expecting to perform an act of rescue on whatever was cooking for supper, I stepped in and found Grace miserably seated at the kitchen table, her face a smeared mask of white. A bottle of calamine lotion was standing ready for more application. Wrapped around her forehead was a rag soaked, according to its eye-stinging odor, in vinegar. Not that I needed any further evidence, but the red welts on any inch of her skin not yet daubed with calamine told me I was seeing a prime case of hives.

"What on earth--?" I sat down quickly and reached over to hold her hand, trying madly to think what to do beyond that. If the goons had shown up here on a glory hole mission despite my warning, I was going to have to find some way to make them regret it; I did not look forward to that. She continued to gaze at me with a forlorn expression, her eyes smarting from the acrid vinegar cloth which, truth to tell, did not seem to be cooling her troubled brow appreciably. "Grace, you have to put it into words. What's the matter?"

"You are."

This was worse than if she had said, "*The goons were here, breathing fire.*" My hand withdrew. Apprehensively I asked: "How so?"

"By being you, whoever, whatever--" She started to scratch her arms, thought better of it, and instead dug her elbows into the table and leaned practically flat across to confront me. "I tossed and turned all night trying to figure it out. Who am I with when I'm with you? Take yesterday. One minute I'm on the arm of someone I enjoy thoroughly"--her reddened eyes blinked more rapidly at that emotion, although it may have been fury--"and the next, you're flinging money away like you're feeding the chickens."

"Russian Famine won by at least eleven yards," I pointed out.

"All right then," she said, no less miserable, "half the time when you're flinging money away, the wind catches it and blows a little back. But how can you depend on that? It's beyond me, and that's what I'm saying." The ghost of Arthur, who would not bet on whether day would follow night, hovered in from the next room. Less than halfway across the table from me as she was, Grace leaned more sharply yet into her next words. "I can't tell from one moment to the next whether you're the best creature that ever wore pants, or, or--I don't know what." Her tirade ran down. "How can a person ever hope to get a straight line on you, Morrie?" This came out practically a whisper, her whitened rag-wrapped countenance as tragic as a mummy's.

Still trying to catch up, I asked hoarsely: "What brought this on? Just stepping out together one day of the year?"

"Yes. No. I don't know. See, that's what happens around you." She sat back as if exhausted, scratched under an arm, and with an angry swipe slathered on some more calamine.

I nervously smoothed my mustache, dreading where this was leading. It had to be faced, it always does.

"Grace"--I used her name as if patting it before putting it away for good-- "I don't know any cure for being myself. The lotion for that hasn't been invented yet." The next had to be said past the lump in my throat. "Do you want me to pack my valise and go?"

No man is a hero to his butler, it is said; nor is any boarder a model of perfection to his landlady. Grace Faraday straightened up and scrutinized me, blinking harder. "If I had a lick of sense, I should push you out the door right now, shouldn't I." As I watched, her dubious self struggled with the proprietorial side of her. "But when you're not a pile of trouble, you're no trouble. You're on time with the rent every week, although heaven knows how. You aren't a

steaming drunk, at least since you gave up wakes. You don't jump when dynamite goes off under the place, where the next boarder might not like a house that shakes. And Griff and Hoop don't seem to drive you crazy, and that counts."

Had she been ticking these off on her fingers, she now was out of fingers. Looking as doubtful as she sounded, she concluded:

"For now, you may as well stay. One more thing, though. We need to be as clear as we can about each other. Yesterday was too, um, too forward of me, Morrie, and it wasn't really fair to you." Something more than an itch was making her chalky face twitch. "You shouldn't get the wrong idea and feel--" There she faltered.

"--taken up with," I finished for her, and I was surprised at how sad it sounded.

This was one of the nights of the week when I had to go back to the library and lock up after the evening groups, and I trudged off to do it with the old weight of disappointment on me.

First Rose, now Grace. Rejection as soon as someone personable and pretty took a good look into me, whatever it was they thought they saw.

Women were the fairer sex? What was fair about their fingersnap judgments of me? Even Sandison, grumpy and flatfooted around women, had found someone to put up with him, the redoubtable Dora. While my best efforts caused them to dust their hands of me or break out in hives.

I felt lonely as a castaway, and what was worse, from all present indications I had better get used to it.

My acidic mood was at odds with the gentle summer dusk, spreading down from The Hill over the brick canyons of the city, casting the streets into picturesque shadow. That sank through to me, and a couple of times I whipped

into a doorway and looked back. There was no sign of goons, at least. Brass knuckles seemed to get the job done, although I couldn't see how to apply that to courtship.

In the library basement when I arrived, the Poetry and Social Circle was still going strong. A balding man of middle age, with the look of a bank clerk, was on stage reciting in round tones: "*...now when heaven holds starry night in its keep/and on moonlit Olympus, the Muses gently sleep.*" Ordinarily I am all in favor of the Muses, but tonight I mercilessly shooed the poetry lovers, and they filed out of the auditorium in shy pairings. The big room echoing with emptiness now, I was stacking away the chairs when I heard a single set of footsteps rapid on the stairs. The goons always traveled as a pair. Or did they. Just in case, I hefted a chair up ready to hurl.

"What the devil," Jared stopped short as he came through the doorway and saw me with the chair in my hands, "are you cutting the janitor out of his job?"

"It's his lodge night, so he's excused early," I said crossly. "The person I work for bends the rules for this, that, and the other, except where I'm concerned."

"You need a union," he joked or not, lending a hand with the stray chairs. He looked at me curiously. "That poor thing who's your landlady told me you've about taken up residence in the library."

"It's a long story."

"I imagine. Anyway, I'm glad I could track you down." He glanced around to every corner of the auditorium even though we were alone. "Any luck with you know what?"

"Luck is the residue of endeavor, in some situations," I responded, still not in my best mood. "Come on up to the office."

Our footsteps were magnified in the empty darkened building as we went upstairs and I sensed Jared was jumpy in the unfamiliar surroundings. But if situations were reversed, I would not be particularly at ease in a mineshaft, would I. When I switched on a light in the office, he stayed by the door and took everything in. "So this is the lion's den." His gaze came to rest on me, with that flavoring of curiosity again. "I have to hand it to you, you've got guts, holed up in here with him all day long. I've heard about old Triple S since I was a kid."

"He hasn't taken my head off my shoulders, so far," I bypassed that, my attention on the contents of the hiding spot in the cabinet where the ledgers were kept, the one place I was sure Sandison would not go near now that he had shed the bookkeeping to me. I brought out the pink sheets and my pages of calculations of each mine's differential between raw tons of ore and tally of processed copper. "Is this what you had in mind?"

Not quite grabbing the bundle of paper out of my hands, Jared immediately laid out my pages on the nearest desk--Sandison's--and ran his finger down the figures. When he reached my totals, he pulled a slip of paper from his shirt pocket and compared. His whoop startled me and probably the pigeons on the library roof. "You've nailed it! Anaconda's been feeding us low numbers on the finished copper. We'll give them hell in the negotiations now and they won't even know how we figured it out." Exuberantly he batted my shoulder. "Rab thinks you're the greatest thing going. I'm starting to see why, Professor, if I can call you that."

I took this to be the kind of nickname accorded to the soldiers he'd served with in the trenches, such as Shorty, Lefty, and so on. "I suppose I'm flattered."

As the two of us headed downstairs, I could make out just enough of Jared in the library's moonlit atmosphere to know he could hardly wait to turn the

tables on Anaconda. Now I was curious. "You have the lost dollar back. What are you still negotiating about so urgently?"

"You name it. Working conditions. Hiring and firing. Safety." His voice turned hollow. "On first shift, just this morning, one of our men in the Muckaroo was killed when a tunnel roof fell in on him. Left a wife and six kids." I recalled his delivering the union tribute--cash and consolation--to the widow at my first wake as a cryer; again and again, from the sound of it, he faced that duty.

Mustering himself now, Jared went on with what he had been saying. "All of it raises hell in the union. There are those who say getting the wage back is what counted, let's don't beat our heads against the shed on these other matters until we get some paydays behind us. And then there's plenty who are ready to shut down The Hill again like that"--he snapped his fingers--"if the company doesn't give us every last thing we want." He glanced sideways at me. "Professor?" In the splendid acoustics--we were in the foyer by now--he sounded like a messenger of fate in a Greek drama as he laid matters out. "I wouldn't guess you're a military man at heart, but you maybe know what an accelerated march is. It covers ground a lot faster than parade cadence, but it's not a run that makes your tongue hang out. That's about what I'm trying for. We can't let up much on Anaconda or things slip back. But we're never going to turn copper mining into a picnic, no matter what we try. Either way, as I see it those of us on the council have to keep things moving, just fast enough." The next came out as if he was thinking to himself. "Particularly now."

When I halted short of the front door and gave him a questioning look, Jared hesitated. "All right," he granted, "Rab will probably blab this to you if I don't. Anaconda isn't our only problem--we're scrambling to stay ahead of the Wobblies. The word is, they're going to make a big push to take away our union members. Slip their hotshot organizer into town, the one who tied Seattle in knots

in the general strike there.” He tilted his head to one side as if seeing me from a fresh angle. “A lot of people are on the lookout for that kind of Wob, you know. Some world-class talker who just shows up out of nowhere,” he gave me a bluff grin, teasing or not, “if you know the type.”

“Jared, how many ways can I say it, I am not--”

“Don’t work up a sweat, Professor,” he batted my shoulder harder this time, evidently meant to be companionable. “I’m convinced you’re what Rab says you are, a wandering planet of your own.” That took care of one worry, perhaps, but the next was whether that fact was ever going to penetrate the thick heads of Typhoon and Eel Eyes.

“I have to hand it to the IWW,” Jared was saying ruefully, “they’re a persistent damn bunch. The last time they sent a bigtime organizer in here, the goons hung him from the railroad trestle. Lynched him. The old remedy, the Montana necktie.” With a laugh that had no humor in it, he gazed around at the grandeur of the library as though wondering how it and a lynching site a dozen blocks away could exist in the same realm of time. “Maybe I have Wobs on the brain,” he mused. “That one at the parade yesterday, singing that damn thing?” Jared Evans startled me again by mimicking, quite presentably, the phantom voice that had mocked the parading miners’ union with *pie in the sky, by and by*. He banged his head with the heel of his hand. “It gets in there and I can’t get it out.”

“It’s called a mnemone,” I informed him. “Something that prompts remembering, usually voluntary but not necessarily. A musical phrase is particularly suited. For instance, ‘Camptown--’”

At the library door now, Jared put up his hands to hold off my discourse.

“I appreciate the definition. But I’ll just call it trouble. Good night, Professor.”

# —————

I was wary in every direction I could think of, those next few days. But there was no sign of lurking goons, and on the home front, Grace--still a picture of misery, under the ghostly layer of lotion--did not come up with any further charges against my personality. She and I were painfully polite with one another, to the point where Hoop and Griff grew nervous around us. They talked a blue streak at mealtimes to cover our silences, and while I learned a lot about assorted topics of interest to retired Welsh miners, it was a relief each morning to go off to work at the library.

Until, that is, the pertinent day when Sandison spun around in his chair as soon as I stepped into the office and announced, "Morgan, it's time we get some ammunition to use on the trustees."

I knew we meant me, so I simply cocked my head to listen.

"You've done a good enough job of balancing the ledger, the board can't find anything to kick about in there," he went on. "Now they're fretting about where the money is going to come from for new carpets, all the wear and tear we've had in here lately. I keep telling them any board of trustees worth its name would just pony it up, but they want to steal it out of the book budget, the damn thieves." The chair groaned under him as he shifted haunches. "That's where you come in. I want to remind that pack of meddling fools which side their bread is buttered on." He looked at me craftily. "I've never signed my book collection over to the library," there was a sly note in his voice I had not detected before, "it's all here on loan like museums have with paintings of people with their clothes off." That explained much; for Butte to house the finest collection west of Chicago, the obsessive keeper of the books came along with it.

"Told you there's something I have for you to do," he was saying as if I was looking for a way to fill my time. "Draw up an inventory of what's mine out there on the shelves," he waved in the direction of the prized books on the

mezzanine. "That'll bring the trustees to their senses," he finished, sitting back and cracking his knuckles in satisfaction.

"I shall need a helper."

That caught him by surprise, and before he could cloud up enough to tell me I was out of my mind, I said: "Fortunately, Sandy, the staffing has been a little light for some time, hasn't it." I flipped to the ledger page that listed library positions and wages, his piggybank for those *Miscellaneous* expenditures when irresistible books showed up in dealers' catalogues. He eyed me as my finger singled out positions budgeted for but chronically unfilled. "Very wise of you," I drove the point home with a final finger tap, "to leave leeway for an occasion just such as this."

Sandison coughed. "Let's be reasonable about this. We can't be cluttering up the place with some moron we don't absolutely need, just because--"

"No, no," I headed off that objection, "summer help will do. A teacher, perhaps, with free time now that school is out. In fact, I think I know of one."

"Don't waste time talking about it, then." He heaved himself around in his seat as if compelling business awaited on his desk. "Hire this summer wonder you have your eye on, and get going on the inventory. You have to make decisions in this life, Morgan."

"This is exciting, working for Sam Sandison. It's like being on a pirate ship."

"Rab, contain your imagination. This is a library."

"You know what I mean," she whispered back secretively, there on the mezzanine. "Everyone in Butte has an opinion about him. What's yours, Mr. Morgan?"

"It's too deep to go into. Pull down *Pride and Prejudice* and see if it has the bookplate."

She took a peek inside the tanned leather cover and giggled. "It does. Just like on a heifer." Volume by volume, our library lord's collection all bore the bookplate lettered in bold, SSS, with the smaller uncompromising line below, *Property of Samuel S. Sandison*. I hadn't put this together until Rab's remark, but now my first conversation with the man came back to mind, when he berated me for not knowing that the most famous cattle herd in Montana history had borne the Triple S brand. Leave it to him to put a brandabetical stamp on the world's literature.

Rabrab--or Miss Rellis, as I had to make myself call her in front of other staff members--was a <sup>dedicated</sup> willing worker, and we were both going to need to be. Already we each had a heaping armful of exquisite books, and this was only Adams, Arnold, and Austen. As we tottered off to the sorting room where Sandison let us set up shop for the inventorying, she marveled: "Say what they will about him, he really does have a soft spot for books, doesn't he?"

And Ivan the Terrible perhaps loved his staghounds. My private opinion of Sandison, inconstant in the best of times, varied almost hourly during those first busy weeks of summer. He was as demanding as ever in the office chores he foisted onto me, the Earl of Hell with a list in his head, and between those I would dash back to the sorting room to work with Rab on the inventory. Sometimes we would look up and see the snowy beard and cowlick pass by as he came stalking out of his office to stand there on the mezzanine and contemplate the ranks of books on the shelves. When he loomed there in one of these trances, white as a sacred elephant, Rab and I simply detoured around him in our task. I was certain as anything that bibliomania did not mean a maniac loose in a library, but there were times Sandison made me wonder whether the definition needed adjusting. Yet, fume at him and his high-handed ways as I so

often did, there always were the immortal books, which would not have graced the Constantinople of the Rockies but for him. In life's list of complications, this one seemed to carry an acceptable price.

Volume by plated volume, Rab and I kept compiling and adding up the Sandison library-within-the-library. If the edition in hand matched a listing in a rare books catalogue, it was no problem to assign a value. Any we could find no listing for, one or the other of us would take several at a time for appraisal by old Adamson, the coldblooded antiquarian book dealer across town. As you might guess, there is a secret satisfaction in going through the streets with your arms around the Artful Dodger and Natty Bumppo and Emma Bovary with no one knowing you are hugging a monetary fortune as well as a literary one. So, its hectic moments aside, the inventorying was the most pleasant kind of work, engaging the mind and no unduly heavy lifting involved. Rab was sparkling company, as I had counted on. She showed up each morning bright-eyed for whatever the day might bring, and in plucking the SSS books from the shelves she whisked in and out of the mezzanine stacks as if on jeweled skates. From the number of upturned male heads among the Reading Room patrons as she winged past overhead, I was not the only one appreciative of her presence.

I suppose I should not have been surprised when Sandison called me in to his office, and there like one of the frowning Easter Island stone heads was Miss Runyon. "It seems there is a distraction in our otherwise flawless service to the reading public of Butte," Sandison addressed me pontifically from behind his desk. "State your case, Miss Runyon."

She drew herself up as if to huff and puff and blow me away. "It's that helper of yours. She wears those little dresses, you can see everything she has."

"You can? I mean, I had not noticed."

"Then you are the only man breathing who hasn't," she declared.

I looked from her to Sandison and back again, both of them dressed twenty years behind the times. "Perhaps it is natural that the younger people take a different view of wardrobe than, ah, we do."

Rousing himself, Sandison abandoned his chair and clomped out from behind the desk. "Your concern for propriety is notable, Miss Runyon," he said soothingly as he escorted her to the door, "and I'm sure Morgan can deal with the issue."

When she was gone, he rounded on me. "The next couple of days, you be the one to prance out there on the mezzanine and fetch the books," he directed, "just on the chance that people may not be quite as interested in seeing everything you have." His frosty eyebrows were hoisted high as he studied me. "You're a sharper operator than I thought, Morgan." He laughed bawdily. "Make the most of your time with Miss Rellis."

I look back on that mid-summer stretch of weeks as a season of life that went up and down with the regularity of a carousel. Each day divided itself according to the female company of the time. At the boarding house, Grace and I stayed as self-consciously civil as schoolchildren who had been told to mind their manners or else; her hives had gone away, but her allergy to being taken up with me had not. Then I would go off to the library and the short-hemmed zephyr that was Rabrab Rellis.

With her keenness for being in on things, Rab was as intrigued with the inventory books as I was, both of us beaming like babies at the chance to handle lovely volumes that even the most omnivorous reader would miss out on in a lifetime. On nice days we carried the mood outside, joking to one another, and ate lunch on the library steps. Butte sunned itself those noonhours, as if storing up

for rougher weather ahead. Gangs of boys swarmed down from The Hill neighborhoods, heading for the swampy attractions along Silver Bow Creek. On the next street from us, the *Post* building had put up a baseball scoreboard on its front, and the amplified voice of the sports telegraphist relaying diamond drama as it took place in Cincinnati and Washington and other major-league outposts carried to us like opera arias: "*Flash! It's a home run! The Red Stockings lead one to nothing!*" Sometimes Russian Famine, scrubbed and neatened, would stop by on his errands as a Hennessy Building runner, and one of us would share a sandwich with him before he sprang to his duty again.

"Mr. Morgan, there's something I've been puzzling about," Rab broached during one of those pleasant noontimes when we were alone. "I noticed it all the way back at Henry Adams and his *Education*. That was published only last year." She had her old look of a schoolgirl circling what might be a trick question. "Aren't the Sandison books supposed to be what he collected when he was on the ranch, ages ago?"

That had tickled my interest, too. By now we were at Kafka, Keats, and Kipling. The <sup>romantic</sup> poet was sadly gone, but the other two were up and writing and I had just catalogued recent contributions to literature by both that also carried the SSS bookplate.

So as not to heat up Rab's instinct for intrigue, which never needed encouragement, I shrugged past the matter of newly minted books among the old: "An occasional stray may have wandered into his literary herd, large as it is. Isn't there a ranching word for that?"

"Maverick, you mean? An unbranded cow that someone slaps their own brand on?" Rab wrinkled her nose as if sniffing something spicy. "Oh, that's so funny."

It was more so than she knew. Possibly Sandison, from long habit, was simply buying valuable books out of his own pocket and folding them into his collection as he had every right to do. But the more tantalizing possibility, I sensed, was that those *Miscellaneous* purchases drawn from the library's payroll budget were being cunningly mingled into his earlier holdings. And if I knew anything about Samuel S. Sandison by now, it was that he never saw a thing of worth that didn't look better to him with SSS on it.

Brushing away lunch crumbs as though that took care of the topic, I told Rab: "We had better get back at it, there's a shelf of Longfellow ahead."

"How's that inventory coming?" Sandison rumbled when I passed by the office that afternoon.

"Sandy, you are to be commended for your buying eye," I stuck to what I could honestly say. "The books you have gathered amount to a financial fortune as well as a literary one."

~~"They ought to," he muttered as he turned back to what he was doing. "I~~  
~~learned the value of a dollar along with my ABCs."~~

insert  
blue  
page

Not long after that, I was met at the breakfast table by two long faces. Griff asked mournfully, "You heard what they're doing to us now?"

"I am barely out of bed, Griff, how could I?"

"They're cracking down," said Hoop, equally doleful.

I waited, but both informants were too overcome to provide anything more. Mystified, I had to look to Grace for an explanation.

"The police have heard from a higher power," she said with a grimace. From the look on her, I translated that to mean the sixth floor of the Hennessy Building, home of the copper collar. "They're arresting characters who hang out

"They damn well ought to," he said as he hunched over an antiquarian catalogue and some notations to himself which, I was quite sure, added up to more books for the Sandison collection.

"Oh, by the way," the issue of expenditure reminded me, "a cyclopedia salesman this morning left us a sample of his newest." I stepped to my desk for the brochure as Sandison groaned at the distraction. "Here you go, the sales pitch for *Prominent Figures of Montana, Past and Present*. He assured me no self-respecting library should be without such a volume. As an added inducement, he told me you will find yourself prominently in it, Sandy." I passed the brochure to him for inspection.

He took one look, informed me it was nothing more than the usual attempt by some robber to steal names and sell them back to flattered fools, and tossed it aside. "Bury it in Section 37," he muttered almost inaudibly, turning back to what he had been doing.

"Excuse me, please," I responded in puzzlement, "but I don't know where that section is in the library."

"Eh?" His head jerked up and around as if I had been eavesdropping. Catching up with himself, he waved me off the subject. "Never mind. Get back to the inventory and making eyes at Miss Rellis, why don't you."

downtown without any business for being there. A couple of those come to mind at this table, don't they."

"Spitting on the sidewalk, the cops call it," Hoop said with disgust.

"Vagrancy is another way of putting it," Grace provided for my benefit.

Griff burst out, "It's that 'unlawful assembly' crap"--Grace did not rebuke him--"whatever name the buzzards put on it."

Still behind, I asked around the table: "What put the authorities on this rampage?"

"The Wobblies," Hoop and Griff answered together, while Grace's expression said she had heard all this too many times, and she went off to the kitchen. The IWW wanted to cut in and take the lead in the miners' struggle with Anaconda--it just wasn't right, my tablemates stated. From what they heard, the arrival of <sup>the mythic</sup> organizers to mold discontented workers of The Hill into a radical legion had thrown Butte's powers-that-be into a tizzy. Hence, jail awaited anyone deemed a 'vagrant.'

When the law is bent that way, a detour around it is sometimes needed. That morning I went to the library by the back-alley route shown me by Russian Famine, just to be on the safe side.

To my surprise, that lunchtime Rab was mum about this newest tussle over who would control The Hill. I don't know what I expected to be in sight when we settled at the top of the library steps as usual--the Hennessy Building being stormed like the Bastille by maddened Wobblies, perhaps--but the streets were placid, only punctuated here and there by strolling policemen who looked vaguely embarrassed. Rab was chattering on about Melville and whether anyone who wasn't vitally interested in blubber actually ever read all those pages of *Moby-Dick*, but there was something bubbling under that which should have

alerted me. Nonetheless, I was caught by surprise when a lean figure, brisk and businesslike in a somber suit but with his hat pulled low, peeled away from the concourse of patrons in and out of the library and dropped onto the steps beside us. "See what I mean about the Wobs spelling trouble, Professor?"

"I suppose I do, Jared," I answered him as equably as I could. "There seem to be a lot of ways to spell that in Butte." I watched with a bit of envy as he nestled in next to Rab and was rewarded with a kiss and a sandwich. Curious as to why he was dressed up, I asked: "What's the occasion?"

"None in particular," Jared provided between bites. "I just don't want to look like someone who might spit on the sidewalk." A policeman went by on leadfooted patrol, giving us hardly a glance. "You can almost feel sorry for the dumb cops," he mused. "Almost."

The police on puppet strings were not the only ones entitled to sympathy in the situation, I could tell; the crackdown plainly hindered the activities of the miners' union, and I charitably said something of the sort to Jared.

"An opportunity for a strategic withdrawal, we called it in the army," came the dry response.

"Extra syllables aside, I believe that means 'retreat'?" I made sure.

"You might say that," he granted. "But going a different direction, even backwards," he munched on the matter along with his sandwich, "gives a chance to gain some ground somewhere else, doesn't it."

Rab, eyes alight, had been flicking glances back and forth between us. "You'd better ask him, love," she prompted. "Mr. Morgan and I have to get back to whaling all too soon."

The ancients who invented storytelling knew to the instant when drama must put on a human mask. The soaring ambition of Icarus to consort with the sun, before the first feather melted from his wings and wafted down and down to

the waiting Aegean Sea. The echo of the knight's heartbeat within his armor before he slays the dragon. Some such flutter in the curtain of fate, now that I look back on everything that was about to happen, came with Jared Evans that noontime.

"You brought this on yourself, Professor," he said as though I didn't know any better. His dark eyes held a glimmer as he went on: "Remember when you were telling me why 'pie in the sky' gets in a person's head and won't leave? The nimo gizmo side of things, you called it?"

"The <sup>mnemonic</sup> ~~mnemone~~ aspect," I was glad to clarify. "It derives from Mnemosyne, the Greek goddess of memory, and--"

"That's what I'm saying, the union needs that kind of brain food." Past the brim of his hat I could see Rab glistening with interest. Jared scanned around as if scouting enemy terrain and lowered his voice. "I got to thinking about what you'd said and it hit me--why shouldn't the union have a song like that?" He made a fist. "Something that shows our spirit. There on Miners Day, when the band played 'Men of Harlech', I damn near bawled and I wasn't the only one. That kind of thing. I mean, hell, up against Anaconda, we're in a fight just as much as any army." I practically had to shield my eyes in the face of his determination. It took only one look at Jared to know he was purposeful as a harpoon, and another at Rab to remind me the whiff of anything venturesome was catnip to her. I had to admit, the two of them were made for Butte.

"Professor?" He spoke now as if taking me all the way into his confidence. "You see where I'm going with this?"

"Vaguely. You have in mind musical phraseology that will rally--"

He didn't wait for me to finish. "A song of our own that will make the Wobblies sound like sick cats. And that's where you come in."

Well, who would not want to be the author of the "Marseillaise" or "Marching Through Georgia" or even "Yankee Doodle"? However, sometimes I know my limits. "Jared, that's generous of you, but songwriting is actually not among my talents."

"Doesn't matter," he sped right over that. "All I want you to do is to make the case to a few people for a hell of a good song for The Hill. Miners can be contrary. We have more factions than a henhouse." He gazed up at the dark strutworks over the mineshafts and the spill of neighborhoods between. "The Finns would join up with the Wobblies lickety-split if the union gives them any least excuse. The Italians think the union is getting too radical. The Irish are itching to run things themselves, and the Cornish think they could do a better job than the Irish or any of the rest of us. So on down the line." Abruptly he batted my shoulder, which was going to develop a callus if this kept on. "You're just the right one to set the bunch of them thinking about a song that will pull everybody together instead of their own grumbles. Rab swears you're a wonder when you get going." Her smile ratified that.

"Ah." Flattery is a quick worker. "I suppose I could lend whatever modicum of musical knowledge I have. If you'd like, the next time you hold a meeting, I could come by the union hall and--"

"That's the rub," Jared said quickly. "The bunch we want won't come near the union hall, the way everyone is being watched like sin these days."

He had already calculated the next, I later realized, but he offered it as if the notion just then strolled up to him.

"Come to think of it, though, there's one place in all of Butte where the cops and goons know better than to go. Down the shaft."

#

than the Irish or any of the rest of us. So on down the line." He batted my shoulder, which was going to develop a callus if this kept on. "You're just the right one to set the bunch of them thinking about a song that will pull everybody together instead of their own grumbles. Rab swears you're a wonder when you get going." Her smile ratified that.

"Ah." Flattery is a quick worker. "I suppose I could lend whatever modicum of musical knowledge I have. If you'd like, the next time you hold a meeting, I could come by the union hall and--"

"That's the rub," he said quickly. "The bunch we want won't come near the union hall, the way everyone is being watched like sin these days." He had already calculated the next, I later realized, but he offered it as if the notion just then strolled up to him. "Come to think of it, though, there's one place in all of Butte where the cops and goons know better than to go. Down the shaft."

No three words in the language could have been more unwelcome to me. I am not subterranean by nature. Quite the opposite; I tend to look up, not down, in life. The sky has held fascination for me since I was a boy sneaking out to the Lake Michigan shore on clearest nights, tracing out the constellations shimmering over the water. Above me in the hypnotic dark, Sagittarius the archer bent his everlasting bow while Pegasus flew on wings of light; those and all the other patterns etched in star-silver define heaven to me. I know of no mine pit in the sky. Now I was being asked to reverse my basic inclination and point myself into the blind paths under the ground. Down where a glory hole led to.

"Must we?"

Jared brushed aside my quavery question. "It's our only shot at getting the right people in one place at the same time." Rabrab watched him with

adoration as he tackled tactics. "How are you at being somebody else?" he asked me and didn't wait for an answer. "Your pals Griff and Hoop never took themselves off the extra gang list, it makes them feel like they're still miners. We can sneak you onto the night shift on one of their work tickets." He wrinkled his brow. "First we have to get you past that pair of apes at the gate."

I groaned. "Big and bigger? One of them with eyes that belong on a sea creature?"

Jared showed surprise. "How'd you know? The company stuck them there to watch for Wobs."

"It's too long a story to go into." I felt a guilty kind of relief as I explained that Eel Eyes and Typhoon Tolliver would know me on sight; with them on lookout at the gate, it was impossible for me to enter the mine.

During this, Rabrab had been studying me.

"Your mustache, Mr. Morgan. If that were to come off, you'd look like a different you."

My upper lip smarting, I trudged up The Hill in the company of Griff the next night. I felt undressed without the mustache, although I was in the same regalia as the hundreds of other miners around us going to work: substantial trousers, a workman's jumper and an old hat.

Griff was practically hopping with anticipation. "You're in luck," he had me know as we trooped along. "The Muckaroo is as nice a digging as there is on The Hill."

"Is it," I responded without enthusiasm; doubtless there was a similarly prime spot in the salt mines of Siberia, too. To try to bolster myself for this, after the library closed I had gone down on my knees and examined the mine model in the glass case long and hard, but right now that seemed like no preparation

whatsoever for the real thing. The screeching of pulleys and the throb of machinery sounded louder than in the daytime. Ahead of us, lit harshly, the headframe of the Muckaroo mineshaft towered into the darkness. The graveyard shift--how I wished it wasn't called that--converged at the pinch of the mine gate and then spread out as men filed off to their eight hours of labor beneath the surface of the earth. Jared was a steady but discreet number of strides behind us, which was somewhat reassuring, but Griff hustling along next to me, madly eager to redeem himself after the Miners Day drilling contest, was not. I kept hearing Grace's words when my conscience made me draw her aside after supper and confess what we were up to: "Think twice about this, Morrie, please? The Hill is the most dangerous place on earth, even for those who know what they're doing."

By now I'd had those second thoughts and many more, with no result but Griff to show for it. Allegiance to a cause is a prickly thing. Put your hand to it just right and there is the matchless feeling of being part of something greater than yourself. Grab onto it the wrong way, though, and it draws blood. Back and forth this scheme of Jared's wavered in me as our rough-dressed procession tromped out of the dark to the mine entrance.

The enemy was at the gate, the oversize pair of them scrutinizing every passing face, Eel Eyes with that sideways stare, Typhoon with doggish concentration. Griff braced up beside me as we neared that inspection. "Here we go, Mor--Hoop, that is." He sneaked a look toward the weedy shadows along the high fence, muttering: "If that kid's gonna do it, he better be doing it."

"He will," I said with more confidence than I felt.

Just then a rock clanged off the tin siding of the gatehouse behind the goons. "Scabs!" came the taunt. "Anaconda stinks and so do you!"

As hoped, Tolliver reflexively bolted off after the stone thrower, although he had no chance in the world of catching up with Russian Famine. Eel Eyes

angrily stayed sentry, but his gaze kept dodging toward the darkness or in search of the jeering laughs from the rank of passing miners, while Griff and I, prim as monks, flashed our work tickets and slouched past him.

Jared caught up to us in the mine yard.

"Nice work. When we get in the lamp room, stay at the back"--he was addressing me--"and keep your head down. Griff, you know what to do."

The lamp room, jampacked with men and equipment, was where we were to outfit ourselves with helmets with carbide lamps on them. Finding one that more or less fit, I plopped it on, hoping it would help to hide me. No sooner was it down around my brow than the night supervisor stepped into the room, a list of names in his hand.

"Hooper and Griffith on the extra gang," he sang out. "Oldtimers' night, is this?"

"Don't fret yourself, Delaney," Griff bridled. "We can still turn out the work."

"We'll see about that." The mine overseer peered to the right and left of Griffith. "Where's Hoop?"

"Taking a leak against the office."

"He would be." Comparing the rest of the names on his list to the crowded roomful of faces, now the supervisor craned to see to the back, where I was keeping my head down. "Who else we got here, anybody I don't know?"

Jared broke in on that. "Just so you have it in mind, Delaney--we voted not to go on the twenty hundred level until more shoring gets put in."

"Nobody's asked you to yet," the mine boss said sourly. "Don't push it, Evans."

"You call that pushing, when it's our necks at risk?" Jared harped on the matter to create a distraction. "All I'm saying is, that shoring better go in before any of us set foot onto that level or--" During this, Griff and I slipped out.

The open air of the mine yard chilled me. With the helmet weighing on me, I felt even more like a blockhead for agreeing to this scheme. Happy as if he had good sense, Griff gimped along ahead of me, carrying on about the old days on The Hill and this rare chance to have a look at the workings of the Muckaroo. "So, all we need to do," he chatted over his shoulder as if we were out for a stroll, "is get ourselves down to the thirty hundred level."

That bit of enthusiasm sounded reassuring. Wait, though; multiply those offhand numbers and the result is--

"Three thousand feet?" I jammed to a halt as if an abyss of that depth had cracked open beneath the toes of my shoes. "I just can't. You'll have to tell Jared."

Silently Griff circled back and rested a sinewy old hand on my shoulder, steering me toward the mine shaft. Companionable as the gesture was, I would have a bruise there in the morning where he was gripping me.

The Muckaroo's headframe stood over us, black metal casting blacker shadows in the glare of the night lights, as we approached. Griff headed us straight in under the girders toward a narrow plate-metal box hung from a steel cable. "Here we go, Morrie, I mean Hoop. Hop in the cage."

Rust-spotted and dented, the thing looked like some torture booth left over from the Spanish Inquisition. Rationally I knew it was simply an elevator, a way to travel to work the same way as an accountant in a celluloid collar would step into wood-paneled circumstances downtown and pleasantly tell the operator, "Fourth floor, please." Except that this express traveled more than half a mile between stops, straight down. With Griff's firm aid I edged in and stood rigid

against the back plating, as far away from the flimsy accordion gate across the doorway as possible. He shouldered in next to me as other miners packed in with us.

The hoistman peeked in, counting heads, then snicked the gate closed. He called out, "Everybody ready for China?"

"Let 'er drop," the miner nearest the front called back.

No sooner were the words out than the cage plunged like a shot, for about a dozen feet. Then stopped with the kind of yank that comes at the end of a scaffold rope.

Everything dangled there, shuddering wildly; I include myself in that. The walls of the mine shaft had closed in around us and overhead there was a terrific clatter and continuing commotion. I believe I would have whimpered if all power of voice hadn't been scared out of me.

"It's okey-doke," Griff tried to soothe me with a whisper. "They're loading a couple more cages over us, is all."

Oh, was that all. Merely piling people on top of our heads, to make sure of calamity if anything went wrong in the descent. Hearing Griff's rushed words or perhaps my breathing, the other passengers glanced over their shoulders curiously at us.

"My partner here is a greenhorn, I'm breaking him in," Griff confided to them. "He's got a little case of heebie-jeebies." That brought knowing laughs and a round of wisecracks about how lucky I'd be if I didn't get anything worse than that from digging copper.

In a minute came another sickening jolt downward and one more shuddering wait. Then *swish!* The next thing I knew, the cage was dropping at top speed, so fast that I feared we had been cut loose and were freefalling to our doom. I shut my eyes, not wanting to see death coming. Then, though, I heard

the steady whine of the cable, and I cautiously peeped past the darkened outline of Griff and the others. Down and down and down, the shaft walls flew past in a black blur. My ears popped. I was trying to work my jaw when everything stopped with a hard bounce. The cage yo-yoed for long seconds as the springiness of three thousand feet of cable settled down.

Someone outside flung open the cage gate and I was blinking into a harshly lighted concrete chamber. Hot air rushed into the elevator shaft as the other men clambered out ahead of us. A staccato chorus, like invisible riveters, emanated from various tunnels where compressed-air drills were noisily cutting into walls of ore. "Here we are," Griff announced as if it was a tourist destination, "as deep as it goes in the Muckaroo."

As I gawked around, the next cage settled to a stop and Jared climbed out. Giving us a thumbs-up, he disappeared off into a timbered tunnel across the way. By now the underground traffic was thick, files of miners passing us by, their talk trailing away as they vanished into various tunnel portals. Griff had been orienting himself. "C'mon, we want to scoot off over here."

He had picked out what looked to me like an abandoned tunnel, except that steel rails were aligned in the center of it. Our carbide headlamps cast bobbing beams as we hiked deeper into the darkness. Every so often, the light caught a gleam where water dripped down a rock wall. The stammer of drilling followed us at first, gradually dropping to a distant murmur that was simply in the air, like the metallic smell that smarted in my nose. I kept waiting for where this burrow led to, some larger cavern, timbered and more secure, where actual mining was done. Then something occurred to me, from my session of studying the mine model in the library.

"Griff?" I sounded like I was in the bottom of a well. "I believe this is what is called a drift tunnel--"

"Righto. You know more about this than a person might think."

"--and if I am not mistaken, the only purpose of a drift tunnel is the excavation of ore. It isn't a passageway to any of the rest of the mine."

"Right again. You are a whiz."

"Then where's the crew that's supposed to be in here doing that digging?"

"I don't see or hear anyone."

"That's because we're it."

I stopped almost in mid-step.

Griff plowed along for a few more paces before noticing I was missing. Turning around, he examined me critically. "I don't want to worry you, Morrie, but you look kind of milky."

"Where did this notion come from that you and I are going to dig copper in this crypt?" I burst out. "My understanding was, I came down here to meet with the men from the other mines."

"Well, yeah, sure," Griff said, patience and reason combined. "When meal break rolls around, Jared is gonna see to that. I bet he's got it worked out slick, don't worry. But we need to make some kind of showing until then. We get caught loafing around"--the beam of his helmet lamp shined past me as if in search of assailants following us through the tunnel--"and Anaconda will make it rough for us. I don't know how you feel about it, but getting turned over to their goons doesn't appeal to me."

"Lead on," I said with resignation.

Like tramps on a railroad track, we trudged along the narrow set of rails deeper and deeper into the reaches of the mine. It was hellishly hot; I would not have been surprised to see lava oozing out at us. At last a covey of ore cars, squarish troughs on wheels, showed up in our lamp beams. Here we were, Griff declared with a flourish, at the ledge of ore. Above us the tunnel wall opened into

an arched excavation, and he skimmed up the ladder to it with me gulping and following.

What awaited at the top was a large cave; blasting had hollowed out the far wall of the ledge and left a litter of ore. I clambered in behind Griff, barking my shin in the dark as I did so. "Whoopsie daisy," he advised absently, "watch your footing." As I stepped over to a rock where I could sit and rub the sore spot, he cautioned: "Let's just sort of hang back and look things over before--"

At that instant I felt a familiar tremble. Not my own, but the kind of glory-hole tremor that shook the boarding house every so often; somewhere in the catacombs of copper, dynamite had been routinely set off. I had just started to say to Griff, a bit nervously, that I supposed I'd better get used to that down here, when half the cavern ceiling caved in, with an avalanche roar and a blinding boil of dust.

In Greek dramaturgy there is often an old blind retainer who can smell tragedy and fulfills the role of doomsayer. Miss Runyon was not sightless nor that antiquated, but she was definitely sniffy when she came upon me earlier in the evening as I knelt at the mine model in the Reading Room. "What are you doing here after hours?"

"Trying to learn the inner workings of Butte's claim to fame," I responded truthfully enough. "And you?"

"I forgot my medicinal lozenges and the door was not locked yet," she rightly rebuked me. Her eyeglasses glinted as she whipped them on for a sharper inspection of me and the miniature scaffold-like headframe and tiny threadwork of shafts and tunnels. "That mine was bad luck, you know."

A chill went through me. "How do you mean?"

"Men were killed in it so many times," she said darkly, "that at last the mining company was sued. Its lawyers had this built to try to show safety measures. They were arguing that in court when another miner was crushed to death. Case lost, then and there." She clucked in final disapproval of the diorama behind the smudged glass. "I don't know why that man"--always Sandison-- "keeps something so full of death around. But that's like him, isn't it."

Choking on dust and my ears ringing, I staggered a few steps this way and that in the murky cavern. Desperately I tried to fan away the cloud and find Griff or what was left of him.

In the gloom, something darker yet appeared, also disturbing the dust. It stopped and I stopped. Through a swirl of murk, Griff and I became visible to each other by the whites of our eyes.

Wiping off a mask of dirt, he said: "That's why it's not a good idea to rush into this kind of place." He squinted around as the dust settled. "Lucky thing is, it was the ceiling toward the back that came down." Turning to say something more to me, he stopped, and very slowly raised a pointing finger. "Morrie," he said quietly, "don't be passing the time of day under a Creeping Pete like that." I looked up, to where he was indicating. Overhanging me was a wicked-looking slab of rock, which, if it dropped on a person, definitely would necessitate the services of the undertaker. ~~7~~ Hurriedly I backed away from beneath it as Griff explained that blasting throughout the mine loosened overhead rock in unpredictable places. Studying this cracked mass, he concluded: "Nasty. We're gonna have to bar it down."

He went over to the tool stash in the corner and fished out what looked like a very long skinny crowbar. Armed with that, he began to pry at the slab. After many thrusts and grunts, he succeeded in breaking it loose. When it hit the

floor of the mine with a deafening crash, he grinned at me. "There's one that won't come down on our heads."

Griff moved on to the next overhang, eyes peeled to find the right crack to insert his bar. I stood back as far as I could, spitting out dust, and watched him jab away at the rock until I noticed he was favoring a hand. Remembering the cramp that had done him in during the drilling contest, I took a deep breath and shuffled over to relieve him of the rod. "Here, let me give it a try."

Poking and prodding as if I was using a lance to find chinks in a dragon's hide, eventually I was rewarded with the fall of a chunk about the size of a gravestone. "See there, we'll make a miner out of you yet," Griff commended from the far corner where he was sitting in apparent contentment.

"Not if I can help it." I fanned away more dust and scanned the ominously uneven surface overhead. Trading back and forth, we pried more chunks down until Griff at last called a halt. "Let's have a listen." He took the bar from me and struck the rock ceiling with it. The timbre was surprisingly musical, a high lingering note that resounded rather sweetly. "There, hear that nice clean sound? It ought to be safe now." He tossed the bar aside with satisfaction. "Now we better get to work."

"Digging, you mean?"

"Nope. Mucking."

I waited, but that seemed to be the entire explanation.

"Griff, really, not only aren't we anywhere in the same pew on any of this, we're not even in the same church. The best thing I can see for us to do is to go back and get on that elevator and--"

"Don't worry none, you'll get the hang of mucking in no time."

That turned out to be true if a person had brains enough to operate a shovel. The loose ore strewn on the floor of the ledge had to be scooped-- "mucked out," in Griff's terminology--into those ore cars waiting in the tunnel. "We might as well get at it. The sooner done, the sooner finished," he philosophized unarguably.

We commenced shoveling. Copper ore proved to be the peacock of rocks, mottled blue and green showing off the mineral wealth within. I was up to my shoetops in the wealth of the richest hill on the planet, but in raw lump form. As the task heated up, with Griff tossing two shovelfuls to my every one, he remarked sympathetically:

"It's kind of tough on the muscles at first. Some people can't stay with it."

"I can sweat with the best of them."

"Sweating isn't necessarily the same as hard work, is it."

That pricked my pride. "I'll have you know, I am not a total stranger to manual labor."

He eyed me. "Lately?"

There he had a point. As time wore on, I wore down. I thought our amount of copper-bearing rock flung into the ore cars was heroic, but Griff was not inspired by it. He shook his head reminiscently. "Hoop and me always could fill an ore car while other guys was standing there thinking about it."

"I'm not the second coming of Hoop," I panted.

Just then a baby-faced flunky stuck his head above the edge of the ledge. "Jared says to tell you," he piped in a high voice, "the shifter is coming through."

The youngster vanished while that was still sinking in on me. "Quick!" Griff rubbed dust on my face, even though I already felt grimy as a coal stoker. "Keep those lily hands of yours out of sight."

We heard the crunch of heavy footsteps, and then the shift foreman came climbing the ladder to us. Our carbide lights dimly lit the chamber as he stepped in. Longfaced and gray-mustached, he had the same miner's stoop as Griffith; they leaned toward each other like apostrophes. "Griff, you old poot. I heard you were on the extra gang--can't stay away, eh?"

"You know how it is, Smitty. It gets in your blood."

I was standing back as far as I could in the shadows. It didn't help. The shift boss cocked an unblinking look in my direction. "Who's this?"

"Hoop's kid," Griff said blandly. "He's trying his hand as a fill-in. Been down on his luck, haven't you, Junior." He confided as if I wasn't there: "A little too much of the booze."

The shift boss shook his head. "The company let us know it doesn't want stew bums down here any more. These aren't the old days, Griff."

Trying to backtrack from his mistake, Griff scuffed at the mine floor and started talking nonstop. "Aw, Smitty. What am I gonna tell Hoop, that our old buddy from when we were all working in the Neversweat tied a can to his kid? Hardly seems fair, after Hoop told me: 'Make sure to get Junior in at the thirty hundred level, I don't want him on anybody's shift but Smitty's. Smitty will understand, he's had a few under his belt himself, like the time you and me and him were celebrating payday in the Bucket of Blood and--'"

"Don't pour it on," the shift boss managed to stem that tide. He sucked at his mustache as if straining the dubious impression of me through it. "So, Junior, how do you like mining so far?"

"It's a sobering experience."

He grunted, still studying me skeptically. Walking over to the brink of the ledge, he peered down at our loaded ore cars. I held my breath and could see

Griff doing the same. With a last doubtful look at us, the shift chief backed around and started descending the ladder. "Keep the rock flying, you two."

We more or less did, although even Griff eased off somewhat now that we had survived that inspection. Still, I was sweating so much I felt like a sponge, and every muscle on me was protesting at the labor of hefting the chunks of ore. I was nearly done in by the time a bell signaled somewhere in the distant tunnels.

"Chow time! Here we go." Griff bounded down the ladder and scuttled off, and I followed as best I could. The route he led me on was as twisty and unpredictable as the wildest of the streets of Butte somewhere over us. Here, however, the thoroughfares were a mere few yards wide and there was always the encroaching roof of solid rock or splintery timbering barely overhead. People speak of the ends of the earth, places beyond all normal geography: the South Pole, the Amazon, the Sahara. The deep mine was that extreme to me; even though I knew The Hill was as pierced as the catacombs of Rome, the unending tunnels we were trekking through made me feel trapped in a maze. That feeling redoubled when we came to a place where borehole pathways diverged left and right and Griff abruptly halted. "Let me just kind of sort this out a little."

I waited, twitching, while he studied the two choices, fidgeting considerably himself. At last he swayed into motion in one direction, declaring "The left one's the right one." Was I imagining, or did I hear him mutter to himself, "I think."

This passage showed no signs of recent mining; the dead air of abandonment was unpleasant to breathe. Except when our boots met rocks on the uneven footing, the silence was absolute. And the going became increasingly narrow; I did not have to put out either arm very far to touch a side of the tunnel. This was what the circle of Hell for claustrophobics must be like. Long minutes

passed, and as far as I could tell, we were not getting anywhere except deeper into a labyrinth.

"Griff, are you sure this is the way?"

"Pretty sure. Watch your head on that overhang."

You wonder sometimes where your common sense disappeared to, just when you most needed it. Over and over I asked myself that as I followed Griff towards nowhere. I could not stop remembering the Miners Day drilling contest when his hand had so miserably failed him. My only hope was that the part of his brain which held the instinct of a badger wasn't similarly cramping up.

The tunnel, though, seemed to have no end, and I was frantically wondering whether we had left The Hill behind and and were doomed to roam some crevice of the earth where no other human existed. Finally I could contain my doubts no longer.

"I really and truly think we ought to turn back and--

"Shh. Don't talk so much, Morrie. Let's just have a listen."

We did. Water dripped somewhere. Our own breathing was loud. But faintly, some immeasurable distance ahead, there were voices.

In the beam of my helmet lamp, my guide gave me a silent frogmouth grin. For the life of me, I couldn't tell whether he was as relieved as I was or just being the essential Griff.

We emerged into a musty chamber which had been mucked out and abandoned. Carbide lamps hanging from spikes driven into the rock walls illuminated this cavern, showing a scene of open lunchbuckets and grimy faces as darkened as my own, as though we all were in vaudeville. Naturally Griff seemed acquainted with everyone in sight. There were a dozen or so of these miners of various persuasions and nationalities, Jared in their middle. The only

other one I recognized was Quinlan, who grinned a wolfish welcome. I couldn't care about manners, I was famished. Collapsing onto a convenient rock, I grappled open my lunchbucket and tore into a turkey sandwich Grace had fixed.

# Jared cleared his throat and announced: "Here's the gent I was telling you about."

After a silence broken only by my munching, someone in the jurylike group posed the question prevailing in them all: "He's the brains?"

Quinlan chortled. "They're running out his ears. He has to stick corks in at bedtime, don't you, Morgan."

Swallowing a major bite of sandwich, I managed to respond: "Mental miracles are in short supply with me at the moment. Music lore, I perhaps can provide as Jared has requested."

A man built like a small haystack stirred from where he was squatting against the inmost side of the cavern. "Why should we fiddle around with music," he demanded of Jared in the declarative accent of Cornwall, "when there's every kind of thing to fight Anaconda about?"

"Tell it to the Wobblies, Jack. I can't get to sleep at night without hearing about pie in the sky. Can you?"

"Thee be right, it's somewhat like a bug in the ear," the Cornishman acknowledged, "but a ditty is just a ditty."

"Ah, but it is much more than that," I was roused in defense of melody and lyric. "A song says something to us that we can't hear in any other way. There is a kind of magic to it. Music does not simply soothe the savage beast, it reaches to our better nature, wouldn't we all agree?"

Not a word nor nod from this uncooperative audience.

"A tune keeps us company," I refined that, "when we need a bit of cheer. We don't whistle just to let air out of ourselves, do we?"

Whistlers in their spare time or not, the entire bunch sat there with lips firmly clamped.

"Or," I tried a different tack, "sing in the church choir merely to show off the starch in our shirts?"

Even Griff was looking stony now, in the frieze of unmoved faces.

Frustration giving way to desperation, I burst out: "How else was the Erie Canal dug but to the chant of workmen who had come from the world over *'to see what they could see on the Ee-rye-ee'*? Nor would railroads such as the Union Pacific have conquered the continent without the chorus of Irish tracklayers"--a hopeful glance toward Quinlan here--"swinging their sledgehammers to the rhythm of *'No leshure in your day, no sugar in your tay, working for the U Pay Railway.'*" By then I was onto my feet. "And I would bet any amount, some of you lately marched in the service of your country to the memorable strains of *'You might forget the gas and shell, parlee voo! You might forget the gas and shell, but you'll never forget the Mademoiselle, hinky dinky parlee voo!'*" Head up, chest out, I tramped in place to make the point. Jared's expression said he remembered that anthem of soldiery all too well.

In the dim and shadowed light, expression among my other listeners was mostly limited to brows and eyeballs, and I could see some widened gazes by the time I registered a final ringing *parlee voo!*

After that died away, one of the most grizzled miners spoke up. "All them songs you been reaming our ears out with are for bunchwork, while we're scattered just a few at a time in every mine on The Hill. So what kind of thing are you talking about that would ever fit us?"

"Mmm." Inspiration is hard to produce on demand. "A work song does have to nicely fit the job and its circumstances, you could not be more right," I stalled. "In our instance here, now don't hold me to this as a finished product,

but perhaps something along the lines of--" Insidious as always, the catchy rhythm of "Camptown Races" crept to mind, and in what I like to think of as a passable tenor voice, I improvised:

I'm a miner through and through; you too, you too!

We dig all day and nighttime too, in the Muckaroo!

Utter stillness met the finish of my performance. Eyebrows came down like dropping curtains, and I saw a wince on Griff. "That was merely one of many possible examples," I offered up feebly. Shaking their heads, the miners began gathering themselves, lunchboxes were snapping shut--Jared looked as defeated as I felt. Any hope for a song for the union cause was walking out with these men.

"Wait!" The requisite bar for breaking treacherous slabs loose lay in a corner. Grabbing it up, I stepped front and center in the cavern and struck the ceiling as hard as I could.

The same high sweet tone that Griff had produced in our workspot filled the cavern. Its clarion call halted everyone in mid-motion.

"There, hear that?" I hurried to capitalize on the frozen moment: "That sound--let us call it a musical note because it has such a ring--is one you would all know anywhere, any time of day or night, am I correct?" I noticed both Quinlan and the Cornishman now looking sharply interested, and other faces attentive as well. "The point is, the right kind of song stays in the mind that same way. It's a melodic message that never wears out, in there. And that's what I was endeavoring to tell you about the magic of a work song."

"A work song for us against Anaconda," Quinlan said slowly, the rest of the miners letting him speak for them. "I like that." Off to one side, Griff rocked on his heels as if he knew all along it would come out this way.

Jared jumped in. "We've got Morgan here for brains, we've got over ten thousand voices on this Hill if we just had the right song for them. It's worth a shot, everybody agree?" One by one around the disparate circle of men, heads nodded and *yes*, *yup* and *aye* were heard.

"With one understanding," I made sure to have this understood by all. "Your response to my first little ditty was indicative. The song will have to come from you and the men themselves."

"How's that supposed to happen?" Quinlan demanded. "If any big bunch of us try to get together for it, the cops will be right on us for unlawful assembly."

Jared's gaze of appeal was more than I could turn down. I said:

"Leave that to me."

## 10

You meet yourself in the mirror one morning and wonder if you know the revealed face in the glass. My reflection, after the night spent three thousand feet beneath the surface of the earth, seemed to mockingly remind me the head on my shoulders is mostly bone, not brain. What had dropped away from me, due to Jared's tricky scheme hatched down there in the Muckaroo, was the visage of self-confidence, the appearance of a sure-thinking person that had carried me largely unscathed through the world. Now as I blinked dumbly at myself in the light of day, I seemed to be missing the countenance I had always counted on. Although perhaps it was only the absence of my mustache.

By the time I pulled myself together sufficiently, I was late to breakfast. Griffith and Hooper were done with theirs, but lingering at the table to greet me. Hoop hopped up from his chair and shook my hand as if operating a pump handle. "So you're pitching in with the union, Griff says. We knew you came to Butte for some good reason."

"That remains to be seen," I said woodenly.

"Don't worry," said Griff, he and Hoop grinning their ears off. "We'll help out on the work song business. You just tell us when and where."

Off they went to their day's potterings, and Grace emerged from the kitchen with my warmed-over breakfast. Her arched eyebrows expressed all that was needed.

"I know, I know," I responded to what had not been said. "You told me The Hill is a dangerous place."

Shaking her head, she slipped into a chair and passed me the jam for my cold toast. "What an honor for the Faraday boarding house to have the singing master for the union on the premises," she said grimly.

"I am not the--" I gave up and poked at my plate. "Butte has a way of making a person line up on one side or the other, you may have noticed."

"You like to place a bet now and then," she observed as though I might not have noticed this about myself. "You've just placed one."

"It is only a bit of music," I tried to convince us both. "Who is going to be overly bothered by that?"

"Other than the police, the Anaconda goons, and the Wobblies, do you mean?" During this she crimped a worried frown at me, scratching under an arm. I hoped she was not going to have to reach for her calamine lotion. No, the affliction of the moment was entirely mine, her attitude made clear. "You really have taken on trouble, Morrie, with this. Just where do you think you're going to hold these singalongs and no one will notice?"

"Somewhere near the surface of the earth, definitely." I stroked my upper lip nervously. My eyes met hers. That violet gaze cast its spell on me even when she was being severe. "Your honest opinion, please. Should I grow the mustache back or not?"

Grace being Grace, she provided a deeper reckoning than I had asked for. She pursed the kind of smile one gives as if weaned on a pickle, and said: "Try life without it, why don't you. Men are lucky, you can change your face overnight. That's not bad for a start."

Hers was a more lenient view of me than Sandison's opinion, which was that I looked like a skinned rabbit.

With that, he dismissed my presence in the office and returned to the rare books catalogue he was thumbing through. Hovering at the bulwark of his back, I spoke with forced casualness. "Just so you are apprised, Sandy, there's a new group that will be meeting in the basement."

"What is it now," he drawled without turning around, "some weak-kneed bunch that wants to hold seances?"

"These are not spiritualists, although now that you mention it, spirit is of interest to them."

"Don't let me die of suspense--what's the name of this la-de-da pack?"

"I believe it is the, um, Lyre Club."

"Liars?" His shoulders shook as he laughed long and loud. "You're a case, Morgan. The majority of Butte is already a liars' club."

"No, no, you misconstrue. The meaning in this instance is the stringed instrument that accompanied the words of bards. When Homer smote his lyre, he heard men sing by land and sea, remember?" I drew a breath. "To launch this group, I have been asked to be the guest speaker for a series of sessions."

"You're the main attraction? They must be hard up. What are you going to yatter to them about?"

"Versification," I said, honest enough as far as it went.

"Aren't there enough bad poets in the world already?"

"You never know where the next bard will derive from, Sandy."

"If you want to spend your nights making up nursery rhymes, I guess I can't bring to your senses." He looked around at me as though I had lately lost more than my mustache. "If you ask me, you're going about things all wrong. Why don't you spend your nights sparking Miss Rellis like a red-blooded human being, instead of preaching verse to some bunch of sissies?"

"Actually, she will be on hand at these meetings."

"Oho. Maybe there's hope for you yet, Morgan. Make the most of your Homeric opportunity." Chortling into his beard, he turned back to the wishbook of rare volumes.

Rab was lingering near the office doorway when I came out. "Is he going to let you?"

"We have his blessing," I said moodily.

"I knew you'd make things click. Jared will get word to the others and we're in business, presto!"

"I can hardly wait," I said, my mood not at all improved.

"Good evening, fellow lyrists."

Among the upturned faces as I took center stage in the auditorium, only a faithful few showed any appreciation of my greeting. Rab sent back a warm conniving smile and Jared grinned gamely. In the front row Hoop and Griff looked eager for whatever mischief the night might bring; Quinlan's expression was similarly keen but with a sardonic edge. Most of the others, union stalwarts coaxed by Jared and his council to represent their neighborhoods, showed curiosity at best, and at worst a variety of misgivings. These hardened miners had sifted into the library basement one by one or in pairs; several had brought their wives, weathered women in dark-dyed dresses usually worn to weddings, wakes, and funerals. Life

on The Hill was written in the creased faces staring up at me in my blue serge, and I needed to tap into whatever inspiration I could find, without delay.

"Why the lyre, you may be wondering, as a fitting symbol for our musical quest?" I whirled to the blackboard I had rigged up on Miss Runyon's story-hour tripod and sketched the flowing curves of the instrument, then chalked in the strings. "Poet<sup>S</sup> and singers of ancient Greece took up the lyre to accompany their recitations, wisely enough. It is a civilized instrument that honors a song's words without drowning the intonations out."

"You draw a pretty picture," Quinlan called out, "but come right down to it, Morgan my man, the thing is only a midget harp. How's that going to compete with anything in the Little Red Songbook"--in back of him Jared pained up at those words--"where all you have to do is oil your tonsils a little and bawl out the verse?"

"Just the question I was hoping for, Quin. What the lyre gives us is the word we must strive toward." There was a waiting silence, which I could tell would not last beyond one more fidget from the audience. "Lyrical," I pronounced, and drove the matter home. "The lyrics of the work song for the union cause must sing to the heart as well as the mind."

A miner with a bristling mustache objected. "What'd be wrong with a song that just out and out gives Anaconda hell?"

"I believe that already exists." I warbled the first few lines of 'The Old Copper Collar' in what I have been told is a passable tenor voice. "As apt as that may be, it seems to have had no measurable effect on the sixth floor of the Hennessy Building, has it." Griff looked hurt.

The audience absorbed my performance uncertainly until the Cornish miner from the Muckaroo called out. "Thee speak a good spoke. But what's the first bite of the bun to get this done?"

"Aha! You have just put your tongue to it." I spun to the blackboard and wrote *bun* and *done*. "Rhyme is the mother of song."

That was the overture, musically speaking, in the quest for a battle hymn for the miners of The Hill. <sup>4</sup> With the union contingent now regularly showing up, a martial set to their jaws and unpredictable stirrings in their throats, I had to schedule the various other societies in and out of the library auditorium like carrier pigeons; it would not do for the Poetry and Social Circle gentility to come face to face with restive Dublin Gulch and Finntown, for example. (I could just imagine Quinlan at close quarters with some follower of Swinburne.) No, at all costs I needed to keep the so-called Lyre Society from being brought to Sandison's attention by any complainers. Only too well I remembered how he fumed against "taking sides" when the idled miners sought shelter in the library during the work actions. If he ever divined that the crowd of us in the basement were, shall we say, less than legally assembled to generate a rallying song for the union, all he had to do to be rid of us was to summon the authorities.

Jail was only one worry. Authoritative in their own way and answering to their own shadowy purposes, there were always the goons.

But where were they?

Jared reported that the pair of them had vanished from the mine gate, replaced by uniformed guards not so apt to be taunted as scabs and bombarded with rocks in the night. Accordingly, I sharpened the watch on shadows on my way home from the library in the dark, but the inky shapes at alley mouths and lightless doorways never once materialized into Eel Eyes and Typhoon Tolliver. Which did not put to rest my sense of apprehension. In broad daylight, I was carrying a beautiful matched set of Shakespeare plays to the antiquarian shop for appraisal when I rounded a corner and nearly bumped into a

hulking figure with an upraised club. I jumped back, shielding myself and the works of the Bard against a blow from Typhoon, but it was merely a hod carrier transporting bricks into the building. So, the goons maybe were nowhere to be seen, but to my mind that didn't mean they were not, as the one called Roland had said of me, up to something.

My imagination kept asking, up to what?

"Do me a favor, please, Rab," I felt compelled to ask, when I was sure we would not be overheard in the book stacks as we tackled Tennyson, Thoreau, and Tolstoy. "Just as a hypothetical exercise, mind you, find out from Jared how much granite it takes to withstand dynamite."

"Mr. Morgan, since when are you such a scaredy-cat?" she scolded. She clucked as if I were one of her more dismaying schoolboys. "Besides, I already checked. The walls of the basement auditorium are three feet thick."

"Rhythm," I turned to, the next session of miners and wives sitting immobile as birds on a wire while I paced the stage. "The ebb and rise of sounds, the heartbeat that gives life to the alphabet."

I paused, which never hurts in building up drama.

"In other words, the pattern within each line of a verse. Art imitates nature in this, for we live amid natural rhythms, don't we. For instance, the *pit-pat, pit-pat* of rain," I clapped gently in time with that.

Climatology evidently did not stir this audience. Not even Hoop and Griff in the front row responded with more than stifled yawns.

"Or," I resorted to, "let us take the example of oceanic sound, the anticipatory *swish* of the tide coming in and the conclusive *hiss* of it going out."

insert  
here  
page

anticipatory *swish* of the tide coming in"--I illustrated with my elbows out and my hands sweeping grandly to my chest--"and the conclusive *hiss* of it going out," my arms spreading wide to imaginary watery horizons.



High tide did not seem to register in Butte. Clearing my throat as though the problem of communication might be there in the windpipe, I tried once more:

"In strictly musical terms, a song can attain a distinctive rhythm with repetition of certain syllables or sets of sounds. An example, please, anyone?"

I had not encountered that many mute faces since trying to explain the Phythagorean Theorem in the Marias Coulee schoolroom.

Walking a circle on the stage as if surrounding the problem, I thought out loud for the benefit of the passive gathering. "I assume many of you have children at home? A show of hands, please."

A good proportion of the audience admitted to parenthood.

"And all of us here are former children, am I correct?"

An unsettled chuckle went around the room.

"Therefore, let us approach this matter from that younger time. We are fortunate to have with us someone who, I happen to know, excelled in schoolyard serenade. Miss Rellis? Would you come up, please, and demonstrate?"

Rab colored prettily. Beside her, Jared tried to look as though he was not present during this. "You're too kind, Mr. Morgan," she made a show of demurring, "I'm badly out of practice."

"One never forgets one's specialty. Recess was never complete without it, I have reason to believe."

"Ooh, that. Do you really want me to?"

"Desperately."

"You asked for it, then."

Rab sprang from her seat and paraded up on to the stage. As I had counted on, she showed the admirable zeal of a schoolgirl, but of more interest to this mostly male audience, also the chest and legs of a Ziegfeld chorine. She

proceeded to deliver the playground song in a voice as pretty as she was, her hands instinctively hoisting the hem of her dress a trifle at just the right words:

*Two little lovebirds sitting in a tree,*

*K-I-S-S-I-N-G!*

*First comes love!*

*Then comes marriage!*

*Then comes a baby in a baby carriage!*

*That's not all! That's not it!*

*Now there's another before they quit!*

*That's not it! That's not all!*

*Now comes twins, Peter and Paul!*

I had no more trouble explaining the nature of rhythm.

Hectic nights or not, the library went about its daytime business at its own whirligig pace. Rab and I were kept hopping to finish the inventory before she went back to teaching in a few weeks, and on top of that was my never-ending round of chores devised by Sandison. Reaching the end of a typically crammed week, I was somewhat behind in tabulating the most popular books of the past seven days and typing up the list for the *Daily Post*, and still was slaving away at the checkout slips when I heard footsteps approaching the office at a near trot. Why, just once in his life, couldn't the courier be less than prompt? Glancing up to say something of the sort, I discovered the speed demon coming in the door was not Skinner, but an even skinnier messenger.

"He's busy running bets on some fight," Russian Famine explained nonchalantly. "Said it don't take any brains to do this kind of thing."

"Make yourself comfortable, Famine," I pointed him to a chair, "I'll be a little while yet at this."

Making himself comfortable was the opposite of sitting still, as I should have known. After a bit of trying to put up with his fidgets, I suggested he work off that energy on the back staircase and I'd meet him there. Bouncing up to go, he spun into the doorway and collided with Sandison's belly. The boy gawked up the slope of body, ~~gasped out a strangled~~ ~~wiped his nose on the back of his sleeve,~~ mumbled "'Scuse me," and darted into the hallway.

Sandison stared after him. "What the hell now, do you have us taking in orphans?"

"You have just met our current messenger to the *Daily Post*, Sandy. Butte's version of winged Mercury."

"If he was any scrawnier, he'd be transparent. Where's he off to?"

"Oh, just out among the books. Fam--Wladislaw is interested in higher learning."

Only barely assuaged, Sandison steamed on into the room, took charge of his chair, and wheeled it around to face me. Lately he seemed even more testy than usual. "Sonething's not quite right around here, and for once I don't just mean the library. You've got ears like a donkey when it comes to what's going on in this town. Catch me up."

I hesitated. Saying anything about the rising resolve of the miners' union might brush too close to the fact of the sessions in the basement. I chose to concentrate on the Wobblies and recited the gossip about the arrival of the phantom organizer, fresh from the Seattle general strike.

"Outsiders," Sandison pronounced flatly. "They're always trouble." With that, he heaved himself out of the chair and marched over to the stained glass window to broodily peer out as if watching for trouble to come.

Russian Famine was flying up the top steps when I went to the back staircase with the book list for him to deliver to the newspaper office. For a minute I stood watching, not daring to interrupt the dizzying ballet on the stairs. As before, the scissor-thin legs flashed up the steps three and almost four at a time, then straddled the banister and rode gravity zip-zip-zip to the bottom. Reluctantly I called to him after one these precipitous rides, and shaking his thatch of hair as if coming awake, he trotted over to me.

I thought it best to walk him out of the building, lest he run into Sandison again. While we made our way through the standing ranks of books Rab and I had tallied, the turn of season was on my mind, with her impending departure back to the classroom, and as adults always foolishly do I asked Famine if he was ready for school to start.

The boy put on a long face. "Flunked is what I shoulda done. Hung on in Miss Rellis's class. Now I'll get some old biddy for a teacher." He sent me a sideward look. "I maybe won't be going to school too much longer anyway. Skinner says I'm in luck, the Hennessy bunch has its eye on me when they do any more hiring."

That knifed through me. So much for my bright idea of having posted him to the almighty sixth floor, just for the summer, to watch for any message of a certain sort dispatched by the goons; true to its nature, Anaconda was ready to swallow him up.

"What does your uncle think?" I asked, afraid I knew the answer.

"He says it's up to me." Famine scuffed along, head down. "I don't much want to, but a kid has got to eat."

So, things flew at me like that during those days, and the hours after work, the fledgling lyricists of the Lyre Club were steadily ready to consume. "You're

insert  
blue page

“Has anyone ever told you, my young friend, you give new meaning to the word ‘restless’?”

“Huh uh. You’re the only one who talks that way.”

quite a night owl again," Grace waylaid me as I was about to hustle back to the library one of these times.

My spirits instantly shot upward. How good to have her popping out of the kitchen to trade small talk as she used to. "These evenings, though," I responded in relief, "everyone involved is healthy enough not to require a casket."

"That's not bad--"

--for a start, yes, yes, you needn't remind me." That drew nothing more from Grace; she just hovered in the hallway. The recent distance between us had shrunk to within reach. I chanced hopefully: "If you're feeling daring, would you like to come with me tonight?"

She shook her head, but still made no move to let me by.

"Hoop and Griff, bless their incurably Welsh souls, have taken practically a proprietary interest in the song sessions," I gabbed to break the silence.

Grace pinched her lip, restricting her response to a careful "Mm hmm." I waited, willing her to find whatever words she needed to put us back on the good terms of Miners Day.

Finally she wound her hands in her apron and said:

"Rent day was three days ago, Morrie."

Deflated, I paid up and exited into the night.

The truth was, I unconsciously had been avoiding rent day because I did not want to hear from Grace's lips the words: "*Morrie, it is best if you move on.*" The thought of removing myself to another boarding house, where I wouldn't know whether the person down the hall was a Wobbly, a government snitch, or even a secret goon, unnerved me. Butte already held dangers enough.

At my second home, the library, once more the miners and wives and Rab and Jared and Hoop and Griff and I filed into the basement without the whole

passel of us being hauled off for unlawful assembly. It was a critical night: by dint of my tugging and hauling, we had reached melody, in the steps of song construction. However, I was making scant progress by standing on the stage and humming famous melodies as illustration, and in frustration I bemoaned the auditorium's lack of any means of musical accompaniment.

To my surprise, that put life in my audience. For once there was unanimity, in the knowing grins of everyone but me, even Jared and Rab.

It was left to the Cornishman to ask:

"Has thee not heard of the Butte Stradivarius?"

"I confess I have not."

"Thee shall have that remedied."

The concertina, rapidly fetched and in Cornish hands, could produce any melody I could think of and plenty of its own. The wheezebox, as I came to think of it, made my point that a good tune was essential to a good song.

"That completes the three parts of musical invention," I announced exultantly as the last wheezy strains of "Camptown Races" wafted away into the plaster foliage atop the auditorium walls.

"Rhyme, rhythm," I smacked my fist into my hand with each word, "and melody. Keep those in mind and The Hill and its union shall sing a work song to rival that of the angels in their airy labors." (Or, in my mind and Jared's, to challenge that infernally mocking ballad of pie in the sky by and by.)

This was a proud moment, the craggy miners who had manfully sat through all these instructional nights now slapping their knees and batting their neighbors on the shoulders and shouting out, "Good job, Professor!"

I took a modest bow. "I have done my utmost, and now it is up to you. Appropriately enough, creating the right song will take work, don't think it

won't," I exhorted further. "Inspiration most often follows perspiration. Now then," I advanced to the lip of the stage and made a beckoning gesture to the group, "what ideas do I hear for that song?"

Discord ensued.

The Finns wanted something grand and sonorous, in the manner of a saga.

The Cornish wanted something brisk.

The Irish wanted something rollicking that would tear the hide off Anaconda.

The Welsh, who legitimately had music in their blood, were outnumbered and outshouted by the others, as usual in history.

The Serbs wanted something that dripped blood.

What the Italians wanted was not clear, but it was nowhere close to what the other nationalities had in mind.

Standing up there trying to referee the musical wrangle, I wondered what it took to get committed to a mental institution in Montana.

At last Jared dutifully climbed onto the stage beside me and in his best top-sergeant manner managed to institute some order.

"This is a start," he took command of the chaos in an unarguable style Napoleon might have admired. "There are a few differences of opinion, but talk those over with each other and your shift partners and anybody who can carry a tune, all right? We'll sort out what's promising and what isn't, next time. After that, we'll get all the union delegates from each shift at every mine together, and settle on the best song." Without breaking his cadence of being in charge he asked over his shoulder: "How many people does this place hold, Professor?"

"Hmm? Perhaps two hundred. But you can't--"

"It'll be the damnedest thing they ever heard on the sixth floor of the Hennessy Building," Jared vowed with a fist, "the song when we get it. Folks will

sing it in this town as long as there's a chunk of copper left in The Hill." He clapped his hands, once, sharply. "Now let's go home and get to working on the work song, everybody."

As the group dispersed, I stood by numbly, still jolted by Jared's fervent promise to assemble two hundred miners here in a library space where they were not supposed to assemble at all. Knowing perfectly well that if I asked him, "How?" the reply was going to be, "Professor, I leave that to you."

Quinlan passed by me with a troublesome grin, humming to himself. That tune at least was unmistakable. *"Same song, second verse. Could get better, but it's gonna get worse."*

When I closed up the library, Rab and Jared were waiting for me down on the steps. "Come with us to the Purity for pie," he invited, direct even when he was being pleasant. "I'll even buy."

I joined them, and the sound of our footsteps was our only company on the lamplit streets ~~as we walked along and talked~~. Of course Rab had a dozen enthusiasms about what the sought-after song should be like, and Jared winnowed those in his wry fashion. I contributed what I could, although my head was a swirl. A crowd of two hundred, to get past the police, the goons, and perhaps most consequential of all, Samuel Sandison, without attracting attention? My mind went back and forth over this <sup>which</sup> ~~and that~~ simply dug the problem in deeper. My mood was not helped when we passed the *Daily Post* building and I saw that even the so-called autumn classic, the World Series, was jinxed this wayward year; the scoreboard being set up for the forthcoming games announced the Cincinnati Red Stockings versus--Skinner would crow to me unmercifully--the Chicago White Sox. The Anklet Series, I thought of it with disgust. Where were

the teams with good sound contentious names, Cubs, Tigers, Pirates? When even baseball starts to go downhill, I grieved, there's no telling what will follow.

My brooding spell was broken by Jared as we neared the cafeteria. He tugged at his short ear as he did when thinking hard, and Rab attentively shut up. Looking around to make sure we couldn't be overheard, he said in a voice low but firm:

"Just so you know, Professor. The Hill is going on strike pretty damn quick."

I hoped his wording was a slip of the tongue. "Another work action, you mean."

"That's the farthest thing from what he means, Mr. Morgan," said Rab.

"She's right as usual," Jared acknowledged, giving her a wink.

~~"Anaconda still won't meet us halfway on anything, and those of us on the council have a hunch they're about to dock the dollar off the wage again. If that happens," his tone became even more confidential, "we won't have any choice. We'll have to call a strike." In the streetlight there outside the cafeteria, I saw him grimace as he looked up at The Hill and listened for a moment to the drivewheel sound of the mines at work. "It's always tough on the town, to shut everything down. But Butte has been through strikes before, everybody understands it's our only way to fight back against Anaconda."~~

insert  
blue  
page

"Jared, I must know," another apprehension creeping up on me, "how quick is 'pretty damn quick'?"

"After the next payday, let's say. Doesn't leave you any too much time, does it."

I blanched. That soon? To come up with the union song necessary to rally his forces? From an aggregate of miners who didn't agree on anything musically except the sublime charm of the concertina?

He was all seriousness as he turned to me again. "We've negotiated until we're blue in the face, and Anaconda still won't meet us halfway on anything that counts. Worse than that, those of us on the council have a hunch the company is about to cut the dollar off the wage again. If that happens," his tone became even more resolved, "we won't have any choice. The union will either have to curl up and die or call a strike." He paused over the next, knowing it loomed large in Rab's mind and my own. "If troops are sent in, there are plenty of us who have faced troops before. We'll just have to see how that goes." In the streetlight there outside the cafeteria, I saw Jared square his shoulders as he looked up at the lights of The Hill and listened for a moment to the drivewheel sound of the mines at work. In another battle, of another sort, he must have sized up Dead Man's Hill similarly before the attack up the slope. Now he shifted his gaze to the slumbering city around us. "It's always tough on the town, to shut everything down," he said solemnly. "But Butte has been through strikes before. They're part of life here. Everybody understands it's our only way to fight back against Anaconda."

Jared nodded as if reading my mind. "I know it'll take some doing. But we'll need all the ammunition we can get when the strike comes." He touched my shoulder. "The song counts for a lot, Professor. I want it in the head of every miner on The Hill, to hold us together."

"Inspiration follows perspiration, you did say, Mr. Morgan," Rab contributed all too helpfully.

At least one thing stayed the same in the Butte night; the owner of the Purity with a glad cry ushered us in to serve ourselves.

Thus, there was everything but library business to be on my mind during business hours at the library the following day. Which may explain the next thing to happen. I was mechanically on my way between one chore and another in a rear hallway when a shadow not my own loomed on the wall beside me. Instinctively I whirled and put my back against the wall, digging with both hands for my brass defenders.

"Famine!" I exhaled with relief. "You surprised me a little."

"Didn't mean to spook you." He handed me an envelope. "Told me you wanted to see anything with Shycago on it."

I glanced at the Chicago postmark and the kind of chill that supposedly occurs when some creature of the night treads across one's gravesite came over me.

"Have yourself some ice cream," I rewarded my trustworthy messenger with enough money for a vat of it, "and then come back." I trotted downstairs to the auditorium. The Theosophists' electric tea kettle steamed the envelope open quite nicely.

Two pieces of paper shook out, dire as loaded dice.

*"There's goods to be got on anybody, sucker."* Eel Eyes' parting shot resounded in me like a cannonade as I examined the sheets one by one. You should never underestimate even the most thickheaded adversary. The goons had been even more determined to get something on me than I imagined. Who knew how many underworlds they'd had to try, but they hit paydirt in a certain den of high-rollers beside Lake Michigan. What I was holding was a print of the photograph from Miners Day, Grace and myself frozen-faced as missionaries with the splendor of Columbia Gardens around us. My head was circled in red crayon like a target.

The letter that came with was even worse.

"Photo you sent is positive identification: real name Morgan Llewellyn. Capture him and deliver him to us. We have an old score to settle."

There was more, but that told the story. The Chicago gambling mob did not forgive, it never even forgot. Like hounds stirred from sleep by an old hunting scent, the betting sharpies were roused all over again about Casper's last fight and our winnings, and I had to act fast.

Reflex and logic agreed on the same piece of advice: take the next train out of town. Put all possible distance between the contents of the envelope and myself. But that left Grace, literally in the picture next to me, and in for nasty interrogation by Eel Eyes and Typhoon if I wasn't available. Besides, if I fled now I would be leaving other loose ends flapping in this Butte chapter of life, and that would bother me for the rest of my days.

With the troublesome pieces of paper tucked inside my suitcoat, I made my way upstairs to the mezzanine, thinking as hard as it is possible to think. Rab had gone out with an armload of books for appraisal by the antiquarian dealer; that helped. And further luck; this was one of the times when the imperious Dora, bless her soul, was putting in an appearance in the Reading Room, from the

sound of it demanding a volume about Mozart so new that it hadn't been catalogued yet. Sandison down there trying to mediate between his willful wife and the seething Miss Runyon would have his hands full for a while, I was relieved to see. My path was clear, and indicatively it led through an aisle of fiction. Passing through the ranks of Twain and Defoe and the others as I slipped into the office, I was in the company of those who best knew that a greater truth can sometimes be told by making things up. And those wise old heads did not even have my magic kit to work with, the typewriter and fountain pen.

I had two envelopes waiting for Famine to deliver when he returned. In the one from Chicago, the goons now were informed in nice fresh typing with a copied signature that, alas, this was a case of mistaken identity, no one back there had ever laid eyes on the nobodies in the photo. In the one to go into the mail to Chicago, the gambling mob was notified that, regrettably, its message had arrived too late, the miscreant Morgan Llewellyn had vanished from Butte.

"You look sunny this morning," Grace observed.

As I sat down to breakfast that next day, it was all I could do not to reach over and pat her on the cheek in celebration of our mutual survival. "A sound night's sleep does wonders," I restricted myself to. She herself looked refreshed by something, taking time off from the kitchen to sit and sip coffee until Hoop and Griff ever appeared. I still was only a boarder and she still was the landlady, but when Grace wasn't having to doctor herself against her own nerves, she also was a very attractive companion at the table. Right now, with her freshly braided hair a coil of gold, she resembled the sunshiny maiden on the lid of tinned shortbread. The sovereign maiden in charge of all such tinned goods, that is. While I was in the midst of such thoughts she gave me, in the words of the poet, a brightening glance, and I smiled gamely back. Maybe this was only a mild degree of thaw

between us, but it improved the climate. She watched me expectantly as I settled into eating. "Well, have you noticed?"

Whatever it was, it hadn't caught my attention yet; certainly the cold toast was the same as ever.

"The house, Morrie," she prompted, "the house!"

"Ah." I scanned around. "New curtains?"

"All right, you," she said in mock exasperation--at least I hoped it was mock. "There hasn't been any dynamiting for days and days, has there." She knocked on wood, but her smile was triumphant. "I was curious," she continued in a confiding tone, "so I had Arthur's old partner <sup>in the mine</sup> look into it for me. And guess what? The shaft under here is played out and Anaconda has had to seal it off. You can quit worrying about sleeping in a glory hole," she teased.

Little did she know that the Chicago watery version had just passed me by. "Grace, that's nice news," I could say unreservedly, "Butte would not be the same without the Faraday boarding house."

Bouncing up when she heard Hoop and Griff on the stairs, she went off to fry their breakfast.

The two of them came in grinning, grinned at each other, then grinned at me some more as they sat to the table.

"We been thinking," said Hoop as if it was something new.

"You've got yourself a lulu of a problem, slipping a couple hundred people into the library the night the song gets voted on," Griff said as if that fact might have escaped me.

"Wouldn't be the first time the cops broke up a meeting and arrested everybody in sight," Hoop went on, tucking in his napkin.

"Righto," Griff confirmed, spooning sugar into his coffee. "So we figure what you need, Morrie, is an eisteddfod."

# — I did not want to say that something pronounced eye-steth-vod stumped me as much as if he had been speaking mumbo-jumbo. But it did.

"Perhaps you could elaborate on that just a bit, Griff."

"Glad to. Like everybody knows, an eisteddfod is when the finest singers and the greatest bards in Wales all gather from the hills and the valleys and every minepit from Caernarvon to Caerphilly," he swept a knobby hand around like an impresario, "and try to outdo one another."

"Kind of a jollification," Hoop put in. "Like Miners Day that just don't stop."

With that, my tablemates sat back and slurped coffee, magnanimously ready for all due praise.

"I see," I coughed out. "Actually, I don't. The Welsh miners are the only ones who would have any idea what an eye--eisteddfod is, and they're just a handful among the song bunch. Everyone else?" I spread my hands.

Griff squinted at me. "You're a little slow on the uptake today, Morrie. Everyone else *outside* of the song bunch, after we clue those in."

"Nobody is gonna go near the thing," Hoop expanded on that, "who don't know the lingo."

Thinking back to the Welsh minister and the tongue-tying eternity of tragwyddoldeb, I couldn't argue with that.

Somewhat against my better judgment, I tested the matter out loud.

"Such as the public at large and the police, you mean." Both wrinkled heads bobbed at my response, gratified that I was catching up. My tablemates now took turns expanding on why an indecipherable event that would unobtrusively slip a couple of hundred people into the basement of the Butte Public Library was such a surefire idea.

Grace came from the kitchen with a plate in each hand, stopping short at Griff's grand culmination:

"Hooper and me can handle the whole proceedings for you, don't worry none."

I had not really started to, until he said that.

It was like trying to rein in runaway horses, but I managed to make the pair promise to contain their eisteddfod enthusiasm until I could test the notion on Jared. Meanwhile, I was late and had to bolt for the library. People were out and about in unusual numbers, I couldn't help but notice, all heading down toward the railroad tracks where a sizable crowd had already gathered. Another political figure arriving to Butte, I presumed, but President Wilson himself would not be a shield against Sandison's displeasure if I wasn't in the headcount of staff before he opened the library.

Too late. When I got there, everyone had gone in but Rab, who was practically dancing with impatience as I hastened up the steps. "Mr. Morgan, you came from that direction," she spoke so fast it was nearly all one word, "did you see it?"

This was not my day, linguistically. "Do you suppose, Rab, you could take a deep breath and define 'it' for me?"

She was as disappointed in me as Hooper and Griffith had been. "Oh, here." Whisking over to a stack of newly delivered *Daily Posts* beside the doorway, she handed me one with fresh ink practically oozing from the EXTRA! atop the front page.

Beneath that, the even larger headline:

OUTSIDE AGITATORS WARNED.

And below that, a jolting photograph of the railroad overpass where the IWW organizer had been lynched a few years before. From the middle of the trestle girders dangled a hangman's noose. Attached to the rope was a sign readable even in the grainy newsprint reproduction:

THE MONTANA NECKTIE

YOU ONLY WEAR IT ONCE

WOBS AND OTHER TROUBLEMAKERS--

LEAVE TOWN BEFORE THIS FITS YOU

Digesting this, I had mixed reactions. Plainly the goons, stymied about me after Chicago was no help, had broadened their approach to include any other strangers in the vicinity of The Hill; when you are a target, I have to say, you do appreciate having that kind of attention shared around. On the other hand, a noose just down the street from where you lay your head at night is still too close for comfort.

"Jared says the police are taking their sweet time about removing it," Rab confided over my shoulder, again as fast as words could follow one another, "so Anaconda gets to scare everybody."

"We have to let Jared handle that," I stated, "while we have to get inside and handle books or face the wrath of our employer."

Her mischievous laugh surprised me. "We wouldn't want that, heaven knows."

Dispatching Rab to take out her ardor on the book collection, I had to tend to a few office matters before joining her. If I was in luck, Sandison would be out on one of his prowls of the building. But no. There he sat, stormy as thunder. Before I could utter any excuse for being late, he flapped the *Post's* front page at me. "Did you see this damn thing?"

"By this hour of the day, I believe everyone in the city has seen either the newspaper or the actual piece of rope, Sandy."

"This town," he said in a tone that it hurt to hear. "It just can't resist having dirty laundry out in the open. Hell, anyone knows outsiders are asking for it, that's where rope law comes from." <sup>#</sup>Saying that, he took another furious look at the front page photograph, his gaze so hot I thought the paper might singe.

<sup>#</sup>"The 'Montana necktie'," he ground out the words, "what's the sense of dragging that up?" He started to say something more, but instead crushed the newspaper in the vise of his hands and thrust it into the wastebasket.

I stood there gaping at the outburst until his glare shifted to me. "Don't you have anything to do but stand there with your face hanging out?"

I left in a hurry. The calm ranks of the books on the mezzanine were particularly welcome after that. Was there any way in this world to predict the actions of their combustible collector? None that I had found, surely. <sup>#</sup>Hearing me come, Rab spun from the shelf where she had been flicking open covers to look for the SSS bookplates. "This is the day, you know."

From my experience, that could be said about every twenty-four hours in Butte. But I did know what she meant.

"The sixth grade is about to meet its match," I said with a smile. Tomorrow was the start of school and the teaching year of Miss Rellis, as she had to turn into. I was going to miss Rab's company and the noble ranks of the inventory. Reaching to the shelf nearest her, I asked: "Ready?" She nodded. Into her waiting arms I stacked the plump volumes of *Therese Raquin*, *Nana*, *Germinal*, and on top the slim elegant masterpiece *J'accuse*; Zola, the end of the inventory alphabet.

"The ones we've been looking for," she joked a little sadly as we went to the sorting room to tally these treasures in with the rest.

"Maybe the full inventory will improve Sandison's disposition," I thought out loud. "The commotion about the noose seems to offend his civic sensibilities."

The mischievous laugh again. "Quit being funny, Mr. Morgan."

"Rab, really, you are not being fair to our employer." For whatever reason I felt tender toward Sandison in his upset mood. "I grant you he has a bit of a temper, but we shouldn't judge him entirely on that. It is a truth as old as humankind that the presence of a shortcoming in a person does not preclude the existence of other worthier attributes in that same--why are you looking at me like that?"

Rab had the magpie gleam of possessing the hidden morsel. "Don't you know who Sam Sandison is? He's the Strangler."

## 11

Rabrab's words went directly to my windpipe.

When I recovered enough air to speak, it still was more of a squeak. "Rab, you might have said so before now. Are you telling me the man I share an office with goes around throttling people?"

"Not that he was ever caught at it himself," she said as if explaining etiquette to a child. "He had mugs who worked for him do the thing. 'Necktie makers,' they were called. Vigilantes." She looked at me closely. "You know: types who hang first and ask questions later."

"I grasp the terminology," I fumbled out. "What I am uninformed about is who my employer has had strangled and why?"

"Cattle rustlers," she answered both of those. "Or anybody who looked like one, to those cowboys of his." Rabrab calculated with the aplomb of a hanging judge herself. "Plenty of them had it coming, probably. But some might have been small operators whose cows and calves the Triple S herd just got mixed in with. You know the saying about a rope"--she looked at me as if I likely did not--"one size fits all."

"But--" Still stunned, I tried to reconcile the two Samuel Sandisons, the one who petted rare books as if they were living things and the other who used lethal means without thinking twice. "How can a, a vigilante be permitted to run a public institution such as this?"

"Oh, I suppose people think those old hangings were a long time ago," Rab reasoned. "After all, Butte is where a lot of people get over their past, isn't it. Mr. Morgan, are you feeling all right?"

"The start of a headache," I replied truthfully enough. It was scarcely twenty-four hours since I wriggled free from the grasp of the goons and the Chicago betting mob, and now I found out my library refuge was in the grip of a hangman. Whose method of tapping the library payroll budget to accumulate literary treasures in his own name was known only to me. This was an unhealthy turn of events, to say the least.

"MORGAN!"

I nearly jumped out of my hide, but managed to face around to the white-maned figure looming at the end of the aisle of bookshelves. Sandison looked as if he had grown even more enormous since I saw him minutes before.

"Drag your carcass to the office," he bawled out, turning away, "I want to talk to you."

Rab bade me off by wrinkling her nose prettily. "He really is something, isn't he."

I went in determined not to tremble. I suppose the blindfolded man facing a firing squad tries that, too. At the other end of the office, Sandison's black suit was the darkest kind of outline against the stained glass window jeweled with colors. He swung around to face me, saying nothing, sizing me up. Between us,

on his desk, lay the smoothed-out newspaper with the emphatic photograph of the noose.

"Sandy?" I gambled, not for the first time, by taking the initiative. "I believe you wanted to see me about some minor matter?"

He grunted and advanced toward me as if he needed a closer look. The gleam in his eye seemed diamond-sharp. "You're an odd duck, Morgan," he declared, halting an uncomfortably short distance from me, "but you're cultured, I have to hand you that. You damn well mean it when you jabber about the music of men's lives, don't you."

A weird hope sprang up in me. Maybe he had discovered I was flouting his orders against "taking sides" by letting the miners congregate in the basement in search of a song and was merely going to fire me. I would take that instead of a death sentence any day.

"Anyhow," he immediately brushed aside that hope, "we can talk about that tomorrow. You're coming with me in the morning."

"Where to?" I asked over the thump of my heart.

The white whiskers aimed at me. "A place you ought to see. Section 37."

Was that a joke from Samuel Sandison? If so, it was his first. I cleared my throat, to try to speak without a quaver.

"Perhaps, Sandy, you could elaborate a bit on that destina--"

Somewhere within the whisker cloud he snorted. "What's the matter, sissy, coming down with a case of *Hic sunt dracones*?"

I had to bridle at that. A measure of caution about traveling in the company of someone nicknamed the Strangler did not equate me with skittish mariners of old who feared sailing off the edge of the map into the abyss that carried the warning *Here be dragons*, I felt.

"That's hardly fair, I am only naturally curious as to--"

Sandison did not pause over my hurt feelings. "Meet me at the depot, good and sharp." He specified the six a.m. westbound train.

There was a midnight train. Eastbound.

*Why not be on it?* the ceiling posed the question, a certain seam in the plaster railtrack-straight above me as I lay fully clothed on my bed. I was as alone as ever in this latest dilemma. At supper, Hoop and Griff had been as animated as sideshow barkers, while Grace put actual cutlets on the table in evident celebration of the boarding house's new lease on life. No one seemed to pay any attention to my unmoored state of mind; when that happens, it makes you wonder about your normal mien.

The bed was crowded with debate. Sandison was a latent noose-wielding unpredictable madman. Or not. He'd had the perfectly sound business sense to hire me, didn't he. Just to be on the safe side, though, pack the valise for the train; saying a permanent goodbye to Butte would be only a strategic withdrawal, after all. But so was Napoleon's retreat from Moscow.

My head now really did ache from going back and forth. I checked my pocket watch again. Midnight was not far off. Abruptly my mind made itself up, almost as if I had not participated. I scrambled off the bed.

Quietly as I could, I opened the door of my room. and tiptoed into the hall. SnORES emanated from Griff's room and Hoop's next to his; at the end of the hall, Grace's bedroom kept a silence. Feeling like a burglar in the darkened house, I slipped past one door. Then another. And stealthily turned the doorknob of the end one.

I crept to the sleeping form and, hesitating just a bit, shook the bare shoulder where the nightdress had slipped down.

"Grace, I hate to interrupt your slumber. But I must talk to you."

My whisper penetrated as if I had jabbed her. Bolting upright in the bed, she clutched the coverlet around her, huskily reciting: "In the name of decency, Morrie, we really ought not--"

"This is imperative or"--I looked at the ivory slope of shoulder still showing--"I would not come uninvited. Please just listen, Grace."

Vigilantly, she did so while I told her she had to be my witness, to attest to my good health before boarding the train in the morning with Samuel Sandison.

"That way, he will be made to know--I won't reveal your name to him--someone saw me alive and in one piece when I left with him. Someone who will go to the police if I do not come back intact."

"The police, is it." There was just enough light in the room that I could see she had let down her flaxen hair when she went to bed, and now she ran a hand through the long tresses. "Morrie, you are the most complicated boarder there ever was."

"I wish I could dispute that."

"Why do I have the honor of this, why not Griff and Hoop?"

"They've been at a union meeting and you know the condition they come home in after that."

Grace gave an extended sigh. "All right, you want a sober witness. But why go with Sandison at all?"

"He's the kind who will not let loose of an idea--the man is a bulldog. If I don't humor him on this, he'll do away with my job at the library. Then I wouldn't have charge of the auditorium. Then the eisteddfod can't be held in the--it's, well, complicated."

All that was wordlessly weighed on the landlady scale of things. Then she patted my hand there in the dark, in a feathery way that was either shy or sly. "I

would only be telling the truth if I said you had life in you the last I saw of you, wouldn't I."

An honest enough affidavit, under the circumstances. I returned her caress pat for pat. If I could trust anyone in Butte, it was Grace.

If I could trust anyone in Butte.

"Sandy, how are we to do this?" Stumbling along before dawn in Sandison's wake, I dubiously approached the depot platform. "If I am not mistaken, those are ore cars." The line of heaped railcars stretched off as far as I could see in the dim light.

"Keep walking, don't be a nervous nelly." Sandison strode along recklessly enough himself that I wished the pair of depot goons would pop around a corner and be steamrollered by him. No such justice, however, at that early hour. Only a yawning conductor, beside what I perceived to be one lone Pullman car behind the train engine, stood in our line of march.

We were the only passengers. As the train lurched into motion, I could contain the question no longer. "West is a long direction--where exactly do we get off?"

My traveling companion grumpily pawed at his whiskers as if herding the word out.

"Anaconda."

"The company?"

"The town."

It turned out to be both. A company town, Anaconda was as orderly and contained as Butte was sprawling and unruly. The train pulled in past boxy workers' houses lined up in neat rows, along streets laid as straight as shelves.

Sandison appeared to pay no heed to the town itself, gazing away into the valley beyond and, I supposed, whatever the neverland of Section Thirty-seven proved to be. At least, I thought as I looked out the window on that side of the train, it was a bright clear day for this. I happened to look out the other side, and the sky was clothed in heavy gray.

When the two of us climbed off at the trim crenellated depot, another chess piece of municipal order, the division in the sky over Anaconda was made plain. On a slope above the murky side of town could be seen the immense smelter for copper ore such as had accompanied us from Butte, and dominant over the smelting works stood a skyscraping smokestack, thickly built but hundreds of feet tall. The scene leapt from every accusatory line ever written about dark satanic mills--the smokestack like the devil's forefinger, black fume trailing evilly as it pointed its challenge to heaven.

Dumbstruck as I was by this sight, only slowly did I register the other product of the smelter besides copper and smoke, a series of slag heaps surrounding the town like barren hills.

"That's Anaconda for you," Sandison growled. "Let's get a move on." So saying, he stalked off toward a livery stable across the tracks.

Now I was alarmed. A saddlehorse is not my preferred mode of transportation. Of necessity, I had spent some time horseback during my prairie teaching career, but no more than I had to. Sandison brayed to the stableman that we wanted genuine riding stock, not nags, and shortly I found myself holding the reins of a restless black horse with a bald face, named <sup>Midnight</sup> Night. When a rangy steel-gray steed was brought out for Sandison, he looked in disgust at the stirrups on the rented saddle and lengthened them six inches to account for his height. That done, despite his bulk he swung up onto the horse as easily as a boy and waited impatiently for me to hoist onto mine.

"Going to be a blisterer out in the valley. Here." He tossed me a canvas water bag to tie to my saddle and spurred his horse into motion, leaving Midnight and me to catch up.

We managed to do so at the edge of town, past one last ugly dark slag heap where children ran up and down. With the cries of their playing fading behind us, the horseback pair of us cantered into another existence entirely, a sudden savannah-like landscape that seemed to exhale in relief at leaving the pall of Anaconda behind.

The valley extending before us was a classic oval of geography, broad and perfect as a French painting. Rimmed by mountains substantial enough to shoulder snow year-round, the valley floor was uninterrupted green except for a few distant settlements strung out near a willowed river like memory beads on a thong. Gazing wide-eyed at the breadth of landscape--truly, here a person was a fleck on the sea of ground--I said something about this startling amount of open country so near the industrial confines of Butte and Anaconda.

Unexpectedly Sandison reined to a halt, and I pulled up beside him. He massively shifted in his saddle to turn in my direction. "Take a good look, Morgan. I owned it all."

At first I thought he meant the plot of land we were riding across. Then realized he meant the entire valley.

I cannot forget that moment. Picture it if you will. A woosack of a man, surely two hundred and fifty pounds, nearly twice of me, sitting on his horse looking down on me like a wild-bearded mad king.

Suddenly he raised a meaty hand and swiped it toward me.

Paralyzed, I felt the swish of air as the thick palm passed my face and descended to mash a horsefly on the neck of my mount.

Flicking away the fly carcass, he rumbled: "Don't just sit there with your face hanging out, we've got a ways to go."

He put his horse into a trot, and mine followed suit. I rode tightly holding the reins and my Stetson. In Montana, it is a good idea to keep your hat on your head so the wind doesn't blow your hair off. Besides, it gave me something to concentrate on other than Sandison's behavior. Keen as a tracker, he stood in his stirrups every so often to peer ahead at the print of ruts we were following; it might once have been a road, but looked long unused.

Leading to where? There were wide open spaces around us to all the horizons, but no arithmetic of logic that I could find in the destination Sandison had set for us. I knew from my time among the homesteads of Marias Coulee that land is surveyed into townships of thirty-six sections, each section a square mile. The numbering starts over at each township. Where then--and for that matter, what?--was Section 37? Was I going to survive to find out?

After an eternity of joggling along, we came to a plot of land boxed by a barbwire fence. We--rather, I--opened the treacherously barbed gate, and the horses stepped through, skittish enough about it that they had to be reined hard.

It could be said they were showing horse sense. The ground changed here. The soil, to call it that, had an unhealthy grayish hue, like the pallor of a very sick person. The sudden change was puzzling to me. I did not know thing one about the raising of cattle, but what was beneath our horses' hooves would not pasture any creature, I was quite sure.

My riding companion now simply sat in his saddle, lost in contemplation of the expanse of valley. I resorted to my water bag. The day was warming to an extreme, and I could see sweat running down Sandison's cheeks into his beard, although he paid it no heed.

"Back then," he all at once spoke in the voice of a man possessed, "this was a paradise of grass. And I bought up homestead claims and mining claims and all other kinds of land here until every square foot of it was Triple S range. I tell you, there never was a better ranch nor a prettier one." His words cast a spell. What a picture it made in the mind, the green valley filled with red cattle with that sinuous brand on their hips.

The bearded head swung in my direction. His voice dropped ominously. "Then it got to be the old story. The snake into Eden." The meaty hand swept around again and pointed, past my flinch, over my shoulder.

"That thing."

He had taken dead aim at the smelter stack. Even at this distance, the giant chimney dwarfed all of nature around it, clouding that half of the horizon like a permanent storm. Staring at that ashen plume along with Sandison, I felt something more oppressive creep over me than the heat of the day.

With a great grunt he climbed down from his horse, stooped low and scooped a handful of dirt. Holding the dull-colored stuff up to me, he uttered:

"Here. Have some arsenic."

Choosing to consider that rhetorical, I cleared my throat and managed to respond.

"Sandy, am I to understand we are camped on a patch of poison?"

"That's what it comes down to," he said, letting the unhealthy soil sift from his fist. Each word bitter, he recited to me that the furnaces of the smelting process released arsenic and sulphur, and the Anaconda stack piped those into the air like a ceaseless spout. Wiping his hand on his pantleg, he went on: "It kills cattle like picking them off with a rifle. The first year after the smokestack came in, we lost a thousand head. Hell, it wasn't ranching any more. All we were doing was burning carcasses." He shook his head violently at the memory. "We sued the mining

company every way there is. The Anaconda bunch had the big money for Eastern lawyers, so they beat us. But that was later.” His voice sharpened again. He gestured as if in dismissal toward the smokestack and its almighty smudge. “That isn’t what you’re here to see. Let’s get to it.” With cowboy agility, he again swung onto his horse and headed us toward a grove of trees along a slip of a stream not far ahead. Damp as I was with sweat from the unrelenting sun--and perhaps from Sandison--I welcomed the notion of shade.

The trees, though, as we approached were mainly leafless. What had been a thicket was now a stand of lifeless trunks and limbs, graying above the soil that had sickened them. In the midst of the witchy trees stood eight or ten huge old cottonwoods, dying more slowly than the rest.

Sandison dismounted and walked his horse over to the nearest great wrinkled trunk. I gingerly did likewise. Under a big overhanging limb, he turned to me with that unsettling royal glint in his eyes again.

“Welcome to the grove of justice, Morgan.”

At first I did not take his meaning.

“It was before copper was on everyone’s mind,” he began. “This valley was just sitting here, best place on the face of the earth to raise cattle. My backers put up most of the money and I built the herd, cows from here to breakfast. Until one branding time when the count was way off. There weren’t dead cows laying around from winterkill or some disease, so you didn’t need to be a genius to figure out the malady was rustlers.” The fixed intensity of that blue gaze was hypnotic as he told it all. “The money men threw a fit, said if it happened again they’d sell the place out from under me. They were town men, they didn’t have a fig of notion about how you have to let the good years carry you through the bad ones in the livestock business. I had to do something to keep the herd count up or lose the ranch.” Trickle of sweat from under his hat into his beard retraced that