

--and stray cats from half the world and--" The lesser thug's yammering broke off and he eyed me suspiciously. "What're you cocking your head like that for?"

"Just listening for the clink of your own medals."

You find concern for reputation in strange places. The pointy face reddened to the same tint Tolliver's had. "I kept the peace here at home."

"I can imagine."

"Hey, punk, a smart aleck like you can end up in a glory hole if you don't watch your--"

*Swish*, and then *bang!* All three of us jumped.

Samuel Sandison towered in the doorway, the flung-open door still quivering on its hinges behind him. "What's this? The idlers' club in session?"

All at once there was more breathing room around me, both goons stepping back from the perimeter of authority Sandison seemed to bring with him. What was I seeing? He was twice their age, and though of a size with Tolliver, no physical match. Yet the two burly interlopers now looked very much like spooked schoolboys. Why the white-faced wariness all of a sudden?

Sandison's ice-blue gaze swept over them and onto me, and I blinked innocently back. "We're only here because this helper of yours is up to something," the pointy-faced one was saying, not quite stammering, "and the people we work for need to know what he's--"

"Quiet!" Sandison boomed, the word resounding in the enclosed room. "You tell them on the top floor of the Hennessy Building that they maybe run everything else they get their hands on, but not this library. Clear out of here, and I mean now."

The pair cleared out, but not without glares over their beefy shoulders at me.



Now all I faced was the stormcloud of beard. Sandison inspected me as if having missed some major feature until then. "Miss Runyon told me you were taking an unconscionably long time down here. Morgan? Are you up to something?"

"Sandy, I swear to you, I am an utter stranger to the battles of Butte." That left Chicago out of it.

He shook his head. "If you weren't such a book man, I wouldn't have you on the payroll for more than a minute." Turning to go, he said as if he was ordering me to head off a stampede: "Get the damn corkboard rigged up so we don't have to hear any more from that old heifer Runyon about it."

I picked at my food that suppertime, drawing a look of concern from Grace. "More turkey, Morrie? It's not like you to be off your feed."

Down the table, two sets of bushy gray eyebrows squinched in similar regard of me. Neither Hoop nor Griff asked anything about my disturbing day, however, in respect of our pact not to bother Grace's head about the goons' interest in me. Pushing away my plate, I alibied: "A touch of stomach disorder, is all. Nothing a restful evening in my room can't fix, I'm sure."

Upstairs, flat on my back atop the dragon coverlet while I stared at the ceiling and waited for inspiration of some sort to show up, I never felt less sure of fixing anything. The zigzags of life were more puzzling than ever. There I lay, in the most comfortable circumstances I had known for a long while, with work that nicely employed my mind, and the goons of the world were sure I was a secret operative for the most radical wing of the laboring class. It was dizzying. If America was a melting pot, Butte seemed to be its boiling point. The Richest Hill was turning out to be also a Cemetery Ridge of copper to be fought over, and some trick of fate had dumped Morris Morgan--all right; Morgan Llewellyn--right in the



middle of it. Not the spot I thought I was choosing when I stepped down from that train.

A train runs both directions, the ceiling reminded me, as boarding-house ceilings tend to do. Lying there looking up at the map of plaster imaginings, I felt an old restlessness. It was a lamplit evening in the Marias Coulee teacherage, when I knew I was losing Rose, that a faint stain in the beaverboard ceiling seemed to suggest the outline of Australia. Even here in Grace Faraday's well-maintained accommodations, did that swirl in the plasterer's finishwork over by the window resemble South America?

Fate comes looking for us, often when we are most alone. Stealthily the conclusion I was waiting for crept down from the ceiling and took shape in the corner of the room. My gaze followed it to my satchel, shabby reliable companion in a portable life.

I swore softly to myself. Ordinarily I do not use profanity, but that was the least of what had been fanned up in me by the bluster from Eel Eyes and Typhoon Tolliver. Bouncing off the bed, in a hurry of resolve now, I crossed to where the satchel waited. Grappled it open wide. Dug to the bottom of it, past spare socks and the poetry of Matthew Arnold, to where they lay.

Brass knuckles. The "Chicago pinky ring," weapon of choice for the streetwise combatant facing an unfair fight.

It had been years since I needed to resort to these, but they never aged. As I tried them on now, they fit across the backs of my hands cold and secure. Even the most vicious street fighter had to hesitate at the dark sheen of armor on a fist, the set of nubs that could gouge into skin like a can opener. Of course, knuckles of metal did you any good only within striking range of an opponent. But I had sparred enough as a warmup partner for Casper in training camp; I knew at least as much footwork as that lummoxx Tolliver. And unless I had lost the knack of sizing up an



adversary, the more mouthy goon was the type who would blink hard at the sight of brass knuckles. He would not rush to have that well-shaven pointy face marred to the bone.

Quitter, he'd called me. We'd see.

Wouldn't you know, no sooner was I prepared to put my fortified knuckles on the line against Anaconda's lurkers than they ceased lurking. Even when I deliberately dawdled on downtown streets, passing the time of day with the blind newspaper seller or picking up the latest gossip from the hack driver at the nearby hotel, I could not draw the goons out. As the days lengthened, their cloak of shadow shrank, further discouraging any encounters. Fondling the brass knuckles in my suitcoat pocket as I went to and from the library, it was as if I was rubbing amulets that kept away evil spirits. Although I knew the real force that had stopped the goons cold in their tracks was Samuel Sandison, whatever that was about.

As for me, the lord and master of the books kept me hopping. It was a mystery how the Butte Public Library had managed to operate before I was there to catch all the tasks delegated from that kingly desk of his to mine.

This particular Friday had started as usual, with Sandison drawling "You know what needs doing or at least should" and disappearing off to somewhere undisclosed, while I faced tabulating the week's checkout slips sent up from the issue desk. He was a demon promoter of the library, and wanted the list of favorite books unfailingly in the newspaper at the end of each week. It was not an inspiring task, as the most popular book of the past seven days invariably turned out to be Mrs. Mary V. Terhune's *My Little Love*, and I sometimes had to adjust the arithmetic to get Thomas Hardy and Edith Wharton onto the list at all; Proust of course was hopeless. So, by the time I fiddled with the citizenry's literary taste to more or less satisfaction, the messenger would be there waiting to rush my



compilation to the *Daily Post*. Messengers raced across Butte, jumping on and off the trolleys and trotting the edge of the sidewalks as they carried typed instructions back and forth between the downtown headquarters and the mine offices, workers' cashed paychecks from stores to banks, small goods from the department store to the wealthier homes, and so on. Our stretch of street was served by a gnomelike courier named Skinner. Old enough to be thoroughly bald, Skinner nonetheless had the pared build of a jockey and was never motionless, on one foot and then the other as he waited to be handed whatever was to be delivered. I had learned to let him jitter there in the doorway, the man apparently was not constructed to sit in a chair.

I was nearly done typing up that week's list from Miss Runyon's checkout slips when Skinner, waiting restlessly as usual, blurted:

"Where you from, pal?"

"Mmm? Chicago."

"Small world. Me, too." I stiffened. "Maxwell Street and Halsted, know it?" he said from the side of his mouth, sending a deeper chill through me. The toughest neighborhood of the toughest section of that hardknuckled city. Was this going to be a repeat of Tolliver and Eel Eyes? Another message of the threatening sort from the Anaconda Company? Panic began to set in as I realized I was in my shirtsleeves, with my suitcoat--and its protective cargo of brass knuckles--on a hanger across the room. A disturbing look on him, the wiry man now bounced toward me on fleet feet as I grabbed for an inkwell, anything, in self-defense. Practically atop my desk as he leaned in face to face with me, Skinner demanded:

"Cubs or White Sox?"

I relaxed somewhat; baseball rivalry was not necessarily lethal. But it is surprising how an old grudge can hold up. In a ring constructed over the infield of the White Sox' stadium, Comiskey Park, Casper on a cool clear Columbus Day had



defeated Kid Agnelli--knockout, third round--before twenty-five thousand paying customers, and the owner of the White Sox and the ball park, Charles Comiskey, had shorted us on the purse. Not for nothing was he known in Chicago sporting circles as "Cheap Charlie." I would root against him and his team if they were the last baseball nine on earth. "My allegiance is to the Cubs," I put it more temperately to Skinner. "I once saw Tinker to Evers to Chance produce four double plays in one game. Masterful."

Skinner hooted. "The Cubs ain't what they used to be. The Sox got the real players these days, they're going to the Series, you watch."

"I shall." Sealing the book list in a gummed envelope, I handed it to him indicatively. "Now do you suppose this missive could possibly find its way to the *Daily Post*?"

No sooner had the messenger scampered off than Sandison filled the doorway. Bypassing his desk, he lumbered over to the stained glass window and peered out through one of the whorls like a boy at a knothole, a sign that something was on his mind. Something on his desk that he did not want to face.

"Sandy, you seem perturbed," I said diplomatically.

"I've just been with the trustees. They raked me over the coals about the library budget. Wanted to know where every damn penny goes." Turning from the window, he shook his head, the wool of his beard quivering. "They have a reason, I suppose. Few months ago, the city treasurer took off with everything he could lay his hands on."

"Bad?"

"Enough that the elected fools in Butte see an embezzler under every bed now. Damn it, I thought it was hard to keep track of a few thousand cows--that was nothing compared to running this outfit." He passed a hefty hand over his cowlick as if trying to clear his head from there on in. "Spending that much time on



numbers drives me up the wall. I don't see why the idiot trustees can't just trust a man."

I remember it exactly. Opportunity was in the air of that office, distinct as ozone. Idly piling paperwork from here to there, I said as though his bookkeeping burden was merely something I could add to the other stacks on my desk: "Thank heaven you have an arithmetical person on hand."

"Who?" Sandison eyed me. "You? You mean you can handle books that don't have mile-long words in them?"

"Assuredly."

"Are you telling me you're a certified accountant?"

"Mmm, 'certified' perhaps is too confining a term. As you might imagine, standards are different from here to there. But along the way in life, I've had considerable experience with ledgers."

Sandison dropped into his desk chair, his weight sending it wheeling toward me. "Morgan? You just said you're not an accountant. What the hell then do you do with these ledgers you're talking about?"

"Oh, mend them. From the inside out." From his furrowed look, I could tell Sandison was not satisfied with that reply. "Let me put it this way, Sandy. Numbers are simply a language I happen to understand--Latin, numeracy, both have certain principles, fundamental in themselves. Surely you know the story of the bookkeeper and the desk drawer? No? Allow me. Every morning, a certain bookkeeper would come into the office of the firm, hang up his hat and coat, seat himself at his desk, pull out a drawer and look in it for a few seconds, shut it, and only then turn to his work. For forty years, this went on--the same drawer, opened and shut, every morning. Finally came the day he retired, and the minute he left the office for the last time, the rest of the office staff crowded around his desk and one



of them slowly opened that drawer. In it was a single sheet of paper. On it was written: 'Debits go on the left, credits on the right.'"

Sandison did not find my little tale as entertaining as I had hoped. "The long and short of it is," came his rumble, "you claim you know how to balance the books."

I nodded. "To the last penny, if it comes to that."

He sat there and frowned for some time. He could be intent as a fiend when he was mulling a matter. "All right," he grudgingly granted at last, "you probably can't make any more mess of the arithmetic than I have. You're in charge of the damn bookkeeping. Come over here and start getting acquainted with the ledgers."

I walked on air back to the boarding house at the end of that day. The one fundamental principle of bookkeeping that had always stood out to me was that if you know how and where the money flows, you are hard to get rid of.



## 6

Live it up while you can, Mister Man About Town,  
Because what you gonna do when the rent comes roun'?

Whistling it softly to myself, I contradicted the catchy popular tune by counting out my rent money as usual, that subsequent week, as I came down a few minutes early for supper. Grace was not there to take it. The table was not yet set. This was a new experience; generally the Faraday boarding house ran like a seven-day clock.

I peeked in the kitchen, to find supper uncooked but Grace steaming.

"Make yourself useful, please," she said testily, bent low to the opened oven. "Yell up to the others that supper will be a while yet. This bird refuses to get done."

In double defiance--pale and dry--the latest turkey lay there in the roaster, and after calling upstairs to Hoop and Griff to hold on to their appetites, I returned to the kitchen, rolling up my sleeves. "If I might suggest, it is time to baste the beast."



"Baste," Grace said, with a fry cook's doubtfulness.

"Allow me." Crouching where she had been, I spooned the turkey's drippings over the breast and drumsticks, then stoked up the kitchen stove with a couple of pitchy sticks of wood. "There now, the meal has no choice but to cook."

No sooner had I said so than the floor did a little dance. Silverware jingled, and Grace steadied a cream pitcher. After a moment, she dismissed the latest shake of everything. "That could have been worse."

"Grace," I let out along with my breath, "I will gladly take your word for that." I doubted I could ever get used to dynamite going off beneath the house.

Pushing a rather fetching flaxen wisp of hair off her forehead, she studied me as if I was the newest distraction. "Sit down for a minute, star boarder. There's something we need to talk about."

I went still. Was I in for another grilling about whether I was an IWW secret operative? What was I supposed to do, march around Butte wearing a sandwich board that read, I AM NOT A WOBBLY?

"If it's about an unfortunate event in the library a while back," I fended as I settled across the kitchen table from her, "that was sheerly a case of mistaken--"

"It's church," she announced, rolling her eyes. "There's talk. About us. 'Ye and me,'" she did not a bad imitation of the little Welsh preacher. Griff had been asked to fill in with the choir a few more times, and the two of us and Hoop duly had made command performances as audience. What was wrong with that? Answering my inquiring look, Grace fanned with a hand as if brushing away pests. "What some of the nosy ones around the neighborhood are saying is"--she reddened at the exact words--"I'm taking up with a boarder. The old biddies."

Gossip, forever the whisper in the wind. "Mmm," I met Grace's report with uncertainty.



"Morrie?" Her violet eyes took in mine, a test that wouldn't go away. "Do you feel, um, taken up with?"

"I am about to fork over my week's rent," I said, unsure of how much honesty beyond that was a good idea just then. "That tends to put matters in a certain perspective."

Carefully folding my money away into her apron pocket, she allowed: "It does, doesn't it." Still hesitant, she went on: "There's the matter of appearances, though. A boarding house has to be extra careful not to be lumped in with--" She gestured off toward the fleshly neighborhood of Venus Alley.

Now Grace looked at me but not quite straight at me. "So you know what this means. I'm sorry, but--"

I waited, dreading the prospect of trying to find any other lodging in Butte as cozy as this.

"--you'll have to go to church just with Hoop," she finished off her decree. Then bounced up to take out the perfectly roasted turkey.

Relieved at the boarding house, I could now busy myself learning the ins and outs of the library's finances. Sandison's style of bookkeeping had been what might be called extemporaneous, with occasional casual entries of *Miscellaneous book purchases* followed by sums that might well make a library trustee gulp. Trying to untangle his method, if that's what it was, I finally spotted in the ledger pages of staff wages and hours his hole card, so to speak. Me. Counting up, I could see there was not quite as much staff as was budgeted for--always a few positions short--and he covered those gaps in service, and doubtless put what would have been the wages into that bland expenditure on books, by shuttling employees from job to job during the course of a day. That works until, say, the board of trustees president's wife is kept waiting at the temporarily vacant



genealogy desk. My arrival plugged a lot of slots. Shunting me from task to task as Sandison did took those burdens off the other staffers; on a ranch, I believe I would have been called the choreboy. I didn't mind; variety has always been more to my taste than its opposite. I even grew fond of the diverse evening groups, catching the end of the discussion those nights when it fell to me to go back to the library and close up, enjoying the verbal volleying about Hamlet's nervous condition or Wilson's strategy at the Paris peace conference. (However, I prudently waited for the Gilbert and Sullivan clan to vacate entirely before I tended to the music stands, lest Dora Sandison pounce on me with some other demand.) And on a more daily basis, when needed at a desk I happily stepped into that role of librarian as bartender of information. Presiding over shelves of intoxicating items, dispensing whatever brand of knowledge was ordered up, I am sure I poured generously. At least Sandison must have thought so, the morning he told me to get downstairs and fill in for Miss Runyon at the Reading Room main desk as she made her grand descent to prepare for story hour.

Elevated there at the high desk, I was coping with patrons' questions when commotion broke out in the foyer.

*"Don't, pigface."*

*"Can't take it, huh, bag ears?"*

*"Jack and Molly, quit that or I'll have your hides."*

The purr of threat in the teacherly voice settled things down at least momentarily, and in trooped as rough and tough a crowd, male and female, as I had seen yet in Butte. On the other hand, they were twelve-year-olds and a freckle epidemic was loose among them. In flat caps and pigtails, hand-me-down britches and mended pinafores, plainly these were children from one of the neighborhoods on The Hill, spruced up for the library visit but the sprucing could go only so far. Watching casually as edgy girls and pushing boys milled down



the stairwell to the auditorium, I took a bit of guilty pleasure in the thought that Miss Runyon would have her hands full with this mob.

"Mr. Morgan." The purr was close at my side. "Your mustache is back."

I turned and was nearly startled off my sitting place.

"Rabrab!" I blurted, drawing nasty looks and one severe *shhh* from the Reading Room patrons.

A knowing laugh arrived with the same throatiness as the purr. "You remember. But you would, wouldn't you. Did you know the whole school used to call you the Walking Encyclopedia?"

I had last seen Barbara Rellis as a sixth-grader, a dark-eyed willow of a girl on the lookout for intrigue. Foremost in my memory was my first day of teaching at the Marias Coulee one-room school, when she ever so innocently raised her hand during roll call and asked if for the sake of keeping up with certain contrary stunts of the boys she couldn't turn her name around, most of it at least, just on the schoolground where namecalling ran every direction anyway? I found an appealing flavor of logic in that and let her. The Rabrab of then had filled out into a fashionably bobbed young woman, still slender but with a substantial bodice, and those eyes that so often held mischief like a flash of struck flint now had authority to them as well. She called over to the tail of the brigade dragging its feet in the stairwell. "Margie, mind them, please, give them a swat if you have to. Tell the story lady they're all hers, she can start. I'll be there in a minute." An older schoolgirl, obviously conscripted for the outing, took charge and the last of the children were hustled down the stairs.

Rabrab's--Barbara's--attention swung back to me. "I see that little smile," she said with one of her own, "don't try to hide it. You caused this, you know, my ending up a teacher. A number of us have. Paul Milliron is already a county superintendent, had you heard?" She was studying me, from my mustache on in, a



faint wrinkle of puzzlement at the side of her eyes. "At first I didn't think it could be you, perched here like the head canary. In Butte, of all places. We were told you'd gone to--where was it? Transylvania?"

"Never mind. In the here and now, I--"

"Have you been back to Marias Coulee, since?"

"Not in person. I mean, no. Rab--Barbara, that is--"

This time her smile was the sly schoolgirlish one I remembered so well, as though she had something sweet tucked in her cheek. "You can call me that. It would make two of you who do. That's rather nice."

We were conversing in spirited whispers, not the best etiquette for the Reading Room, and I summoned Smithers from periodicals to sit in for me. Hurriedly escorting Rab out into the foyer, where there was only Shakespeare to overhear us, I began trying to contain the situation.

"About Marias Coulee. I must take you into my confidence, Rab." It worked. The racehorse keenness she had always shown at any prospect of conspiracy was immediately there to see. "It is best if no one in our old neighborhood knows I am back in Montana," I went on, "because of--well, possible hard feelings, you'll understand." I paused for what I hoped was drama's sake. "Rose and I had a falling out. A family matter."

She swooped on that. "It happens over and over, doesn't it. A brother and a sister, you'd think they were built to get along, but no, they find every way there is to get crosswise with each other. I see it all the time in my pupils. So I'm not surprised--those of us at school thought you and Rose were born in different phases of the moon, as the saying goes. And you won't go back now because you don't want to stir up old trouble--that is so like you, Mr. Morgan."

"I could not have put it better myself."



Rab leaned closer, back to whispering. "Now I'll let you in on a secret. It just happened, the other night. I'm betrothed. E-n-g-a-g-e-d," she rattled off as if in one of Marias Coulee's spelling bees. She wrinkled her nose, turning in an instant into the perfect facsimile of a pretty and mischievous bride.

There was no hiding my smile this time. "The lucky man is getting more than he bargained for."

"But keep the news to yourself for now," she added anxiously. "My pupils can be such awful teases and I want to wait until the school year is over to--"

As if the word *pupil* had triggered open a gate at the head of the hall, here toward us came one of the schoolgirls, mostly knees and pigtail. Undoubtedly she had put up her hand in that urgent way that allowed her to go to the lavatory, but she marched right past it until she was practically at the hem of Rab's smock.

"Just so you know, Miss Rellis, Russian Famine snuck off."

"Not with you around, Peggy, I'm sure. Now do your business and scoot back downstairs." The class tattler flounced happily into the lavatory, and Rab spun to me. "Is there another staircase?"

I took her down the hallway toward the set of stairs at the back of the stacks. "Rab," I questioned as we quickstepped along, "isn't your class somewhat advanced for story hour? They look very much like--"

"Sixth graders," she sighed. "Don't you dare laugh, Mr. Morgan." She herself had been a ringleader--it was the kind of class that had many--in the populous sixth grade that had been my biggest handful in the Marias Coulee schoolroom.

"I won't bother to say justice is served," I told her archly. "But story hour at that level--what sort of story?"

"First aid."



It was always hard to tell with Rabrab whether she was pulling your leg. She shook her head as I scrutinized her. "It's the school board's big idea." Her expression sharpened. "Most of the boys will be in the mines in just a few years, and most of the girls will be hatching other children, up on The Hill. The thinking is, it might spare the public treasury in the future if they learn some first aid before what is going to happen to some of them happens. In theory, I suppose I can't argue with that." Another sigh. "In any case, your Miss Runyon here is looked upon as the apostle of first aid. I'm told she was greatly disappointed that she was too far up in years to boss the nurses in France during the war."

"I can imagine. Here we are." I unlocked the delivery door to the stacks, and we stepped in.

To be met with sounds such as I had never heard put together before: a shoeleather *chuff-chuff-chuff* spaced what seemed a dance step apart, followed by a drawn-out soft whizzing like a very long zipper being drawn down.

"That'll be him," Rab said under her breath. "See?"

Beyond the bookshelves sheltering us, a boy as spindly as any I had ever seen was racing up the long staircase to the floors above. As if built on springs he bounded up the stairsteps three at a time, on the brink of trying for four, and when his leaps carried him to the top, the race against gravity, against himself, momentarily over, he in one swift mounting move jockeyed his legs over the banister and slid back down. There was a heartstopping pneumatic grace, a fireman's fearless ride down a twisting pole, in the way he shot to the bottom. The instant he touched the floor again, he was back into motion, *chuff-chuff-chuff*, trio after trio of stairs flown over by the broomstick legs.

"He does it at school whenever he can," Rab's murmur was close to my ear. "You should see him on the fire escape." Just watching him here was mesmerizing enough; I felt as the audience must have when Nijinsky first flew out



of the wings onto a ballet stage, and human ability would never be seen the same again. This pint-size dervish seemed determined to spring at the steep staircase until he could sail up it in one weightless jump.

"Wladislaw, that's enough," Rab called to him. I could have told her a teacherly tone was not effective in cases of extremity; it took something more. Oblivious, the boy launched off on another waterbug skim up the cascade of stairsteps. Rab cupped her hands to her mouth and let out a shout that would have cut fog: "Russian Famine, do you hear me?"

"Yes'm. Can't not."

Strawy hair flopping, he slowly glided off the banister and dropped on the balls of his feet in front of us. He did not appear guilty, simply caught. I could see how his classmates came up with the nickname, brutal as it was. Gaunt as an unfed greyhound, the hollow-cheeked boy did resemble a living ghost from starvation times on some distant steppe. He met our gaze with a bleak one. "I was just fooling around a little."

"While you are supposed to be in class learning about first aid," Rab chided, combing his hair out of his eyes with her fingers. "Come say hello to Mr. Morgan--the library couldn't run without him."

The boy's reluctant handshake was like squeezing a puppy's paw. As quick as seemed decent, he rubbed his hand on a hip pocket and cast an appeal to his teacher. "Can't I skip that aid junk, Miss Rellis? Pretty please? All it's gonna be is rags and sticks," he maintained, with a certain degree of clairvoyance. "I seen them bring that Bohunk mucker up the other day at the Neversweat, wrapped up like a mummy and just as dead anyhow. The roof comes down on them in the mine and they're goners. How's rags and sticks gonna help that?"



Wisely not debating the point, Rab instructed with firmness: "You're going to be a goner of another kind--after school until the seat of your pants wears out--if you don't get down there in that room with the rest of them, right now."

"Yes'm. Pretty please don't do no good with you." The spring was gone from him as he hunched off to class.

We watched him trail away, Rab making sure he went down to the auditorium rather than out the front door. "He's an acrobatic marvel," I remarked, "especially since he's so thin you can see through him."

"Wladislaw has been given the thin edge of life in every way," she filled in the story for me. "His parents and a baby sister died in the flu last year. He's being brought up, if you can call it that, by an old uncle. The man has a peddler cart, he sharpens knives around town." She shook her head somberly. "What they live on is anybody's guess." As if having taken a cue from her rubber-legged pupil, she pirouetted to leave. "I'd better go or your Miss Runyon will be sending out a search party. We still have catching up to do, though." She peered at me quizzically, schoolteacher and schoolgirl merged into a single soul of curiosity. "Such as, why *does* that mustache come and go?"

I had my answer ready, along with a slight smile. "We all have our disguises in the masquerade party of life, don't we, Rabrab?"

She took that with a laugh and another crinkle of her nose. "That sounds just like you. But I'm not letting you get away that easily. You have to meet my Jared. Tomorrow night? Join us for supper at the Purity."

The Purity Cafeteria, I found, prided itself on its snowy tablecloths, the forest of tables and chairs that could hold a couple of hundred customers at a time, and, the dubious piece of progress that demarcated it from a cafe, a total absence of waiters. NO WAITING! YOUR FOOD AWAITS YOU! proclaimed a large sign in red,



and across the rear of the ballroom-size dining area stood a line of counters with the menu's offerings, condiments, cutlery, glassware, and so forth. "A new customer! They must be cleaning out heaven!" I was greeted by a plump bowtied individual, evidently the owner, presiding over the cash register. "Sir, I can tell from here, your belt buckle is hitting your backbone. Skip right in and fill on up."

Smiling thinly at that gust of Butte bonhomie, I cast around for Rab and her fiancée amid the eating crowd. I spied him first, with a prickle of inevitability up my backbone.

Rabrab had been leaning in tasting something off his plate, as lovers will, and as her bobbed head came up into view, she spotted me and waved.

Mindful of his manners, the young man stood and turned to me with a soldierly correctness that I could have predicted. He'd had that same deportment while tendering the union's envelope of benefit to the widow Dempsey, and in marching like a Roman at the head of the miners in shift change on The Hill. Rabrab gazed up at him as if she'd had him made to order.

"The men in my life," she announced fondly. "Jared Evans, this is Morris Morgan."

"Morrie," I amended over the handshake, to put us on familiar terms.

"Jared," he said, perhaps humorously, perhaps not.

As soon as chairs were under us, he sat back and regarded me through dark deep Welsh eyes that reminded me of Casper's, only more reflective. Beyond that, he and Rab together were like matched cutouts in charcoal paper by a scissor portraitist, his slicked-back hair black as hers. Any children of these two would be ravens. Yet there was something even more striking about this lean chiseled man, and it took me a second to single it out. His ears were different sizes; the left one was missing its earlobe, clean as a surgery. Together with the fathoms in that gaze,



it gave him the look of a reformed pirate. I tried not to stare at the foreshortened ear, which of course only creates another level of attention.

Still examining me with those grave eyes, Jared spoke as if I were a question brought before the podium. "You're the cryer. You get around."

"A temporary appointment," I brushed away my career of wakes. "The best kind to have where a coffin is involved."

Rab rippled a laugh. "Now he's the resident genius of the library, aren't you, Mr. Morgan. Have you read every book in it by now? I remember when you knew everything there was to know about comets, and that was just the start of--"

"Flattery does not have to be more than an inch thick, Rab," I waved that to a halt. Basking in her words more than I should have, I shared to Jared: "You must know how she is by now--when her enthusiasm gets going, she'll talk your ear off."

Immediately I wanted to crawl under the table. Jared's dark brows drew down as he leaned in and pointed a cocked thumb and finger at me like a pistol, and I wildly wondered what I was in for. Then, of all things, he winked.

"A German bullet took care of that for me. I got off lucky--they didn't call that sector Dead Man's Hill for nothing. A medical corpsman slapped a patch on me and I went right back into the thick of it." Fingering what was left of the ear, he dispatched a droll half of a smile to the rapt Rab and around to me. "I have to watch out not to be too proud of it--the earmark none of the rest of the herd has."

As when Sandison plunged off into livestock terminology, I chuckled uselessly.

Rab came to my rescue. "Mr. Morgan, you need to hunt up some food. We had to start, Jared has a meeting. He usually does."

"To dicker the lost dollar out of the Anaconda lords and masters?" my natural interest in wages prompted me to ask.



The question was flicked right back to me. "How is it that you know we're in there dickering?" Over a deliberative sip of his coffee, the union leader held me in that compelling gaze again. What was it about The Richest Hill on Earth, that I seemed to be a suspect of some kind no matter which way I turned?

"My usual dining partners," I alibied hastily, "are Griffith and Hooper at the boarding house. They discuss matters."

Jared's look softened somewhat. "If that's who you're hanging around with, you probably know more about anything and everything in town than I do."

In the time soon to come, I would learn that Jared Evans had been thrust from the thick of one war into that of another. The combat between the hierarchies of Europe had at last reached a mortal end, while the struggle he came home to on The Hill showed no sign of abating as long as there was corporate capital and there was unionized labor. Flint and gunpowder had the same relationship. Put simply, although Hoop and Griff in their telling of it to me seldom did, the Great War had crippled the once-mighty Butte miners' union; its bargaining power had been hampered by government decrees, rivalry from the IWW, and Anaconda's imperious determination to fatten profits at the expense of wages and workers' lives. Jared alit back into the middle of all this, chosen for that sense of capability he carried as naturally as the set of his shoulders. The better I came to know and observe him, I could not help thinking of Rab's beau as a paradoxical version of Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, the Roman soldier who fought his battle and returned to his plow; Jared had been summoned from the battlefield to plow the ungiving ground of Butte's conflicts.

"You two," Rab broke in now, her napkin a flick of white flag between us, "would rather talk than eat, I know, but that's not me." She was onto her feet, poised in the direction of the dessert counter. "Rhubarb pie. I can't resist. Jared, sweet, can I bring you some?"



He leaned back in his chair and stretched mightily, a man with much on his mind and a long night of negotiating ahead of him. "Just some more java, thanks, if you have enough hands."

"Back in a jiffy," she promised. She sailed off, spiffy as a Riviera princess in the shorter style of dress that was coming into fashion; you could actually see she had legs.

"I had better follow Rab's example," I said, starting to get up to find a meal for myself. Only to be stopped in mid-rise by Jared's thumb pinning the sleeve of my suitcoat to the table. It was a very substantial thumb.

"How does it come to be," unmistakably the words were those of a stern young fiancée, "that you call her 'Rab'?"

"I, ah, officiated on that name."

That didn't seem to help. "Officiated how?"

Rapidly I told the story of Barbara's verbal somersault into Rabrab in my classroom. The thumb grudgingly lifted from the fabric of my sleeve. "All right," he granted, "it makes two of us who call her that. That's a great plenty."

With a measure of relief I moved off toward wherever the food waited. "You're lagging," Rab scolded as she passed me bearing a tray with her slice of pie and Jared's cup of coffee. "Only until I can track down the breaded veal," I assured her. Grace had many virtues as a landlady, but it had been a considerable time since I had seen a cutlet.

Cafeteria dining, Butte style, evidently meant that half the clientele was fetching mounds of food for itself at any given moment, and so I had to work my way through the crowd to the counter where the meat dishes were listed, past a huge mahogany breakfront stacked with glassware and coffee cups and saucers. Squeezing around that furniture, I popped into an opening in the meal line, nearly bumping into the larger than life figure piling a plate with liver and onions.



Typhoon Tolliver and I stared at each other.

"The rumor is wrong, then, Typhoon. You don't eat hay."

"You," he said thickly. Beside his tray, I saw his fists ball up.

Something about the way I thrust my hands into the side pockets of my coat halted any further movement from him. I had decided that if it came to blows, I would try to hit him on the left fist with my brass knuckles, in the hope of putting his best punch out of action. But I did not particularly want to test that tactic, and from his slow, perplexed blinks, Typhoon seemed not sure he wanted to initiate anything either. Before he could think it over too much, I rushed to say: "The crowd in here is not going to be entertained by you beating me up in public--this isn't the boxing ring."

"No, it ain't," he agreed with that.

"Where's--" I cast a hasty glance around for the telltale set of sideways eyes "--your partner in crime?"

"Who, Roland? He goes for that Chineese stuff." Typhoon swiped a dismissive paw in the direction of Chinatown and its bill of fare. "Noodles and chicken feet or something. I can't stomach it myself." Independence seemed to be linked to appetite somewhere in that big thick head. "He and me ain't joined at the ribcage."

"Then he doesn't need to know we're showing the good sense not to whale into each other in front of two hundred witnesses and get ourselves arrested, does he."

"I guess maybe not." The mention of witnesses caused the flat-faced pug to look around nervously, peeking over the top of the breakfront for anyone watching our impromptu meeting. I did the same, around a corner of it. We both had more than enough reason to be jittery. It was perilous for me to be seen talking to a prime Anaconda goon, and just as detrimental on his side of things to be caught



conversing with me, possible Wobbly that I might be. Luckily, back at the table Jared's attention centered on Rabrab, and Typhoon's jerky scan around the room evidently did not pick up any watchers either. Rolling his big shoulders, he huffed to me:

"There'll be another time, punk."

"Until then, I'd be careful if I were you," I responded in a concerned tone. "You see the union bug there." I inclined my head toward the small but significant Federation of Labor emblem in the bottom corner of the wall-hung certificate attesting that the establishment proudly employed members of the Cooks and Dishwashers Brotherhood. "I hear that if the crew in the kitchen knows you wear the copper collar, they slip ground glass in the onions."

I left him staring down at his plate.

"What, did the calf have to be butchered first?" Rab bantered when I returned to the table with my cutlet.

"Something like that." No sooner had I sat down than Jared leaned my way and spoke in a low tone. "Morrie," he tried the name out, "I maybe jumped on you a little too hard there at first, about union matters. Rab worked me over and says you can be trusted." His face said, *We'll see*. "Keep this under your hat, but there might be a work action, sometime soon. I'll make sure Hoop and Griff stay out of it. I'm telling you now so you don't have to worry about the old devils, all right?"

"I'll try not to. From what they've told me, though, doesn't Butte turn into a hornets' nest during a strike?"

"I didn't say 'strike,' did I."

"We went through enough of that, last time," Rab said as if instructing both of us. "Anaconda's squads of bullies in our streets. You'd think we weren't Americans."



"That smarted," Jared admitted, his brow creased. He looked over at me. "A year ago I was getting shot at in a trench in France, and I come home to the mines, and next thing I know, a bunch of muscleheads who never even got overseas are ambushing me on the picket line. We're going to try to get around that this time."

Rab traced a chevron on his shoulder. "My sergeant."

Covering Rab's hand with his own, he made a wry face, again in my direction. "You tell me, is it a promotion or a demotion to head up the union council when Anaconda is trying to make us eat dirt?" The question lingered in those agate-dark eyes. "When the company goons broke the strike last time, the men kicked out the council leaders." He spoke the next very levelly, as if sharing it between Rab and me. "The same way they'll kick me out if I don't deliver the lost dollar."

"Can't not, as Russian Famine would say," Rab said confidently. "You have to budge Anaconda somehow, so you will. I'll bet on it."

For their sake and Butte's, I hoped she was right. Jared got up saying he had to get to his meeting, and Rab moaned that there was a school board session she had to attend, while I had to make sure there were enough chairs for the Shakespeare Society's Merry Wives' Night back at the library; and I imagined Typhoon and Eel Eyes would be flexing their shoeleather and muscles somewhere in the night, too.



Sometime soon, in the vocabulary of Jared Evans, turned out to mean the very next morning. As I rounded the corner to the library, I saw that the usual line of staff and a few patrons at the door had grown mightily and fanned out like a peacock's tail, the entire street filled with new faces. For a moment my soul lifted at this surge of literary interest from the citizenry of Butte. Then it dawned on me that the atmosphere of the city had changed overnight. The Hill's normal throb of labor was not to be heard: no ore trains were running, the seven smokestacks of the Neversweat were empty pipes in the air, the headframes stood as stark and still as gallows. And the mass of fidgeting men here in the light of day ordinarily would have been at work in the everlasting night of the mines. Whatever Jared's definition of a "work action" was, it closely resembled a wildcat strike.

A crowd is a temperamental thing. I could tell at once that as watchfully quiet as this one was, it would not take much to make it growl.

The minute I arrived, Sandison--grim as thunder--beckoned me up. The library staff nervously held its place at the closed door as he and I stepped to one side and conferred.



"What are these lunkheads doing here, Morgan, instead of out on a picket line somewhere?"

"Sandy, I know no more about this gathering than you do."

"Some help you are. What are we supposed to do about all this mob?"

"Put out more chairs? There are stacks downstairs from when the Shakespeareans--"

He cut me off with a look. "Let them in and make them at home, are you telling me? Hell, man, the Butte Public Library isn't supposed to take sides in some damn dogfight of this kind." Then the oddest thing. There on the topmost step, Sandison turned and gazed out at that sea of workingmen's faces, much the way a pharoah might have looked down from a pyramid. In that suspended moment, he seemed to draw something known only to himself from those so many eyes. Then he gave a laugh that made his belly heave.

Shaking his head, he climbed onto the base of one of the doorway pillars. I feared he might fall, but he clambered up as if he did this all the time. The sight of him perched there, with the white aureole of his beard and cowlick against the grave Gothic stone of the building, made the crowd fall silent; once more, I could feel that strange mixed mood of apprehension and fascination that followed Samuel Sandison like the shadow at his heels.

"It looks as if the library has some new visitors today," his voice rang off the building across the street, "and I have one thing to say to all of you. It pertains to behavior that will not be tolerated in this public institution." Throughout the crowd I saw faces darken, the phalanx of idled miners readying for yet another warning against 'unlawful assembly' even here. "You maybe do it out of habit up there on The Hill or down in the shafts," Sandison blazed, hands on his hips, "but this is not the place for that kind of thing, understand? I am only telling you once."



He glowered down at some of the hardest men in Butte as if they were schoolboys playing hooky. "No spitting."

With that, although I would not have thought it possible, his voice rose to another level. "Let us in, Morgan."

Once inside, I made straight for the cashbox Sandison kept in his desk, grabbed a fistful of money, and sent someone scurrying to the newsstand down the street to buy all available reading material. I would worry later about a ledger entry for *Miscellaneous diversionary matter*. Next, several of us lugged chairs from the auditorium to the Reading Room, the mezzanine, even the foyer. Meanwhile the miners circulated, speaking in hushed tones if at all, as they got the feel of the grand paneled rooms and the tiers of the world's writings. With the arrival of the newsstand supplement of newspapers and such, so many men settled at tables and in corners with newsprint spread wide that the Reading Room took on the look of a schooner under sail. The library staff, originally taken aback as I had been, caught a fever of enthusiasm at having constant customers, cap in hand, requesting guidance; librarians do not ordinarily receive such worship. I detected a warm gleam of triumph even from Miss Runyon when a stooped miner asked in a thick Italian accent for *L'Avventura di Cristoforo Columbo* and she was able to produce a pristine Florentine edition from the mezzanine treasure house.

One thing I particularly noticed: the display case in the far corner drew onlookers as though it were magnetized. Man after man crouched to contemplate the mine model, so complete from tip of headframe to deepest dungeon of tunnel, the compressed vision of the mines standing empty on The Hill this day. It was as if the glass of the case was a smudged crystal ball, with hints of what lay ahead if one could only make them out.



Busy with everything, I was hastening down the hallway past the drinking fountain when a familiar voice caught up with me. "Just a suggestion, but the flavor of the water in this place would be improved by piping in some rye."

"Quin!" The Irish conquistador face looked more solemn in this circumstance than it had at wakes. "I had no idea you were the library-going type."

"Funny, boyo." Quinlan winked and indicated toward the horde in the Reading Room. "A lot of us feel the call of culture today. In about a hundred percent of those cases, the wife told us to get out of the house."

"Why not on a picket line, showing solidarity?"

He snorted, amused or the opposite. "Tsk, Morgan, for a sighted man you're deep in the dark, aren't you. There's no picket line. No negotiating session. No anything whatsoever. Jared Evans just made some kind of safety excuse and pulled us out at the start of morning shift like that"--he snapped his fingers--"and is letting Anaconda stew about it." He hardened as I watched. "Whether it gets us our fair wage or we need to try stronger persuasion--" The shoulders of his coat lifted, and I was aware that the Little Red Songbook, in some pocket or other, could find an adherent in more than musical ways. "We'll see if the one-eared Taffy knows what he's doing." Quinlan's expression suggested it would not be easy to prove to Dublin Gulch.

At the end of the day, I had to resort again to the higher powers to uncloud the bafflements of Butte for me.

Hooper was several rungs up, against the weather side of the house, industriously slapping paint on while Griffith held the ladder. "Everything still standing, downtown?" Griff called out upon sight of me.

"Every brick in place, when I left. Why weren't the pair of you in the middle of things today?"



Hoop dipped his brush and stroked a comet of paint onto the siding. "Told not to."

"Saving us for when we're really needed, Jared says," Griff reported. He wagged his head in general acknowledgment. "Caught Anaconda with its pants down today, he sure did. Put a Welshman in charge and you start to get somewhere. Look at Lloyd George." He gestured as if the prime minister of Great Britain might materialize to set things straight in Butte.

"Yes, but--"

"Your turn," Hoop called down.

I waited while the two of them traded places, like two aged sailors scrambling in the rigging. "But why this so-called 'work action' instead of a genuine strike?"

"No strike, no strikebreakers." Holding the ladder with both gnarled hands, Hoop looked around at me as if deciding how much more tutoring I was worth. "Besides catching that other gang--"

--with its pants down," Griff contributed, along with an emphatic swipe of his paintbrush.

I must have looked blank. Top and bottom of the ladder, both of them eyed me. The silence grew until at last Hoop spelled out:

"The Wobblies. They'd cut in on a strike, try to take it over if they knew it was coming."

"Send in infiltrators." Griff echoing Typhoon Tolliver was an unnerving experience. I drew myself up.

"As a mere bystander"--it was hard to tell if that registered on those walnut faces--"it appears to me the union council won the day, as you say. But what happens tomorrow?"

The last word was Hoop's. "Things go back to their normal confusion."



Trudging upstairs to my room to wash up before supper, I reflected again on that zigzag pattern of life. There I was, simply a hopeful empty-pocketed climber of the Richest Hill on the planet, and suspected of something more by nearly everyone except Rabrab, who usually saw connivance behind every mustache. At least, I told myself with a grim smile, tonight I could look forward to a meal not garnished with a goon.

But when I opened the door, my room looked as if it had been visited by a typhoon.

The bedding lay in a heap on the floor, the pillows flung onto the dresser top. The truly alarming thing, though, was the mattress, standing on its side and teetering toward me like a falling wall, while someone grunted in exertion behind it.

"You thugs!" I cried, wildly fishing in my pockets for the brass knuckles, expecting the pointy-faced Anaconda man to burst from the closet while the bigger one mashed me with the mattress. "Get out of here or I'll--"

The mattress stopped its waggle. Around an edge, Grace's face came into view. "Morrie!" She appeared as surprised as I was. "Is it that time of day already?"

"Room devastation time, you mean?" The brass knuckles swiftly pocketed out of her sight, I stepped toward the disarranged bed.

"I'm glad you're here, you can help me turn this mattress," she said reasonably. "I do this every couple of months, so you don't have to sleep on lumps." I took an end and we flopped the mattress into place. As she unfolded fresh sheets she looked across at me curiously. "You came in sounding like you were declaring war. What were you so worked up about?"



"Oh, that. Everything upset as it was, I thought I'd caught Hoop and Griff playing a prank on me," I alibied. "Tossing the room--all boys do it, and aren't they that at heart?"

"They're supposed to be painting the bad side of the house."

"I must have come around the other way."

Grace cocked an eyebrow. "'Thugs?'"

"The word comes from *thuggee*, Hindu for someone who sneaks around and, ah, does mischief to you."

She shook her head, making her braid dance. "I always learn something around you."

I made no answer. A fresh apprehension was coursing through me. Over in the corner of the disheveled room, my satchel was missing.

Busily fluffing a pillow, it took Grace a few moments to catch up to my alarmed gaze. "Oh. I had to move your bag out of the way. It's in the closet."

Undisturbed or gone through? I nearly asked. Suspicion was the contagion of Butte; now I was the one catching it. For once I was glad my trunk was not there, to disclose any of its secrets.

My landlady, dimpled with either innocence or guile, by now was done with the freshened bedding, the room miraculously back in order, and she announced she had better see to supper. "Grace?" I halted her before she could swish out the door. "You've been through the war of nerves between the men and the mining company before. What's your sense of this one?"

She bundled her hands in her apron as she considered my question. "My Arthur," she invoked somberly, "used to say taking on Anaconda is like wrestling a carnival bear. You have to hope its muzzle doesn't come off."



The speed of sound is slightly less than that of a shock wave, and so the tremor in the dark of that night shook my bed, and every other in Butte, a few instants before the noise of the blast arrived.

Even foggy with sleep, I knew this was no usual detonation, no dynamiting at the depth of a glory hole. I stumbled to the hallway. Half-dressed, Hooper struggled from his room yanking into the remainder of his clothes, while Griffith already was putting on coat and hat. At the head of the hall, Grace clutched her bedgown around her throat as she witnessed the exodus, then sent me an agonized look.

She did not even have to deliver my marching orders aloud. I dressed hastily and set off with the limping pair of old boarders to The Hill.

Up there, in the ghostly light of the headframes, a murmuring crowd was clustered around a mineshaft called the Flying Dutchman. When people gather from the nooks of a mining town to the surface of a disaster, they bring every degree of dread, and as the three of us edged through the throng I could feel the mood of apprehension, the air was sticky with it. Each arriving set of eyes, mine included, expected the sight of bodies laid out on the hard ground. But Griff and Hoop, pointing and muttering, saw at once this was no mineshaft accident, no explosion and flash of deadly flame deep in a tunnel. Instead, over near the machine house, beneath a now askew sign reading PROPERTY OF THE ANACONDA COPPER MINING COMPANY, the mine's pay office stood open to the night with its front wall blown out.

Blue-uniformed policemen were chiding the crowd to stay back, while burly civilian types who could only have been plainclothesmen prowled the blast site. Reporters were clamoring out questions and receiving no answers. Flashbulbs kept



going off, the hollowed-out pay office in rinses of light that would put it on front pages all across the state in the morning.

My companions were not impressed. "Mighty poor job of setting the dynamite," either Hooper or Griffith appraised there in the deep shadows of The Hill.

"Could've done that much with firecrackers, couldn't we," said the other.

To me, the building looked devastated enough, the huge ragged hole in its front displaying broken bricks like snagged teeth. I moved closer to the skeptical experts. "Do I hear that this blast wasn't up to your standards?"

"The stupid pay office is still standing, isn't it?"

"Well, yes."

"That's no kind of a result, if you're gonna blow something up."

"Waste of a good fuse and a match."

"But," I wasn't able to budge from the evidence of my eyes, "the front of the building is by and large gone."

"So what? They'll get bricklayers in here in the morning and have it fixed back up before you can say boo."

"Spell this out for me, then," I gave in. "How would someone who was an old hand at blowing things up have done it?"

"All it would have taken," Hoop explained patiently, "was to set the dynamite at the corner of the building."

"It'd slump over like a dropped cake," Griff mused, practically smacking his lips as he envisioned it.

By now the cloud of reporters and chain lightning of flashbulbs were concentrated around one small circle of men next to the Flying Dutchman's headframe. Even though I had expected something of the sort, my heart sank. As flashbulbs popped again, I saw in their glare the strong but strained features of



Jared Evans in the midst of his beleaguered union officials. Although I had nothing to lend but moral support, I headed over.

An arm slipped authoritatively through mine, nearly scaring the life out of me. "I just knew you'd show up, Mr. Morgan," Rab's warm voice was next to my ear. In stylish scarf and jumper, she cut an unlikely figure there in the industrial spoils of The Hill. With perfect prepossession, she assessed the cordon of newspapermen surrounding Jared and the other union men. "Look at the mob of them. They're like pecking birds."

As the two of us sorted our way there in the semi-dark, we could hear the volley of questioning. Peppered from all sides as he was, Jared raised a hand for quiet.

"We're told no one was hurt," he chose what to deal with and what not to. "Given that someone is killed in the working conditions in these mines every week of the year, in this nasty incident only bricks suffered any harm, for a change."

"Anaconda says provocation like this will make it take 'all necessary measures' to deal with a strike," called out a newspaperman in a better topcoat than the others, which marked him as working for the *Daily Post*, the mining company's mouthpiece. "What's the union think of that?"

"There is no strike," Jared deliberately raised his voice above the clanks and clatters of the night shift in the other mines around. "When the miners of this hill go out, there's never any mistaking it--you can hear the grass grow, up here. That's it, gentlemen, no more chitchat, thanks." To his council members, "I'll catch up with you at the union hall. We're in for a late night." Jared's expression had lifted measurably when he spotted Rabrab, and she and I skirted the pack of reporters to join him. As we did so, Rab "accidentally" tripped the *Post* man, sending him stumbling into an oily puddle and cursing at the splatter on that spiffy coat.



Smiling tiredly, Jared chuckled his feisty fiancée under the chin. "You'll get us a big headline."

"They'll smear you no matter what," Rab predicted, "in that waste of ink they call a newspaper." Making a face at the mangled pay office, she went on: "So the sneaks resorted to this. I suppose they think they're clever."

"They're not far from it," Jared let out a slow breath of judgment. "They've put us in a hole about the size of that, for now."

By then I felt reasonably sure that in the company of Jared and his union followers, I was not in with dynamiters--even inept dynamiters. To catch up with the conversation, I contributed in a confidential tone: "The Wobblies, you mean. It's in their interest to stir up all the trouble they can, so they did it with a bang, hmm?"

Jared and Rab looked at me as though I was speaking in tongues. He shook his head. "If the Wobs wanted into this, they'd more likely blow up a machine house. Something that would really cripple this mine."

I was back to bafflement. "Then who?"

"Mr. Morgan, put your thinking cap on," said Rab. "It's so obvious."

Weary as he was, Jared took pity on me. "Anaconda. Their goons. To blame it on the union."

There are moments in a lifetime when you can taste history as it is happening. When the flavor of time, from one hour to the next, somehow is not quite the same as any day before. So it was, at the start of the intense summer of 1919, as the miners of Butte and the mining corporation cooked up strategy against each other. Dickens should have been living in this hour to tell the tale of the two cities, the one of the neighborhoods of The Hill and the other of the tall offices downtown, in the double-numbered year.



The morning after the bombing of the pay office, along with breakfast Grace delivered a firm suggestion. "This might be a good day for everybody to stay in."

"How come, Mrs. Faraday?" Griff could have taught innocence to a cherub. "Nice weather, it'd be a shame not to take a little walk downtown."

Hoop went to the point: "We wouldn't want to miss anything."

"And I suppose you," Grace turned to me in exasperation, "are going to say the library will curl up and wither away if you're not there."

"Not at all," I said from behind my coffee cup. "But my job might, if I don't show up as usual."

Off the three of us went, into the tense center of things. There is an atmospheric condition known as earthquake weather, a blanket stillness that forecasts a shaking-up; this day was like that. Hoop and Griff and I hiked up The Hill to that vantage spot of my first day in town and waited. With the city braced, with squads of policemen at the ready, we held our breath as it came time for the morning shift of miners to appear. They did so in eerie silence, the long files of men spilling into the streets of Meaderville and Centerville and Finntown and Dublin Gulch as if forming a somber parade. They marched toward the police lines with barely a murmur. And then turned in at the gates of the mines and went to work as if all was normal.

At supper, Griff and Hoop were downcast and Grace was not serving up sympathy. "No blood in the streets, how disappointing. Jared Evans must be more sane than some I could mention."

"He'd better have something up his sleeve," Griff said.

#



Three mornings later, I rounded the corner of the library into a teeming streetful of miners and Sandison frowning down at them.

I worked my way through the crowd, dropping questions as I went. Sandison met me at the top of the steps, looking even more disgruntled than usual. He drew me aside behind a pillar, while the library staff and the miners gawked back and forth. "What do the knotheads say?" he pumped me without preliminary. "Have they quit fooling around and actually gone on strike this time?"

"Not as such," I reported. "It's another work action--just the morning shift, they told me."

"How many more times is this going to happen?" he demanded, as if I was in charge of that.

Knowing Jared Evans, I put up my hands helplessly. "Doubtless as many as it takes. Wouldn't you say it's a tactic that goes back to Roman history, Sandy? You will recall the great delayer, Fabius Cunctator, who outgeneraled his foes with skirmishes that put off the climactic battle time after time. It appears to me that the union similarly is using these stoppages to wear on Anaconda's nerves and--"

"They're practicing on mine, I can tell you that much," he disposed of my discourse. "Are we running a library or a union hall?" Scowling at his own question, he heaved himself around for another look at the packed street. I barely caught the words in his gust of exhalation: "Oh, hell, let them in, Morgan."

Full as a church on Christmas, the library brimmed with activity, much of it mine as I sped from task to task. Sandison commanded from the mezzanine, on the lookout for anyone forgetful enough to spit on the sacred floor, and things seemed to be going well until midway through the morning, when he flagged me down with the news:



"Miss Runyon has gone home in a nervous fit, the excitement has been too much for her. You'll have to take over the story hour."

"Now? How? Whatever short notice is, this is less."

"The tykes are on their way," he overrode my protest. "You wouldn't want to break their young hearts, would you?" Did the man actually have a sense of humor? I would have had to part that beard of his like a curtain to be sure. "Get yourself down there," he ordered.

I raced to the basement, hoping against hope that the auditorium's supply cabinet held some storybook that Miss Runyon had in reserve for emergencies such as this. Rummaging frantically, I came up with a dog-eared *Mother Goose Tales*. Well, it wasn't Aesop, but it would have to do. I breathed easier; from my experience in the one-room school, even jaded fifth-graders eavesdropped keenly enough when those old nursery tales were read to the younger children.

Then I heard the thumps and scuffles on the stairs.

By the time the freckled heathens of the sixth grade spilled into the room, with Rab riding herd behind them in a harried way, I had given up on Mother Goose. More like a rough-dressed horde than a class, boys and girls alike threw themselves into chairs and looked me over. *Who's this gink?* I heard the loud whispers. *How come so much of him is mustache? Where's old lady Bunion?*

"Everyone, shush or else," Rab recited as if by rote, meanwhile shoosing the final straggler in from the hallway. Pale as a chalk figure, Russian Famine slouched past her, sending me a prisoner's gaze as he took the farthest seat of the last row.

His classmates ignored him but not one another, pinching, poking, prodding, and generally provoking disorder. How well I remembered it all. Grade six somehow transforms obedient schoolchildren into creatures with the bravado of bandits and the restlessness of over-age Sunday schoolers. Rabrab herself had



turned into a schoolyard Cleopatra at that time of life; the Marias Coulee sixth-grade boys went dizzy in her presence. Now I watched her brightly approaching me while behind her a pugnosed boy and a redheaded girl swatted each other over the issue of elbow room. If Rab with her battlefield experience couldn't command best behavior from this bunch, what chance did I have? The dismaying thought occurred to me that, in Butte, perhaps this *was* best behavior.

"Mr. Morgan, what a treat," her velvet murmur greeted me as we stepped aside to confer. "My pupils don't know how lucky they are."

"I can see that. I was hoping for a second-grade choir of angels."

Rab wrinkled her nose at her squirming tribe. "They're somewhat worked up today."

"I wonder why."

"The Hill is a little excitable this morning," she hedged, "but Jared is only doing what he thinks is necessary."

"Maybe so. The question is, what am I to do with this mob of yours, Rab?"

"Anything you like, as long as it teaches first aid," she said contradictorily. "That's a must--we don't want the school board on our necks." She thought to add: "Nor, I imagine, Sam Sandison."

I had forgotten the medical aspect. Seeing my blank look, Rab prompted: "Your Miss Runyon starts off with Florence Nightingale as a nurse in, oh, say the Crimean War, with shot and and shell whizzing everywhere, and somehow jumps from there to strapping one of the pupils up in bandages. Then, next story hour it is Florence Nightingale happening upon some awful accident in London, and--"

"I get the picture."

There was nothing to be done but square myself up and advance to the stage of the auditorium. Restive in the seats below, the class eyed me like cub lions in



the arena waiting for a Christian meal. So be it; I took off my suit coat and tossed it to a surprised Rab, then rolled up my sleeves as if for a fight.

"Blood," I said in a tone practically dripping with it.

The word did its work, for the moment at least. Two dozen sulky faces showed flickers of interest.

"Blood is red as fire, and thicker than rain," I did not let up. "Blood percolates secretly all through us, from finger to toe. It outlines our family, whom we speak of as our own flesh and blood. When we are afraid, we feel our blood run cold, don't we, and when we are angry, we are hot-blooded. No other substance carries the magic of life so tirelessly." As I talked on, I pressed a set of fingers to my wrist. "The heart beats in its mysterious way day and night, so blood never sleeps." I finished taking my pulse. "While I have been speaking, my heart has pumped blood sixty times. If it had stopped doing so, back there when I rolled up my sleeves to test it, by now I would stand before you dead."

Several more heartbeats went by as my audience caught up with that. A litany of gasps, a lesser peal of laughs. One girl crossed herself.

Before such attention wore off, I swept my listeners through the Greek suppositions of Hippocrates and Galen that blood simply sloshed in us like water in a jug, to William Harvey's discovery that the substance in fact goes around and around. "The circulatory system, as it is called, sends this miraculous fluid circling through us." There is a glaze that comes over a class if too much of a topic is pressed on them at one time, and I could tell from a first few restless feet and territorial ellbows that I was reaching that limit.

Folding my arms on my chest in thinking mode, I paced the stage. "Roll up your sleeve, everyone." This was a gamble. Hardboiled boys and pouty girls among the group showed no inclination to do so. But Rab got on the job, patrolling mercilessly, and soon enough I had a forest of naked arms in front of me.



"There is a superstition that your life can be read in the palm of your hand," I began, "but really, it is written there on the underside of your wrist." I hustled them through taking their own pulse, emphasizing that the underskin rhythm was actually the contractions of arteries as blood was pushed through by the pumping of the heart. As intended, even the most heedless twelve-year-old could not ignore the message of existence there just beneath a surface barely thicker than paper. "And," I rounded off the arm lesson, "the blood that keeps us going has to find its way back to the heart to be pumped again. See the blue tracings between your wrist and elbow? Each of those is a vein. A word you have heard at home, am I right? Your fathers and perhaps your brothers descend into the body of earth to find those streaks of ore. If you think about it, copper is the blood of Butte."

As I said so, a part of my mind filled with visions of what lay ahead of these youngsters in this veined city. By all odds, at least one among the fresh-faced boys who would follow the family path into the mines would die underground in that relentless toll of a death a week. A greater number of their classmates in pigtailed and curls, women to be, would experience perilous childbirth and the innumerable ills of The Hill. Yet others sitting here today would go on uneventfully to what passed for average life in Butte. Those flashes of precognition were hypnotic; I could see as if it was written in me the circlings of fate which would single these young lives out, as always happens in the human story, within the rushing bloodstream of time.

"Mr. Morgan?" Rab prompted me out of my trance. "You were saying--?"

"Ah." I scrambled for new ground. "Blood provides life to our language, too, doesn't it. Shakespeare could scarcely write a page without bloodshed ahead or behind. Poets would have nothing to rhyme perfectly with *flood*. Who can tell me some everyday ways we use this essential word?"



"Bloody murder!" blurted a freckled scamp who seemed to relish the thought.

"Red-blooded," a bossy girl overrode that, impatient at not having been first.

"The blood of our Lord," said a cauliflower-ear tough who nonetheless must have been an altar boy.

"Bloodshot eyes!" rang out from one end of the increasingly enthusiastic audience, and from the other, "Blood poisoning!"

Amid the hubbub came a muted utterance from the back row. Everyone looked around. I encouraged: "A little louder, please?"

Russian Famine wriggled in his seat, scratched behind his ear, gazed over our heads as though that would make us go away, and finally muttered:

"No getting blood out of a turnip."

"A well-known saying, thank you very much," I honored that. Before I could get another word out, a hand was up and waving strenuously. Its owner was the impish enthusiast for bloody murder. "I perceive you have a question."

"Sure do. Back there a ways when you had us taking our pulse, how come we couldn't do it on our veins just as good as on those archeries?"

"Clean out your ears, dummy," the girl next to him jumped on that. "It's not *archeries*. That's bows and arrows. It's *arthries*, like arthritis. Isn't that right, Mr. Teacher?"

"You are both nearly correct." But not near enough. While explaining that the returning blood in veins was too dispersed to register a pulse, I despaired of ever making my words stick in minds as flighty as these. Then an idea hatched.

"Miss Rellis?" Rabrab was startled to hear me call her that for the first time since she was the age of these students. "Do your young scholars ever sing?"

"They most certainly do. Why?"



"Can they sing this one?" I whistled a snatch of it.

Confidently, Rab swept to the front to lead the command performance.

"Class, serenade Mr. Morgan such as he has never heard."

Whether it was the song's mischievous endorsement of betting on bobtail nags or the familiar sassy tune or simply the chance to bawl at the top of their adolescent voices, the sixth-graders attacked the old favorite with gusto, making the auditorium ring with the final galloping chorus:

Camptown ladies sing this song, doo dah, doo dah!

Camptown racetrack's five miles long, oh the doo dah day!

"Unforgettable," I said with a congratulatory bow to the class when the last high-pitched note had pierced the rafters. "And would you believe, the exact things we have been talking about go nicely with that same tune. Hum it for me and I'll show you." With the room practically vibrating to Stephen Foster's jingle-jangle rhythm that practically anything can be fitted to, I improvised:

Arteries and veins and pulse; heartbeat, heartbeat!

They all deliver life to us, that's the job of blood!

"Ready to try it?" I challenged. They couldn't be held back. Rab looked radiant as the young voices romped through my version a number of times.

"One last thing." I rolled my sleeves down at the conclusion of the songfest. "At next week's story hour, I am sure Miss Runyon will be happy to show you the knack of the tourniquet."

"I hope you didn't do too much damage to the minds of the youngsters." Sandison was back to prowling the mezzanine when I came upstairs. "Just imagine," he swept a hand over the scene of the miners tucked in every conceivable sitting place in the Reading Room below, "if we had this kind of patronage on a usual day. The trustees would think we're geniuses." He looked resentfully at the



Roman-numeraled clock high on the wall. "And at one minute past noon, ninety out of a hundred of our involuntary scholars will hightail it out of here to the nearest speakeasy. The poor fools."

"That's an altogether gloomy view of humanity, isn't it, Sandy?" I protested. "Surely a good many of the men apply their minds while they're in here like this."

"Hah." He rested his bulk against one of the grand bookcases, the gilt-edged works of George Eliot over one shoulder and Ralph Waldo Emerson over the other. "Let me tell you a story, Morgan." A distant look came into those iceberg-blue eyes. "It was back when I was just starting out in the cattle business, before I could get things built up into the Triple S. I was wintering in by myself--Dora and I hadn't been to a preacher yet. It was a bad winter, down around zero a lot of mornings when I'd have to pitch hay to the cows. Other than the feeding, I had all the time in the world on my hands and the winter wasn't half over before I'd memorized every damn word of all the reading material in the house." He turned his hands up empty, still in the distance of remembering. "There wasn't a library or bookstore in fifty miles in those days. The only neighbor was an old prospector, up a gulch a couple of miles away. I'd seen a beat-up copy of *Robinson Crusoe* in his cabin." Sandison fixed his disturbing gaze on me. "You're a bookworm, maybe you savvy: I had to have that book or go crazy. I saddled up to go get it. Snow was starting to come down heavy, but I didn't give a damn, I wanted that book. When I got there the old coot drove a hard bargain--I had to promise him a veal calf in the spring. Anyhow, he finally handed over the book and I wrapped it good in a piece of oilcloth and stuck it under my coat. Rode all the way home in a blizzard and both ears were frostbitten, but I still thought it was worth it." One more time he scowled down at the mineworkers, some of whom were starting to watch the clock.



"See there? Do you think any of these would have gone through that for the sake of a book? Look at them, they'd rather educate their tonsils than their brains."

Maybe I thought he was scanting the capacities of the Quins and the Jareds and others from The Hill whose minds were as lively as could be asked for. Maybe I was still sailing on air after my session with Rab's young minds. In any case, I indignantly invoked the bard of us all, presiding open-eyed as an owl above the entrance to the jam-packed Reading Room. "You leave me no choice but to bring down Shakespeare on you, Sandy. 'The music of men's lives' is not so easy to call the tune of, we must remember."

At that, the expression under Sandison's beard was unreadable, but the rest was plain enough. Shaking his head conclusively, he moved off toward his office, leaving the words over his shoulder: "You're an optimist, Morgan. That's always dangerous."

"You have a caller."

Along with Grace's knock on my door came the distinct note of curiosity in her tone. I was as inquisitive as she was. With my head still full from that day in the library, I could think of hardly anyone in the entire city who would be paying me a call here, with two shadowy exceptions. But Grace, of all people, would know an Anaconda goon when she saw one. Wouldn't she? To be on the safe side, I made sure the brass knuckles were in my pockets before I went downstairs.

The parlor was empty, as was the dining room; no caller, no Grace, anywhere.

Just as panic was setting in on me, she called from the kitchen: "In here, Morrie. Your visitor is making me tired just looking at him."



The first glimpse of my guest, I relaxed the grip on my weaponry. Dealing with a twelve-year-old may take a lot of one's resources, but usually not brass knuckles.

Skinny as the sticks of kindling in the woodbox behind him, in dusty patched pants and a hand-me-down shirt, Russian Famine was only barely occupying a chair, one leg jittering and then the other, ready to bolt. Grace, as usual in crisp apron and a dress so clean it practically squeaked, was looking at him as if one or the other of them was at the wrong costume party. So as not to confound her even further, I retrieved the boy's given name with a smile: "Wladislaw, we meet again. What brings you?"

Even his words were thin and fidgety. "Miss Rellis needs to see you. At that Poority place."

"It's another long story," I fended off Grace's quizzical look. Gesturing toward our surprise caller, I made a supping motion. "Perhaps--?"

"Good heavens, yes." She cut a thick slice of bread, put it on a plate, and set it in front of the famished-looking youngster. Pouring from the syrup can, she said: "Say when."

"I like it sogged."

The syrup pooled on the plate before the boy nodded. As he tucked in to the food, Grace wordlessly cut another slab of bread for him. I excused myself to fetch my hat from upstairs. When I came back down, Grace's guest reluctantly licked his fork and edged out of the chair to go with me. "I may be a while," I told her. "Skip me at supper."

"The larder can stand a chance to recover," she bade us off, still looking mystified.

# —————



Another side of Butte showed itself in the route I was now led on. With a nonchalance you might not expect in a sixth-grader, my guide took an immediate shortcut through Venus Alley. Overhead in one of the red-curtained windows, the sash was flung up and a woman in a kimono leaned out. "Hey, kid! How about running over to Betty the bootlegger's and getting us a bottle of her best?"

"I'm busy, can't you see?" the boy called back importantly.

"Then how about you, mustachio? Come on up and we'll cure what ails you."

"I'm busy keeping up with him," I tipped my hat, "thank you very much anyway."

Block after block, we wound our way past buildings that put all their respectability out front, their back ends grimy with the detritus of coal chutes and the leavings of garbage. Around every other corner a view of The Hill was framed between brick walls, the tower over a mineshaft like a spiked ornament on the roof of the city. I could hear the throb of ore lifts and other machinery, so pronounced after the silence left behind when the morning shift walked off; Jared and his tactic of work actions was turning The Hill off and on like a master switch. If, that is, the Anaconda Company didn't find a way to break his hold on the matter. Or already had. I wondered again why Rab was summoning me.

Suddenly my hotfooted escort was talkative. "How come you work at the library 'stead of the schoolhouse? I was just telling Miss Rellis she's the best teacher in the whole world and she said not as long as you're on two legs."

That touched me deeply. Yet it also mandated an answer. "Life likes to surprise us, Wladislaw, and so--"

"I hate getting called that," he muttered, squirming as if to dodge the name.

"It sounds too much like 'coleslaw.'"

"Russian Famine, then--"



"Don't like that no better. I ain't any kind of a Russian. My unk says if we're anything, it's Glishians." I tried to remember if Galicia was central to what the Europeans from time immemorial called the Polish Problem, and whether that part of Poland was another jigsaw piece on the table in front of Wilson and Clemenceau and Lloyd George as they sought to remake the world at the Paris treaty conference. In any case, the Old Country was forever off the map of a peddler whose only ware was the sharpening of knives, and a skin-and-bones street tough nephew, wasn't it. The thought clutched at me: the fostering places that we are exiled from, in the irreversible twists of life.

Back to the question at hand, though. "Young citizen of the world, we are running out of possibilities--what would you like to be called?"

He thought for the next some steps, slowing his pace to mine. "Famine ain't too bad. It'd be one of those nicked names, huh?"

Gravely I took off my hat and in due ceremony tapped him on a narrow shoulder with it. "By whatever authority is vested in me, I dub thee Famine." He bounced a little higher his next couple of steps. "Now then, Famine, as I was saying. Sometimes a person finds himself doing the unexpected. And so you give each job everything you have, but stay on your toes for what comes next. Isn't it that way with you at school?"

A shrug. "I guess. Miss Rellis's flame says it's the same in the army, now you're peeling spuds and next thing you're shooting back at somebody."

"Jared is at the Purity with her?"

"Uh huh." The boy flopped his hair out of his eyes and looked around at me hopefully. "That sure was good about blood. Are you gonna do story hour some more?"

"We'll see," I said, smiling. "That's up to the man who runs the library."

"With all the whiskers? The one they call the Earl of Hell?"



That stopped me in my tracks.

"Where did you hear that?"

Famine slowed himself to wait for me by walking backwards. "Down around the stockyards. Those cowboys riding the fence are always yacking about something."

I felt relieved. I could easily believe Samuel Sandison had been high-handed in his ranch days and gained that name in the Triple S bunkhouse. That had me thinking about the doggedness of reputation, fair or not, when Famine, curiosity on as much of his face as there was, wanted to know:

"What's a earl?"

"Someone who owns everything but a good name, usually. That other word, I'd advise you not to use around Miss Rellis."

"Uh huh, she's death on cussing." Restless as a hummingbird, Famine now was talking to the top of my head. I had frowned him off clambering on fire escapes along our backstreet route, but he couldn't resist hopping up onto the loading docks at rear entries to stores. He teetered along the planked edge of this latest one, his sense of balance making a mockery of gravity. I watched with the envy of those of us who have outgrown the blind bravery of a twelve-year-old. Perhaps it was the pale sharp cheeks or the flatly factual eyes beneath the toss of uncombed yellow hair, but he looked oddly pristine up there, more like a trainee in an acrobats' academy than a schoolboy. I thought back to the blood enthusiasts among his classmates, and to the black eyes, bent noses, scabs, and bruises that my Marias Coulee pupils accumulated in the average mayhem of the schoolyard. Skinny and milk-skinned as he was, my young friend seemingly would be a bullies' delight, yet there was not a mark on him. "Famine, I'm not trying to be nosy, but the bigger boys don't give you trouble?"

"Would if they could catch me."



"You're quite the runner then. Don't they ever catch you?"

"Huh uh." He continued along the outmost inch of the loading platform with the aplomb of a tightrope walker. "I run until they drop."

After depositing me at the entrance to the Purity Cafeteria, Famine vanished at a high lope. The owner, a scarlet bowtie blazing under his set of chins, met me with a glad cry. "I knew you'd be back," the gust of welcome nearly parted my hair, "your appetite wouldn't let you stay away! Help yourself, this is the spot to fill that hollow leg!" I slipped in line behind a broad-beamed couple who obviously had partaken of the menu many times before. First things first, as ever; I peeked from behind the glassware breakfront to make sure Tolliver and Eel Eyes were not on the premises, then gathered a meal for myself and joined Rab and Jared at their corner table.

Fatigue showed on Jared, but so did something like the sheen of a winning streak; Rab's pride in him stuck out all over her. He had not backed down after the dynamiting of the Flying Dutchman pay office, simply skipped aside from any blame with the kind of remark Butte loved--even the *Daily Post* could not resist quoting him--to the effect that anybody who worked for Anaconda maybe should have his head examined, but no miner was dumb enough to blow up the place his wages came from. In boxing parlance, I knew, he and the union were winning the early rounds on points, with the shift stoppages he was invoking about some faulty working condition or another in the mineshafts; the danger was whether the company would be provoked into unloading a haymaker, such as a lockout or a show of force, brutal and bloody, by its goons. Well, he was the tactician and I wasn't. I simply remarked, "On behalf of the library, I should thank you for our unprecedented number of users, certain days lately."



"Always glad to encourage the cause of learning," Jared responded, wearing that droll expression somewhere between pious and piratical. "I hear you're quite the expert on blood." He eyed me as if curious to find any evidence to back that up.

"In a pedagogical sense," I said, between bites of my food. "All in all, though, that is likely the wisest approach to the substance. For instance, Shakespeare invoked the word some seven hundred times in his works, but there is no evidence he ever actually experienced the shedding of blood. Christopher Marlowe, now, sadly did undergo--"

"My pupils want you back next week to talk about skulls and skeletons," Rab sought to pin me down.

"While you're handing out favors," Jared was quick on the heels of that, "I could use one, too. Rab tells me you're a whiz with figures."

With a modest gesture I admitted to something of the sort.

"Good. Anaconda has us bamboozled on the production figures." As if scouting a battlefield, he scanned the entirety of the restaurant to make sure we were not being observed. "Show him, Rab."

Covertly she cracked open her sizable purse to give me a peek at a vivid sheaf of papers. "Those are the pink sheets the mine managers hand in at the end of each week," Jared went on in a low voice. "The janitor at the Hennessy Building is supposed to burn them, but he has a nephew working in the Neversweat shafts, so he slips the batch to us." Rapidly he explained that the famously fought-over wage was tied to The Hill's production total and subsequent price of copper, but the union was suspicious of the company's numbers in the negotiations. "They're playing it cute on us, we're pretty sure. It seems like the bulk tons that come out of the mine"--he indicated Rab's trove of pink sheets--"ought to add up to more processed tons at the smelter than the company tells us. But the differential is the



problem. No two mines assay out at the same percent of copper in the ore, and there are three dozen Anaconda mines on The Hill." Jared tugged ruefully at his lopped ear. "It's driving us batty trying to come up with a complete figure to argue against theirs."

"I told you Mr. Morgan would have a solution," Rab snuggled nearer him with the scheming expression I remembered so well, "just wait and see."

With the situation delineated to their satisfaction, the two of them, ravens of collusion, waited me out.

This, I realized with a churning in my stomach that caused me to lose interest in my meal, was another of those moments when choice was forced upon me. What was being asked of me was exactly what Sandison inveighed against, taking sides in the dogfight, as he not inaccurately characterized the Butte feud of labor and capital. Here was where a headful of learning was a burden. Intuition, instinct, some mental gremlin, whispered to me that the library's extensive mineralogy section, complete with the annual mining reports of the state industrial board, with a bit of calculation might yield the set of ore differentials the union needed. But why should it be up to me to coax out that magic arithmetic? Unfortunately the answer kept coming back, *who else?* Resist it as I tried, a certain line of reasoning insisted that the Anaconda Company had an army of bookkeepers on its side and the union deserved at least one.

Besides, around Jared Evans you felt you were made of stronger stuff than imagined, and Rab's guile was as infectious as ever.

"All right," I sighed as she glowed in triumph, "let me see what I can do." Jared watched keenly as she slipped me the pink sheets and I tucked them well out of sight inside my vest. "I may live to regret this, but I'll help out in the name of the holy cause of the lost dollar."



"Oh, we have the wage back up to where it was," he answered matter-of-factly. "Now we need to fight to hang on to it."

"You have the-- Since when?"

"Since some Anaconda bigwig with a lick of sense looked at a calendar and realized Miners Day is almost here." He grinned fully for the first time. "Just after the next payday."

"It's Butte's biggest doings of the year," Rab leapt in on that. "The whole town turns out for Miners Day. You'll have to, too, Mr. Morgan."

My brain felt weak. "Are you telling me the Anaconda Company gave in about the dollar because a holiday is coming?"

"Look at it from their side," Jared instructed. "Every miner in Butte will be parading through town that day. If you were up there on the top floor of the Hennessy building, would you rather have them happy or ready to tear things up?"

"Then this is a kind of truce," I wanted to make sure of what I was hearing, "of the moment?"

"That's not a bad way of putting it," he commended in his best sergeant manner. "The one thing sure about dealing with Anaconda is that the war is never over."

Whatever lunar power Miners Day possessed that the year's other three hundred and sixty-four did not, things settled down ahead of it. Work actions ceased and The Hill pulsed day and night with the excavation of rich copper ore. The coveted dollar a day, as Jared had said, was added back in to the wages of ten thousand temporarily soothed union men. Without the morning tides of miners, library life quieted to its usual seashell tone of whispers. Miraculously, I nearly caught up with the chores Sandison pushed my way. He himself, of course, constituted a sizable task as often as not.



This day I came back into the office after some errand to find him pacing from his desk to the window and back, his footsteps sharp as a march beat. Barely acknowledging me with a glance, he delivered: "That robber Gardiner in New York I deal with has a fine copy of *Asphodel*. What do you think?"

Quick as a fingersnap, I calculated what a transaction of that sort would do to the delicate balance I had achieved in the library's ledger. "Sir Walter Scott himself regarded that as one of his lesser works," I responded breezily. "Rather like *Ivanhoe*, but done with a trowel."

He grunted. "All right, I'll think it over." The boots retraced their route as if following dance steps imprinted on the floor. I grew uneasy as he prowled the room, more often than not a signal that something was on his mind. I could only hope no one had blabbed to him that I was staying late after the Jabberwockians and other evening groups packed up and went home, and immersing myself suspiciously deep in the mineralogy section.

Just then Miss Mitchell from the cataloguing section, young and rather pretty and somewhat of a flirt, came in with a question. I dealt with it in no time and she pranced out.

Sandison watched the back of her until she shimmied out of sight, then deposited himself in his desk chair. He turned my way so weightily the chair groaned. "Morgan, I don't see you making eyes at young things like that even when they're asking for it. What are you, some kind of buck nun?"

This turn of topic took me off guard. Good grief, did my social situation look that dusty to someone whose own idea of mating in life was the grandee and grandora sort? Trying not show how much that smarted, I stiffly assured my white-bearded interrogator: "I enjoy female companionship when it presents itself, never fear."



"This day got away from me." Grace guiltily bustled past me, trying to tie her apron and control her braid at the same time, when I came in at the end of my own hectic day. "How do you feel about cold turkey for supper?"

"Rather tepid. Let me see what can be done." Following her to the kitchen, I scrounged the cupboard, coming up with cheese that was mostly rind, some shelled walnuts, and macaroni. Yielding the culinary arena gracefully, so to speak, Grace stood aside while I whacked chunks of the turkey into smaller pieces and set those to simmering in cream and flour in a baking pan.

"Such talent." She watched with folded arms as I did my imitation of Escoffier. "If all else fails, you can get on as a cook at the Purity," she ventured.

Up until then, I had not offered any explanation of Rab mysteriously summoning me to the cafeteria, nor, for that matter, of Rab herself. "Yes, well, Miss Rellis you heard mentioned by our fleet young friend the other day," I fussed with the meal makings some more while coming up with a judicious version of the past, "and to make a long story short," by which time a pot of water was boiling merrily and I dumped in the macaroni for what was going to be approximate turkey tetrazzini, "someone I knew when she was just a girl ends up as the fiancée of none other than Jared Evans. Isn't it surprising how things turn out?"

Grace's expression had gradually changed from puzzlement to a ghost of a smile. "You lead an interesting life, Morrie."

As I combined the macaroni and turkey and added the walnuts, I took the opportunity to bring up the question that was in my mind and doubtless Hoop's and Griff's these past many suppers. "Now you tell me something--why is a holiday bird like this such a perpetual bargain at this time of year?"

Razor-sharp shopper that she was, Grace looked at me as if I did not understand basic commerce. "Don't you know? The homesteaders' crops dried



up, so they tried raising turkeys. The whole dryland country is gobblers these days, and what that does to the price, you see, is--"

"I can guess, thank you." I tried not to show it, but the news of hard times in the other Montana, the prairie part of the state where agriculture drank dust if rain did not come, hit into me all the way to the hilt. My hands took over to grate the cheese atop the other ingredients while the remembering part of myself was transported to Marias Coulee and the parting of the ways there, Rose's and mine. So deep in thought was I that I barely heard Grace's expression of relief as the turkey dish went into the oven looking fit for a feast. "You've turned the trick again, how do you do it?" She patted my shoulder as she passed. "I'll call you and the Gold Dust Twins to the table when it's done."

My mood refused to lift during supper; the boarding house blues are not easily shaken off once they get hold of you. The same exact faces that had seemed so companionable three times a day now surrounded me like random passengers in a dining car, right, left, and center. The four of us were at that table because nowhere in our solitary lives was there a setting for just two. I knew Hooper was a widower, and no one had ever been willing to put up with Griffith as a matrimonial mate. Grace still was beholden to her knightly Arthur, touchy as she was about any appearance of being "taken up with" by any unworthy successor. And I, I had to be classified as something like an obligatory bachelor, always mindful that for a woman to be married to me would be like strapping her to a lightning rod. A quartet of solitudes, sharing only a tasty meal.

Tired from brooding--tired *of* brooding--I excused myself from small talk after eating and went up my room to lose myself in a book. The one I had brought home was a lovely blue-and-gold volume of letters titled *Let Me Count the Ways*. The illustrious surname incised twice on the cover caused me a rueful moment;



Casper used to tease me whenever he caught sight of my Browning collection, asking if I was reading up on how to get a suntan.

I tucked onto a pillow and the coverlet hoping to be transported, and was. In the marriage of poets, I found from the very first page, each wrote with the point of a diamond. Dazzled and dazzling, Robert Browning was a suitor beyond any that Elizabeth of Wimpole Street could have dreamt of:

*I love your verses with all my heart, dear Miss Barrett...the fresh strange music, the affluent language, the exquisite pathos and true new brave thought; but in this addressing myself to you--your own self, and for the first time, my feeling rises altogether.*

*I do, as I say, love these books with all my heart--and I love you too.*

The quality in that. The pages fell still in my hands as I thought of such a matching of souls. The ceiling became a fresco of Marias Coulee as I sank back on the pillow and imagined my version.

*"Morrie! You're back! Even though you promised not to be."*

*"Rose, run away with me."*

*"Oh, I can't."*

*"You did before."*

*"I did, didn't I. But that was to save our skins, remember?"*

*"You might be surprised how little the situation has changed."*

*"Tsk, don't spoof like that. I know you. That tongue of yours calls whatever tune it wants to."*

*"If you won't listen to reason, my dear, let me try passion. We have ten lost years to make up."*

*"Where's the clock that can do that?"*

Rose always did know how to stump a good argument.



Wincing, I put away reverie and sat up. My mind took a resolute new posture as well. You don't need to be a biblical scholar to realize there is a time to equivocate and a time to decide.

Still in my slippers, I trotted down the stairs. In the living room, Grace whirled from the sideboard where she was putting away her mending, looking flustered at my hurried arrival. I halted at the foot of the stairs, she braced at her end of the room. Practically in chorus, we blurted:

"I was wondering if you might want to--"

"If you don't have anything better to do--"

Both of us stumbled to a pause. She caught her breath and expelled it in saying, "You first."

"I'd be impolite."

"Morrie, out with it, whatever it is--we can't beat around the bush all night."

"I suppose not. I, ah, I wondered if you might like to go to Miners Day. With me, that is."

Grace covered her hand with her mouth and hiccuped a laugh. I felt ridiculous and, calling myself every kind of a fool, was ready to slink back upstairs when she put out a hand to stop me. "Great minds run in similar tracks. I was about to knock on your door and ask you."



## 8

“Never seen you quite so dolled up, Morrie. Mrs. Faraday will have to go some to keep up with you.”

I smoothed the fabric of my new checked vest and adjusted the silk necktie bought to match it. “Everyone tells me Miners Day is a holiday like no other. You are quite the fashion plate yourself, Griff.”

“Better be, on account of the parade. We’ve marched in every one of them, haven’t we, Hoop.”

“Since parades was invented.”

The brand-new work overalls on both of them looked stiff enough to creak, and underneath were the churchgoing white shirts and ties. Their headgear, though, was the distinctive part. Each wore a dingy dented helmet that must have seen hard duty in the mineshafts.

“Are you expecting a hailstorm?” I asked with a straight face.



Hoop proudly tapped his headpiece. "The Hill tried to knock my brains out any number of times, but nothing ever got past this lid. Any more we only wear it the one day a year, don't we, Griff."

Telling me they had to form up early with the other marchers or spend the entire parade looking at hundreds of behinds, the pair hurried out while I waited for Grace to come down from her room. With The Hill not operating due to the holiday, a stillness had settled over the city and the boarding house was in rare quiet. A silent room that is not your own tends to breed long thoughts. Around me now, the boarding house's furnishings seemed to sit in arrested attitude, as if arranged in a villa in Pompeii. The mood of timeless deliberation drew me in and I became more aware than ever of the wedding photograph on the sideboard, where Arthur Faraday stared levelly at me. Something in that everlasting straight gaze reminded me of Casper, likewise gone too early from life and a bride who idolized him. Introspection is a rude visitor. An unsparing look into myself went to the heart, in more ways than one. I know myself fairly well: I am solo by nature. Incurably so, on the evidence thus far. But what a hard-eyed trick of fate--perhaps reflected in Arthur's stare?--if I was destined, around women, always to be a stand-in for better men.

"Sorry to keep you waiting," I heard Grace behind me, her footsteps quick on the stairs. "I had about forgotten how to dress up."

I turned to look at her, and looked again. She had gone some, in Griff's phrase for it. Her hair was done up in a crown braid, and atop that sat a broadbrimmed summer hat with a nice little swoop to it and a sprig of red ribbon. Her dress, attractively tailored to her compact form, was of a sea-green with a shimmer to it. Even her complexion had a new glow, assisted by just enough rouge to give her cheeks a hint of blush.

"Very nice," I fumbled out.



"You, too," she managed.

With Arthur in the room, we stood there shying away from further compliments, until she remembered to check the clock. "We should get a move on," landlady back in her voice, "everyone turns out for the parade. I hope we can still find a place to see."

"Spare yourself that worry," I rallied. "I know just the spot."

Man, woman, and child, the populace of Butte lined the downtown streets half a dozen thick. I shouldered a way for us, Grace with a grip on the tail of my coat, to the block by the library. She looked dubious as I led her past people picnicking on the steps to the big arched doorway. "Isn't the library closed for today?"

"Except to the privileged." I displayed the key.

We slipped in, the ornate front door sweeping closed behind us. Inside the thick walls, the din of the outside world was shut out. The foyer, its Tuscan paneling and dark timbered beams as royal as ever, stood staidly empty. I glanced up to see whether Shakespeare winked at us as we passed through the Reading Room doorway, and he may have. Grace gazed around the elegant quiescent chamber with a trace of awe, and then at me. "Sam Sandison must trust you."

"Mmm, I suspect he simply doesn't want me to have any excuse day or night for not being in here doing all the things he piles on me to do."

As we passed through the Reading Room, I could not help but stop for a minute and run my eyes over the mezzanine's ranks of books, silent and eloquent. I was smitten every time by the finest collection west of Chicago, and to have its literary riches almost to myself this way seemed like a scene in a dream. Housed in their books, the souls of writers waited in this great room to come out into the light of day. I would not have been surprised right then if Joseph Conrad materialized at



the railing like a stalwart first mate on the deck watch, or Emily Dickinson came tiptoeing out of the shelves to peer down to the unattainable life below.

"My. It's so different in here without anyone around, isn't it."

"Grace, you needn't whisper."

"Oh, right." She trilled a laugh in relief. "If you promise not to shush me."

A last lingering moment, I gazed at the varicolored bindings of the books as a person would cast a final glance at the jeweled colors of a cathedral window.

Then I motioned Grace to the stairway, but she stayed as she was, studying me.

"This is the love of your life, isn't it. What's in these books."

"I suppose it is," I conceded. "As the phrase goes, for better and for worse."

Off the corridor to Sandison's office was a small balcony, like a flex in the stonework over the main entrance's keystone arch, and the parade coming down Broadway would pass practically beneath us. Grace went straight to the balustrade and took a full look around, adjusting the swoop of her hat to keep the sun out of her eyes. Smiling her best, she plucked at the cuff of my suitcoat. "This is such a treat, you devil."

The rising roar from the street announced that things were underway. The copper capital of the known world knew how to stage a spectacle. Everything in shoes walked in the parade. The lodges--Masons, Elks, Templars, Odd Fellows, you name it--all of them sashed, some plumed. The firemen, prideful of their new hook-and-ladder Ford. The suffragists, triumphant with their signs celebrating the correction to the Constitution that would give women the vote. The trade unions, and in Butte that was every trade; bakers, tailors, cooks, carpenters, even blacksmiths went by with their banners in the breeze. Most groups were led by a drum, the boom of march step resounding off the buildings. Then behind those



marchers came the big horses, the brass of their harnesses gleaming, pulling delivery vans of every sort, and other horse-drawn conveyances polished up for the occasion. A traveling carnival, calliope and all, rolled past in gold-spoked wagons; a stiltwalker ambulated by nearly at eye level with us. The next group on wheels were putt-putting automobiles with dignitaries trying to maintain dignity in the herky-jerky progress.

Eventually, more pedestrianly, came contingents of schoolchildren. Rab, gaily dressed, went by in charge of a flock of beribboned girls representing her school. She spotted me, waved, and blew me a kiss. Grace looked at me with a slightly raised eyebrow. "She must have been quite something as a girl."

By now the Miners Day procession had gone on for most of an hour, and I leaned out to see how much more there could possibly be. "Good heavens!" was all I could say.

Bearing down on us was what looked like an army of toy soldiers magnified to heroic size. Each marching man wore a uniform of emerald green with gold-thread embossing across the chest and down the sleeves, and their cap visors were set identically low to their brows. The mix of gaudy uniforms and shiny musical instruments suggested an orchestra conscripted onto the stage of an operetta. As the marching mass neared the library, its leader spun in his tracks and, walking backward, lifted his arms. Instantly instruments sprang to lips, and at his signal, a Sousa march roared to life. Sun glinted off a tuba, the extensions of trombones, the squadron of cornets. The bass drums produced a beat that could be felt on the body.

"The Miners Band," Grace managed to make herself heard into my ear. "They're nationally known. Not for lullabies, as you might guess."

And in the wake of the powerful music, here came the miners in their hundreds and hundreds, beneath a forest of banners with the union council proudly



at the front. Leading them with his level stride was Jared, in suit and tie and a snappy hat that might as well have been a crown. With his triumph in the wage battle, he was the hero of the day; Caesar coming home to Rome after victory could have received no greater tribute from the crowd. Grace and I added our cheers. The banners dipped and rose and swirled in back of Jared and the other council members, where the ranks of men who worked in the mineshafts stretched for blocks, each national group distinct to itself as I had seen them that first day on The Hill, but now scrubbed and tidied and in their best clothing. We strained to see, and tucked in between the Finns and the Serbians were the retired miners, with Griffith and Hooper and dozens of stooped replicas all in their vintage helmets.

By now the band had wheeled about and come back, facing the mineworkers. The resplendent bandleader lifted his arms and everything halted. He bowed from the waist toward the council, and a great cheer went up for the union and the restored wage. The other council members pushed Jared, grinning and not objecting too much, out for recognition by himself. The bandleader spun, up went the arms, and in tribute the band thundered into the mighty Welsh anthem, "Men of Harlech."

Men of Harlech, march to glory!

Victory is hov'ring o'er ye!

Bright-eyed freedom stands before ye--

Hear ye not her call?

"I've never been within five thousand miles of Wales," Grace was sniffing when it was over, "and that old thing always makes me want to bawl."

I was somewhat misty myself. "A very wise man once said mankind's two great magics are words and music."

Meanwhile Jared had doffed his hat to the band and the crowd, and the marchers were starting to shuffle into motion again.



Then it happened.

From somewhere, perhaps an alley or a rooftop, came a lone singing voice, just short of a yodel but with a devilish lilt to it. The refrain sliced through the parade mood:

Wear the copper collar,  
Swallow dirt for your dollar.  
You'll eat pie  
In the sky  
By and by.

Jared looked up as if the mocking ditty had hit him like an arrow. A squad of policemen at the intersection, whom I had assumed were on hand to hold back the crowd, jumped into action toward where the derisive singing seemed to come from. Before they made much headway, the unwelcome songster was at it again.

Work and pray,  
Live on hay.  
You'll eat pie  
In the sky  
By and by.

Now a couple of the council members shouted to the bandleader, a march tune was struck up, and the parade slowly snaked into motion once again. Looking back from now, what strikes me in the whole episode was that although I had never heard the pie-in-the-sky stanza before, I knew its origin almost from the first few insidiously catchy notes. So did Jared, according to his reaction. That kind of serenade rose straight from the Little Red Songbook.

"That's Butte for you." Grace had been waiting as patiently as she could for me to return to myself. "The top of the world one minute, the glory hole the next."



# —————

Now it was her turn to surprise. With the parade over, I assumed we would follow the crowd to the next attraction, down at the depot. Butte was a regular stop for political speakers traveling through, in that ritual of a suspender-bursting oration from the rear platform of a train. Today's portable statesman was the imported variety, Eamon de Valera, a leader in Ireland's struggle against British rule, and judging by the sprigs of green in lapels and bonnets of everyone rushing by us, Dublin Gulch was avalanching off The Hill to hear him. Grace, though, firmly headed us the other direction. She would not tell me our destination--"You know what curiosity did to the cat, don't you?"--as we bundled onto a trolley. All I saw ahead as the trolley tracks continued past the outskirts of the city were mine dumps and the wall of mountains that topped out at the Continental Divide. Yet Grace and the other holiday-goers packed in with us were as merry as if we were bound for paradise.

The last stop on the line, in the tuck of a valley at the foot of the mountains, may not have been my notion of paradise, but it was somebody's idea of a fantasy land. We stepped off into an enormous amusement park, with COLUMBIA GARDENS spelled out in floral design against an entire hillside. Everything but the flowers seemed to be in excited motion. As I tried to take it all in, a roller coaster galloped through the treetops, and beyond, a ferris wheel spun against the sky. Across acres and acres of the only green grass I had seen since coming to Butte, there were picnic groves; a playground featuring a brilliantly striped maypole and highflying swings and a labyrinth of monkey bars; a merry-go-round; a zoo; a baseball diamond; a boxing ring; a trout pond; flower gardens; on and on. And the populace of the city had arrived in force to absorb the pleasures, it looked like. There is an unforgettable painting by Breugel of swarms of children, serious about



their fun, each bunch engaged in a different game and oblivious to the larger world. This panorama was like that.

Directly ahead from where Grace and I stood was a huge central pavilion, vaguely Italianate, surrounded by a soda parlor and other refreshment stands.

"Pinch me," I told her, "I seem to have been whisked off to Coney Island. Who runs this?" She only gave me a certain kind of look.

"Don't tell me," I groaned. "The Anaconda Company."

"You're getting better at the facts of life," she awarded me.

The extravaganza surrounding us, then, was the other side of the copper coin, at least for this one day. Shaking my head at the turnabout of Anaconda's conduct, I asked Grace what she would like to do first. "Stroll the gardens," she chose without hesitation. "I haven't had an outing like this since--it's been a few years."

For as long as there are men and women, some things in life will best be done arm in arm, and strolling a flower garden is one. We exclaimed together at a hillside burst of blooms planted in the design of a giant lyre, as if a Gulliver had temporarily laid aside his music-making. Grace's grip on my arm was an exclamation in itself as we happily competed in naming off blossoms while we walked. Under the spell of the aromatic surroundings, we soon were sharing more than just the pleasure of the day. Grace's story was entirely rooted in Butte, I learned. "The mapmakers don't get rich on some of us, Morrie." To help support the family she had been a bucket girl, selling sandwich lunches from a pail as the men trooped to the mines on The Hill. There she caught the eye of a young miner on the same shift with her father; Arthur Faraday, as patient as he was gallant, had his reward when she reached marriageable age. The toils of Butte took her parents before their time--heart and lungs worked to death--leaving the young couple the gift of property. I listened raptly, the makings of a life always casting a spell on



me. "We thought we had it made, Arthur and I, with the house in our name and his job in the Speculator." Instead, the fire, the worst in American mining history, widowed her overnight. There had been no children. "Nature did not provide." Left on her own, Grace used what resource she had--the house--and boarders such as present company were the result. "You and the matched pair are good about the rent," she patted my arm, "but it's still a hard go. The taxes and the upkeep and all. I get by, though. No sense in waiting for my ship to come in when there's none in sight, I've decided." She tilted her head my direction, putting the question lightly enough. "What about yours, is the library it? You seem at home there." I cocked the same kind of look to her. "Do I? I don't always have the Butte Public Library all to myself, understand."

We laughed, duly self-conscious about the day's unexpected glimpses into each other. So much private time on the most public day of the year surely was too good to last. "Aren't Hoop and Griff joining us?" I checked. "It's not like them to miss this kind of spree."

"They're off to their own pursuits, they told me," Grace reported in that tone of fond exasperation the pair customarily produced in her. All at once she clutched my arm hard enough to leave a mark. "Look, dear!"

Companionable as our promenade was, I was surprised silly by the sudden endearment. I had to wonder if I was keeping up with developments. Was this a forward side of Grace Faraday, hitherto hidden in the house rules of landlady and boarder? Then, thoroughly abashed, I saw the deer she meant, several does and fawns flitting through a stand of blue spruce in the near distance.

"Cutlets on the hoof," I jested feebly and drew a swat on the arm, but also Grace's teasing smile.

Something surprising seemed to be the constant at Columbia Gardens. Fresh riots of flora in exuberant designs kept showing up as we strolled. Around



any curve of the path, we were apt to be met with flower-holding ceramic gnomes of the European sort. And down at a pond off to our side, evincing great interest in the ducks, was Typhoon Tolliver.

There in broad daylight, the awful sensation of being stalked by shadows came over me. Luckily, Grace was distracted by the next riot of flowers. Taking a neck-stretching look around as if I could not get enough of admiring the grounds, I caught sight of Eel Eyes behind us, lurking around a corner of the soda fountain.

Apprehension rose in me like the mercury in a thermometer with a match under it. There is no law that goons have to take holidays like the rest of us, but why was this pair of dunces on my tail at all? The miners and the Anaconda Company were at peace, at least temporarily. Were Typhoon and his sidekick simply in the habit of following my every move? Whatever the notion in their thick heads, I didn't like it.

I scanned around some more. Back toward the pavilion and its huddle of refreshment stands, a photographer with his hood and flash powder was busily taking pictures of posing couples. "Let's," I said, pointing. "What's a day like this without a keepsake? My treat."

Grace hesitated, no doubt hearing from the spirit of Arthur. Verve won out. She primped her extensive hat and provided me a practice smile. "I suppose we shouldn't let all this gussying up go to waste."

The waiting line to be photographed was considerable, as I was counting on. "You hold our place," was my next proposal. "How about a root beer fizz?"

"Morrie, are you made of money all of a sudden?"

"I hope you're not turning down a root beer fizz?"

"Of course not."



Off I strode, nonchalantly enough, to the soda parlor and its line of customers. The instant the angle of the building concealed me from Eel Eyes, I darted around to the back.

I crept along until I could sneak a look around the far corner. Eel Eyes, his back to me, was slouched against the building, dully watching for me to return to the photography line. I was scared to do what I was about to do, but more scared not to. The one advantage I had was musical; the Miners Band had arrived somewhere on the park premises, and the triumphal march from *Aida* was blaring loudly enough to drown any sound I could possibly make. Whatever Nile god is in charge of brass knuckles I said a quick prayer to, and fitted the metal onto my fists. Coming up unheard behind the bored goon, I clipped him hard on the crazy bone of his left elbow.

He yelped like a coyote and flopped around clutching the elbow, his business hand unable to reach for the blackjack or gun or whatever he carried in his coat. Grabbing hold of his shirtfront, I backed him against the rear of the soda parlor. While he was still squirming in pain, I rested a fist on the point of his chin, where at any sharp move the brass knuckles could knock out his front teeth.

"Typhoon isn't close enough to be any help to you," I uttered with so much bravado I hardly recognized my voice, "so you're going to have to tell me a thing or two. Why do the pair of you keep following me around like collie dogs?"

"Coincidence," he said sullenly, looking down his nose at the brass knobs threatening his teeth.

"Come now, Roland. Before one of us gets hurt"--I tapped his chin hard enough to make him wince--"you need to rid yourself of this ridiculous notion that I'm worth tagging after. Where does it come from anyway?"

"How am I supposed to talk with those things half in my mouth?"

"Try."



He drew his lips over his teeth and munched out the words. "Let's square with each other, Morgan or whoever you are. You're up to something, but Ty and me are on to you--so what do you say we cut a deal?"

"I am not 'up' to anything, you idiot, and whatever the pair of you think you're 'on to' is a figment of your overcooked imaginations."

"Oh yeah? Try this for size," he mustered hardily for a person in his situation. "Butte ain't been quite the same since you showed up, has it. You got off that train and funny stuff started happening. Wildcat strikes. That old mug who runs the library wakes up and throws his weight around. And today you're up there on that balcony like a royal highness and at just the right time some Wobbly belts out a song and throws the whole parade bunch into a fit. Don't that add up to something in anybody's book?"

"That is all coinci--" I caught myself from using his exculpatory word. "I swear to you, man to man, I did not come to Butte to stir up trouble. What more can I do to convince you?"

"Leave town. Vamoose."

I hated to admit it, considering the source, but there was a lot of sense in that. Something else outweighed it, though. Maybe this was a wrong reading of the human condition, but it seemed to me there ought to be a limit to the number of times in life a person was obligated to vamoose.

Eel Eyes took my brief silence to mean I was thinking it over. "Ty and me will put you on a train tomorrow, how about?" he blurted. "We won't lift a hand to you except to wave good riddance, I promise. Him and me can find better things to do with ourselves than trailing you around."

"Then go find those, starting about now. But I'm not leaving. Butte is too interesting at the moment." His left hand was creeping toward the inside of his coat, so I rapped his knuckles with my brass ones. "Ow!" He sucked his lips over



his teeth again. "And one more thing while we're at this," I leaned in on him instructively. "In case you're told to deliver any messages about a glory hole to a certain boarding house, save yourself the trouble on that, too. Now go collect your fellow idiot and"--I have to admit, I took nasty pleasure in the word--"vamoose."

I gave him room, and he backed around away from me. At a safe distance, he spat out: "Okay, we're done following you since you're onto it, but that ain't the only way to nail you. We'll get the goods on you yet."

"Tsk, Roland. You really ought to take up some other line of work."

He looked at me with sneering pity. "There's goods to be got on anybody, sucker."

"Did you have to brew the root beer for those?" Grace inquired when I came back. We sipped our fizzes while the last few couples ahead of us in line were posed to wait for the click of the shutter, then it was our turn.

If memory serves me right, it was Balzac who believed that the human body has layers of self, and each time we are photographed one of those ghostly images is peeled off us irreparably onto the photographic print. In our case, Grace posed cautiously beneath the shelter of her hat, and I'm sure I looked as though I had too many things on my mind, which I did.

"Perfect!" cried the photographer as the flash powder went off with a *poof*. He emerged from under his black cloth to hand me a numbered receipt. "Here you go, you can pick up your picture at the gate when you leave."

Grace startled me by taking my arm again. "Now I have a surprise for you."

Surprises come in two sizes, good and bad. Hers remained indeterminate while she steered me through the holiday throng toward the grandstand by the playing fields. The area was buzzing with activity as sporting events took shape; I



could not help but notice two boxers going at it in the ring at a corner of the grassy expanse. After Eel Eyes, a boxing match appealed to me as restful. But Grace did not guide me up into the stands to spectate the various contests as I expected. With a flourish, she led me to the lip of the grass where the surprise came into sight.

I laughed helplessly. "Why didn't I think of this?"

"You must be slipping," she teased.

"I'll try to make up for it. Wait here, I'll be right back."

She frowned. "Has anyone ever told you, Morrie, you are restless company?"

Off I went in search of a gnome that moved, and found him circulating in the vicinity of the men's lavatory, as expected.

"What's up, buddy?" the halfpint messenger, in Sunday suit and bowtie for the day, called out when he spotted me. "Hey, how about those White Sox? They're burning up the league."

I sighed. Chicago follows a person like a botanical name. "The Comiskey Cheap Sox," I scoffed as I came up to him. "They'll unravel."

"You Cub guys don't know real baseball when you see it."

"I shall keep looking," I left that at and got down business. "Skinner, I believe you might know how a man could place a bet."

"Think so?" He scanned the grounds. Satisfied that no strolling policeman was going to intrude on his working territory, he whipped out a much-used notebook. "What's your pleasure? The boxing matches? The mucking contest?"

"The boys' hundred-yard dash."

Indignantly Skinner pushed away the money I held out to him. "You kidding me? Use your noggin, buddy. Not till I look this over. How do I know you're not running some junior-size Jim Thorpe in on me."



Russian Famine was shambling back and forth at the edge of the field of contestants like a stray keeping his distance from the herd. All the boys in the race wore jerseys cut down; the stenciled FARADAY BOARDING HOUSE practically wrapped around him.

I went over to lend encouragement. I needed some myself after a closer look at our entrant. His skinny arms and legs were as pale as if the bones beneath were reflecting through, the strawy hair had not been combed in days, and for lack of a handkerchief in his racing outfit he was busily wiping his nose with the tail of the jersey. I had to hope the rest of him was as runny as his nose. Bending down to him, I urged in a low voice: "When you're in the race, Famine, just imagine the other boys are trying to catch you and beat you up."

"Doesn't take much imagination," he said stoically.

"To the victor belongs the spoils, remember."

"Huh?"

"Just run hard." I patted him on a barely existant shoulder, then joined Grace on the sidelines. She looked worriedly at the bigger boys in the race. "You're the one who told me he's lightning on two legs. He'll need to be." She inclined her head indicatively at a lanky redheaded lad, Irish as St. Paddy, wearing a jersey with PETERSON'S MODERN MORTUARY across his chest, and on the back AND FUNERAL HOME. "Look at that one, he makes two of poor Famine. This had better be worth the five dollars," she muttered, meaning the sponsoring fee.

"At the very least, it will distinguish the boarding house." I did not need to say with precision that it would distinguish it from the different sort of houses a block or so away in Venus Alley.

Catching Skinner's eye, I stepped over to place my bet. Observing this wagering side of me, Grace bit her lip but said nothing. Skinner wasn't happy to see me either. He shook his head, squinting skeptically at the assortment of boys