The detention school amounted to a slightly prettified reformatory, the high brick wall surrounding it garnished with a few flower boxes, growing nothing but icicles this time of year. According to one of Rab's remarks, the soot-gray many-gabled residence on a shoulder of the Hill above Dublin Gulch had been a nunnery--a short journey for pious girls from the mine families the, a holding pen for troubulous sons from those same shanties now. As I topped the last street rise and left behind the world of downtown, the day was a rare one of winter clarity, the snowheld Rockies beyond the city limits dazzling in full sunshine, while the thirty or so mining operations in full swing along the Hill stood out in every detail of black steel headframe towers and bin cars loaded with peacock shades of copper ore and squat redbrick hoist houses throbbing
and thrumming with cablework, the entire spectacle as if a gigantic factory had been thrown open for inspection.

The Richest Hill on Earth never ceased to thrill and chill me at the same time, with its powerful manufacturing of wealth and the squalid leavings of that, dump heaps like Sahara dunes and gaping bottomless pits called glory holes. And beneath the ground I stood on, beneath all of Butte, around the clock three thousand men per shift drilled and blasted and shoveled in the most dangerous of circumstances to produce the metal that would wire the world for electricity.

With those thoughts in the back of my head, I rang at the iron front gate of what Russian Famine had aptly enough called the hoosegow school. But looking every inch the spirited schoolmistress rather than a
jailer, Rab met me with a rush, lowering her voice conspiratorially as she hastened me into the building. "So far, we're in luck, Mr. Morgan. I've sweet-talked the superintendent into it. If the boys can get steady jobs that don't interfere with school, they can be let out for that period of time."

"A perfect fit. You haven't lost your wiles since you practiced them in my schoolroom, Rab."

"Such things as I learned from you," she acknowledged that trace of mischief with the right kind of grin, then turned seriously to the matter at hand. "I chose the seventh grade for this. The eighth are one step short of desperadoes."

I smiled. "That hasn't changed either."
“Although I suppose I should warn you about even these.”

I assured her I was not expecting little gentlemen in velveteen. Still, walking into that room was a step into bandit territory. Row on row, street toughs who looked hardened beyond their twelve and thirteen years—Rab had warned me they’d earned detention terms for fighting in class, petty theft, or chronic truancy, although some were simply from disrupted families that could no longer care for them—the lot of them were coldly eyeing me and my suit and vest. It was all I could do not to stare back. The youthful faces were sketch maps of Ireland, Italy, Cornwall, Wales, Finland, Serbia; early drafts of the mining countenances drawn from distant corners of the world by word of a hill made of copper. In the person of their immigrant fathers and mothers,
Butte's hard-won contribution to the American saga still went on, its next chapter these young lives ticketed, like those, to the mines.

"Mouths closed and eyes and ears open, everyone." Rab swished to the front of the classroom, brisk as a lion tamer. "Today we have with us someone schooled in so many fields of learning it would tire you out to hear them. Except to say I will make anyone who misbehaves regret it to the end of time, I'll let Mr. Morris Morgan tell you himself why he has come. Mr. Morgan, they're all yours," she demurely invited me up to the desk and blackboard, her eyes saying *Have at them.*

That introduction did not impress the captive audience as much as might have been hoped. At desk after desk, young roughnecks slouched as if they had heard their fill from figures of authority, as they no doubt
had. A fortunate exception, up front amid the obvious hellions, was a smaller redheaded boy with the face of a Botticelli angel watching as if he couldn’t get enough of me. It wrung a person’s heart to think of such a one cast out into the world; why someone had not put him in a pocket and taken him home, I couldn’t fathom. Meanwhile at the far back sat Russian Famine, prudently away from sharp elbows and random clouts, looking restless but curious. Well, two such were better than none. I cleared my throat and set to work on the rest.

"Your instructor, Mrs. Evans"--off to one side Rab tried to look matronly, not at all successfully--"has invited me to offer this select group a chance for each of you to go into business for yourself."
“Huh, us? That’s a good one,” a longshanked tough in the second row jeered. “Who do you want us to knock the blocks off of?”

I forced a chuckle. “I didn’t say that, did I. What Mrs. Evans and I have in mind is for you to become individual merchants. With the freedom of the city, at hours that won’t interrupt your, ah, education, in which to sell your merchandise.”

“Sellin’ what?” another sarcastic voice demanded. “Noodles to giraffes?”

“Nah, canary birds, cheap cheap,” yet another member of the unholy chorus was heard from. Retribution in her eye, Rab started for the nearest offender until I held up a hand to stop her. “The merchandise,” I


went on as if uninterrupted, "is the entirely honorable sort produced at the place where I myself work."

"Yeah? Where's that then?"

"At a bastion of the Fourth Estate. At Butte's citadel of fair enterprise," I couldn't help getting a bit carried away. "At the Thunder."

In an instant the room rang with wild hoots. "You mean that rag down by Venus Alley?...Newsies! He wants us to be newsies!...That don't sound like no way to get rich."

There was only one thing to do. Sighing, I took off my suitcoat and rolled up my sleeves as if for a fight. Stepping closer to the blinking rank in the first row of desks, I singled out a chunky youth who had been
one of the loudest hooters. Gazing at him so relentlessly his Adam’s apple bobbed, I demanded to know: “What day of the week is this?”

“T’ursday, natcherly.”

“What if I told you it had another name?”

“Uh, like what?”

I whirled to the blackboard and wrote in big letters THOR. “Thor’s day. In the time of some of your great-great-great-grandfathers, that was the pronunciation.”

“Yeah, so?” some skeptic called out. “Who’s this ape Thor?”

I glanced around for some kind of implement. The window crank would have to do. Seizing it by the handle, I leapt onto the teacher’s desk and brandished the blunt instrument overhead so threateningly that
the entire front row reared back in their seats with a sucked breath.

"THE GOD OF THUNDER!" I roared. "That's who."

While I had the class's undivided attention, I stayed atop the desk and regaled them with the mighty reputation of Thor and his mountain-crushing hammer in the bloodiest of Viking myths. Rab had her hand over her mouth, eyes sparkling, and Russian Famine squirmed in excitement as I led the lesson around to thunder's inception from lightning. "What we hear as that hammerblow of sound is the air being disturbed by the bolt of electricity. And so," I concluded, still looking down at the pale sea of faces, "thunder comes of a troubled atmosphere. I hardly need to tell any of you that describes quite a lot of life here in Butte as well, hmm?"
While that hung in the air, I hopped down from the desk. "That's why the newspaper is rightly called the Thunder, and why I think I've come to the right place for its best possible newsboys."

"Yeah, but," the silence was broken by a high-pitched voice from the end of another row, "my brudda tried that wit' the Post. He always ended up wit' a pile of papers nobody'd buy."

"I promise that will not happen with the Thunder, which lives up to its word in fairness for the workers. We will buy back any of your unsold newspapers at half the street price," I improvised. "You're guaranteed that much of a wage, while you're making profits from all the papers you sell."
“No hooey?” This came from the evident ringleader who had spoken up at the very start. The others again let him speak for them all as he thought out loud, “There’s still a catch. The Posties already got the good corners.”

“Ah, but--every intersection has four corners.”

My questioner persisted. “Then what if the Posties don’t want us on any of ’em and gang up to run us off?”

“Streets are a public thoroughfare. You have as much right to be there as they do, if you take my meaning.”

“Now you’re talkin’.” He gave me a sudden wink, and craftily translated for the roomful of waiting faces. “If they try to give any of us a bad time, we all pitch in and knock their blocks off.”
“Yeah! You bet! That’s the way!” acclamation resounded, and with that, Rab moved in bearing a large map of the city so that the carriers of the *Thunder*, as they now were, could each pick out intersections to claim as their own.
One figure in this crowd stood out for exactly what he was, a hunch-shouldered pallid type, stone bald, as emblematic of the newspapering profession as a wooden Indian is of a cigar store. This was none other than Armbrister, Jared's choice of editor.

The sallow journalist and I singled ourselves out as if by instinct. Shaking hands at a careful distance, we studied each other. Armbrister wore a trademark green eyeshade and the expression of a hound dog on a cold trail. From the look of him, he had worn both since time immemorial. He eyed my rather smart tweed suit none too neutrally.

"You know beans about newspapering, Morgan?"
"A bit, from a lifetime of reading every scrap of newsprint possible. Do you know beans about arousing public opinion for a good cause?"

"I've heard distant rumors of it," he answered lugubriously, "about like the existence of the unicorn."

"Mmm. I understand that up until now you worked for our rival, the Post."

"City editor on that rag, was all," he snapped, giving me a look I thought of as the Butte eye. It was not a true squint, simply a slight lowering of the eyelids like a camera aperture finding finer focus. I had encountered it at Dublin Gulch wakes, and in a
mineshaft nearly a mile deep in the Hill, and on occasion in the woman at my side in life, Butte-born as Grace was. That particular cast of eye perhaps became habitual in a city always enwrapped in conflict. Armbrister maintained it as he grudgingly spoke the next: "I didn’t have to run up to the top floor of the Hennessy Building like a coolie and have every word pass inspection with the bastards there, if that’s what you’re thinking."

At the mention of Anaconda’s lair on high, his long face grew longer. "A man has to make a living, you know."

"I do know."
Something in the way I said that drew the first twinge of interest from the hound dog face. "Evans swears you’re a pip at making the language dance." He sniffed. "Naturally, any paper worth its ink needs a Fancy Dan for its editorial page or readers will never get past the funnies."

"And naturally, you are the crusading editor leading the charge and I am the, ah, working stiff."

He gave me another looking over to see if I meant that, and by some intuition must have decided I deserved the benefit of the doubt, at least temporarily. "Hell, man," he rasped, "maybe we’re a pair of a kind, jokers wild. We’ll see."
Rab joined us in there, saying brightly, "I have a question for you gentlemen of the press. What's the name of the newspaper?"

Seeing the three of us were stumped, she declared: "I thought so. Let's think. What about"--I could practically hear her mind whirring as if she were trying out an idea on backward pupils--"The Plain Truth? That's been in short supply in Butte newspapering."

Jared rubbed his jaw. "It's nice, Rab, but I like something that sounds a little tougher, like maybe The Sentinel?"

"That'd do in a pinch," Armbrister said with a grain of editor-to-publisher deference, "but we want something with some real
kick to it.” He started reeling off feisty possibilities--*The Spark, Liberator, The Free Press*. Then, almost bashfully, he confessed: “I’ve always wanted to have a masthead in type big as what they use on Wanted posters that just goddamn outright says *Disturber of the Peace.*”

“No, no,” I exclaimed, the thought ascending so swiftly in me I was lightheaded, “it must be something that carries the sound of promise, that resonates across the land, that dramatically bespeaks the coming clash with Anaconda.” The two men were set back on their heels, while Rab gleefully watched me balloon off into the upper atmosphere like old times. Passionately I invoked
Shakespeare, the magically phrased passage in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* when Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons, in rhythmic zest recounts the great hunt with Hercules and the dragon slayer Cadmus, “When in a wood of Crete they bay’d the bear/With hounds of Sparta,” concluding with the inimitable turn of phrase, “Never did I hear/So musical a discord, such sweet thunder.”

Thus was the Butte *Thunder* born.
It did not help my disgusted mood that the warehouse district down by railroad tracks was a snowy mess, and to save my London shoes as I headed back uptown I picked my way along a different street than I had come, past a rundown warehouse where a truck with GOLDEN EGGS POULTRY FARMS on its side was parked out front. I was just passing when I was overcome with the uncomfortable feeling of being watched.

I checked around. Peering at me from the deepest recess of the warehouse doorway was a thick-set figure with a face that advertised trouble. Old fear freshly flooded through me. A window man, even where there were no windows? Bundled up in overcoat and gloves as I was, I couldn’t reach to an inside pocket for my brass knuckles before he was on me like a springing tiger.
"Boss!" he yelped and grabbed my elbow. "We wasn't expecting you! We heard you'd be in Great Falls about now, fixing the trouble with that speakeasy that got raided. Man oh man, you move fast."

"You are--" I attempted to tell him he was wholly mistaken as to my identity but he cut me off with: "Smitty." He winked. "I know we ain't supposed to know each other's real names, not even yours. But I never got to shake your hand at the big meeting back when Prohibition came in like Christmas all year long, and I been dying to ever since." My hand was swallowed in his. "Boss, was you ever smart! This is the best racket ever." It did not sound as if he meant poultry products. My confidant stepped back in admiration. "What a slick disguise, dressing up in fancy threads. You look like one of them Vienna
professors.” With my overcoat collar turned up and winter felt hat pulled down, the beard no doubt was my most prominent feature, not helping any in convincing this enthusiast that any resemblance he saw in me was coincidental. Finding my voice, I tried: “Really, I’m not--”

The engine roar of an automobile navigating the snowy street toward us at startling speed drowned me out. Smitty’s broad face registered alarm. Yanking a pistol from a coat pocket, he cried, “Watch out!” Before I could react, he bowled me over, tumbling us both into the snowbank near the Golden Eggs truck, himself on top.

His action came barely in the nick of time, as a gunshot blasted over our heads and lead splattered against the brick wall of the warehouse. Gunfire gets your attention like nothing else. I held an aversion to guns.
In my estimation, sooner or later they tend to go off, and I did not regard myself as bulletproof. Someone—who?—had just tested that out. In the shock of it all I went inert as a mummy, but Smitty fortunately did not. Rolling off me where I was squashed into the snow, he swiftly was up and firing back at the vehicle speeding away.

“A shotgun, the dumb clucks,” he jeered as the car disappeared around a corner, “what’d they think, they’re hunting ducks? Everybody knows you can’t reload a double-barreled real quick.” Pulling me to my feet, he alternately wiped snow off my overcoat with the barrel of his gun and kept watch around the fender of the truck. “Amachoors. It’s that Helena gang. Don’t worry,” he risked stepping far enough into the street to retrieve my satchel for me, “we’ll hijack a couple of their loads
on the Bozeman run. That'll make them think twice about stunts like this.”

With gunfire still echoing in my ears, I numbly started to ask about the police. Smitty didn’t let me get past the word. “Nahh. Cops don’t come nosing around here. If they do, we’ll tell them we was shooting snowshoe rabbits.” He had me by the elbow again. “Come on in, quick, in case those dummies double back.”

That sounded prudent. But as soon as he bustled me into the huge warehouse, I regretted it with a nearly audible gulp. From behind file cabinets and desks and every other piece of furniture, a dozen or more men peeked in our direction, holding pistols like Smitty’s.
“Put away your artillery, boys,” he called out jovially.

“Everything’s hunky-dory now, the Highliner is here.”

Instantly there was a swell of cries of “Yeah, hi, boss, great to see you!”

By now I realized I was in a precarious situation; the only question was, how deep. The picture before me was becoming all too clear. In back of the desks and filing cabinets, nearly filling the rest of the warehouse, stood a sleekly painted fleet of delivery vans, the majority with Golden Eggs blazoned on the sides, others with Treasure State Pork or some such. However, what they were delivering, I could tell at a glance, was not the product of hen and pig, but stacks and stacks of
boxes labeled SUPERIOR RYE--CANADA'S TRADITIONAL WHISKEY.

"Them Helena jaspers," Smitty was holding forth to an appreciative audience about our ambush escape, "they couldn't hit the broad side of a barn. You shoulda seen the boss when they jumped us--he never said a word. Cool as ice."

Frozen with fear was the more accurate description, a condition not allayed by facing a gang of gun-toting bootleggers who had mistaken me for their mastermind. This did not seem the right moment to set that straight. Ringed around me like admirers at a banquet, the whole assemblage awaited my words expectantly.
“How’s”—My voice sounded high as a choirboy’s. I cleared my throat and made a face. “Butte air.” They all laughed knowingly. “How’s business?”

There was a chorus of “Terrific!” “Great!” “Out of this world!” Then, though, a mustached individual, otherwise a bulky replica of Smitty, stepped forward with a worried frown. “Boss, I hate to tell you this when everything is running so slick, but we got a problem, up at the border.”

I cocked my head inquisitively, and he rushed out the news that the crossing point at Sweetgrass had been shut tight by federal alcohol agents. “They’re even inspecting carloads of nuns,” my mustached informant complained. By now I was putting two and two together and
realizing that the Highliner, whoever he was, must be the authority on that northmost ‘high’ stretch of Montana, where the boundary with Canada extended for hundreds of miles but roads were few.

A hush of expectancy settled over the assemblage as my solution—that of the evidently all-wise Highliner—to the border crossing problem was awaited. Looking around the office section of the warehouse as casually as my nerves would allow, I spotted a roll-down map, such as had been in my Marias Coulee schoolroom. Stepping over to it, I yanked it down with a flourish, desperately hoping it was not a Mercator of the entire world.

I was in luck: the longnosed profile of the state of Montana displayed itself. Still not saying a word, I studied the map. The
Sweetgrass portal was like the lip of a funnel from Canada to main roads on the American side, which no doubt was why it had drawn the attention of the government agents. Off westward from there was what looked like wild country with no sign of habitation or roads. The old advice "Go west" had not failed me yet. As if back in a classroom, I seized the nearest item of any length lying around to use as a pointer, which happened to be a sawed-off shotgun. Mutely and gingerly, I held it by the grip and planted the end of the barrel at random on an obscure spot along the western reach of the Canadian border.

The bootleggers flocked around the map like crows at a picnic basket.
I waited tensely as they peered at the geography in studious silence until suddenly one of them broke out excitedly: “I know that neck of the woods, I’m from up toward there! The boss is right, there’s an old Indian trail through a gap in them benchlands up there. I bet it would take trucks!”

I nodded wisely, resisting an urge to wink lest I overplay the role. “It’s Whiskey Gap now,” Smitty declared, rubbing his palms together in satisfaction. “ Didn’t I tell you the Highliner would have the answer?”

Very, very carefully putting down the sawed-off shotgun, I made a show of glancing at the wall clock as if pressed for time. But before I could make a move toward my departure, the mustached man was asking
with urgency: "Boss, how'd that Great Falls mess come out? Did you get those cops that raided the speakeasy squared away?"

"We'll--" I had to think hard for the barnyard phrase--"teach them not to suck eggs."

Around the room a general nod of agreement indicated that took care of that, somehow.

Using the chance, I started to say it was time for me to take my leave, but reworked it in my head and brought out:

"I need to scram."

Smitty put up a protesting hand. "Boss? We know you send Micky around at the end of the month for it, but you brung your satchel and all--don't you want the take? Save Mick the trip?" He gestured proudly.
"We had a good holiday season. Everybody in Butte was busy hoisting drinks on New Year’s, boy, was they ever. Show him the dough, Sammy."

I stood rooted, my dumbstruck expression mistaken for quizzical. The mustached thug went to the safe in the corner, knelt and spun the combination. When the safe clicked open, inside were stacked bundles and bundles of currency. Staring at the largesse, I was practically overcome with the memory of the munificent Black Sox bet. Here for the taking lay a similar fortune, sufficient to propel Grace and me back into the high life of the past year. A train tonight would put us and the bulging satchel in Seattle by this time tomorrow, and from there an ocean
liner to Hawaii, Siam, anywhere... It was so tempting it was paralyzing. Like me, the whole roomful gazed reverently at the pile of cash.

Trying to keep the strain out of my voice, I said one of the harder things I have ever uttered.

"Let it sit on the nest and hatch out some more."

An appreciative laugh rippled through the bootleggers. "You know best, boss," said the mustached one, tenderly closing the safe. "While you're here, you got any advice about how to keep the racket going so good?"

I stroked my beard as if in Viennese consultation. "Keep doing what you're doing." Leaving them with the simple wisdom of that, I
rapped out: "Smitty?" He jumped like a puppet. "Walk me to the corner."